

Laurence Whistler was included in the *Made in Devon* exhibition.

In 1952 Dartington recruited a recent art graduate, Bobbie Sutton, to teach part time at Totnes High School for Girls, to make her own work, and to teach at Dartington. Three years later Peter Cox married her. Bobbie Cox, as well as becoming a distinguished textile artist in her own right, played an important role in life at Dartington. A vivid picture emerges through the book of how in the early days there was little distinction between family and professional life – the couple hosted visiting artists and were active in organising activities including the *Children's Christmas Festival* and the *Tournament of Ancient Sports*, the latter so seemingly archaic, at least for a community arts event.

So many important things that have happened in the arts in the second half of the 20th century either took place at Dartington or had an impact on it. The crafts may not always be at the centre of Peter Cox's book, but at a time when contemporary craft in Britain is well established it is worth being reminded of how much things have changed in the last 50 years.

PETER F. MASON

WEARING PROPAGANDA: TEXTILES ON THE HOME FRONT IN JAPAN, BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES, 1931-1945

Ed. by Jacqueline M. Atkins, published by Yale University Press, £35

Wearing Propaganda is the lavish and beautiful catalogue for an exhibit of the same name at New York's Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture. Organised by American scholar Jacqueline Atkins, it focuses on political textiles in Japan, the US and Great Britain during the Asia-Pacific War (from 1931, when Japan invaded Manchuria, to 1945 and the end of World War Two). The book examines the items that people invented, purchased and wore in order to strengthen and support each nation in 'total war'.

For the Anglo-American sphere, this means mass-produced scarves and yardage printed for clothing, the wearing of turbans, and the British style called Utility Fashion. However, Atkins pays more attention

to Japanese *sensō gara*, or wartime designs and patterns. It is the volume's painstaking exposition of these – including the evolution of their complex iconography – which establishes it as truly original work.

In complete contrast to its Western counterparts, Japanese propaganda was not meant to be publicly flaunted. Instead, its designs were created on jacket linings, carrying cloths, undergarments or children's kimono. These clothes – worn by adult men or young boys – united artisans, manufacturers, vendors, families and friends in shaping a new portrait of the exemplary citizen. Unlike the book's UK or US designs – most of which have been examined before – these Japanese pieces have never been photographed or studied together. This adds a frisson of the repressed and forbidden which, combined with the art's ferocity, increases the volume's resonance.

The Japanese garments also shock through sheer graphic panache. For example, a silk *obi* (kimono over-sash) features silhouetted airplanes streak-

ing past one another, their rainbow vapour trails delineated by metal thread. A cotton *nagajuban* (kimono undergarment) vibrates with repeats of a moonlit battlescape: we see soldiers taking a beach by stealth, with still waters shimmering and dark clouds parting behind them. Even a baby's *omiyairi* (first shrine visit garment) features soldiers charging into desperate, smoky battle.

On the surface, such pieces seem easily readable – interspersed as they are with flags, airplanes and well-known emblems of war. Yet their rationale as clothing alone is highly complex, one stop on a long and elaborate trail of social negotiations. In the mid-19th century, as Japan opened up to the West, her emperor had declared kimono 'Chinese' and 'effeminate'; he dictated that Western styles be used in business and by the military. This edict, however, was preceded by a strong tradition: one of evading feudal Sumptuary Laws – the rules about which fabrics a social class could or could not wear – with 'hidden' fashion. Japan's bourgeoisie were used to placing elaborate deco-

ration on their undergarments, jacket linings, children's kimono and similar 'private' clothing.

Ms Atkins's book is very careful to explicate such matters. Mentored by the Pulitzer Prize-winning Asian historian John W. Dower, it benefits from such contributors as Musashino Art University's Kashiwagi Hiroshi. It utilises Japanese name order and offers an excellent glossary, as well as introductory maps and a comparative timeline. Especially useful to the untutored Western reader will be the explanation of how, after victories over both China and Russia (in 1895 and 1905), the Japanese were greatly shaken by the explosion of Chinese nationalism in 1919, the 1930 depression, and the global growth of xenophobic 'yellow peril' sentiment. Their reaction – a complex of fears, anger and ignorance – prompted militarism and the textiles that promoted it.

To alter perceptions of the *kokutai* (or national essence), Japanese propagandists re-purposed older symbols: pine boughs, chrysanthemums and leaping carp. However, they also paid homage to their country's modernity, using images such as radios, skyscrapers and cartoon characters. Many of the book's bountiful illustrations show us precursors of the country's celebrated contemporary pop imagery.

The Japanese aptitude for harnessing tradition amazes, and stands in sharp contrast to the Anglo-American pieces. The latter – aptly described in the text as 'sound bites of their time' – draw on a much more limited patriotic palette and they appear, in contrast, especially unsubtle. Craftwise, the most engaging are Britain's Utility Fashions, for, although patriotic scarves proliferate, almost all are pedantic rather than remarkable.

Wearing Propaganda shows us a past in which our national selves were hidden from one another and, as importantly, ignorant of each other's histories. Today we know the lies and atrocities of this time so thoroughly that the undeniable beauty here is startling to see. But these images demonstrate well, with uncanny timeliness, how every 'Home Front' must be made to view its warriors: as selfless and elevated, braver and somehow 'better'.

CYNTHIA ROSE



Man's nagajuban, 'Night Landing', printed cotton, 1937-41, Japan