

Dimitrios Apostolou Thea Jacinto

Every year, the RISD apparel department goes to New York to meet designers and tour their studios. Our first stop, a building on West 35th street. Just over twenty people, we go up to the 19th floor in batches. Like family of sardines, I went up with the last group. The industrial elevator doors open to a lobby that looked more like a nest than an office. Thick vines had crawled up the walls and taken over the windows and the ceiling pipes. Golden photographs that keep warm memories alive pop out from the green.

As I entered the main reception, tall shelves full of stacks and stacks of fabric swatch books and textile design originals that are sold for the thousands or sometimes loaned, hovered over my class. Hidden in the bustling life of New York City is Dimitrios' Design Archive, the oldest & largest collection of documentary paintings, antique textiles & wallpapers in the textiles industry. The collection mainly includes 17th, 18th, 19th & early 20th century documents & vintage yarn-dyes.

A charming, very distinguished man, in a jolly grandfather sort of way, warmly showed my class examples of his collection. He pulled up a black textile that had neon pink lightning bolts on it and asked us, "when do you think this was produced?" The class looked at him like he was asking the silliest question, almost insulted by the obviousness of the answer. Quickly, my classmate replied, "the 80s, of course." He laughed and clarified that it was created just a few years after the Jacquard Loom was invented in France in 1801. We gasped. Dimitrios' eyes lit up in the delight of surprising us.

He explained that after the Jacquard Loom was invented, the textiles industry was changed forever. Woven fabrics with complex patterns that previously took lifetimes to produce such as brocade, damask and matelasse, became much more accessible. When this happened, they tried each and every single technique and color combination, even ones that we would typically relate to other future periods in time. Even though they were not appreciated by the masses, they were locked away and years later, treasured by Dimitrios.

After being in the industry for over 30 years, the Greek former navy officer is still fascinated by the industry. His oldest piece in his collection is made out of gold thread and dates back to the 6th century. Growing up in Greece, Dimitrios never expected to be doing what he does today.

He moved to America for political asylum and proceeded to serve America in Vietnam. Shortly after Vietnam, he met a man somewhere along the docks of the east coast who asked him to go to auctions in Europe to collect paintings and textiles. He said, "this is not a job for someone who spent 22 months in Vietnam that has two purple hearts. Isn't that a job for a woman?" He laughed. He figured, "why not?" It was good money and he had the opportunity to travel all over Europe.

A few years into his career, he met a man that was in the same industry that showed him a vast collection and that's when it clicked and his passion that is still over so present today began. His two loves: his wife and the constant search for unique textiles.

Today, Dimitrios' works closely with the most prominent design houses in the world such as Ralph Lauren, Chanel and Versace. They look to him for inspirations for their collections. He told us that "almost everything has been done before" and that "there really is something special about hand crafted work. The introduction of

computer-generated work drastically changed the textiles industry in the 1980s. Many people lost their jobs.” Yet, Dimitrios has lasted the test of time in the fickle fashion industry.

His appreciation for works of the past and his philosophy of how honesty and hard work will get you far has kept him around. He is a hidden gem of the industry. Before we left he reminded us, that as we graduate and go on to work for companies all over the world, that we should be humble. He smiled and said, “you have to prove your worth to sit in that chair.”