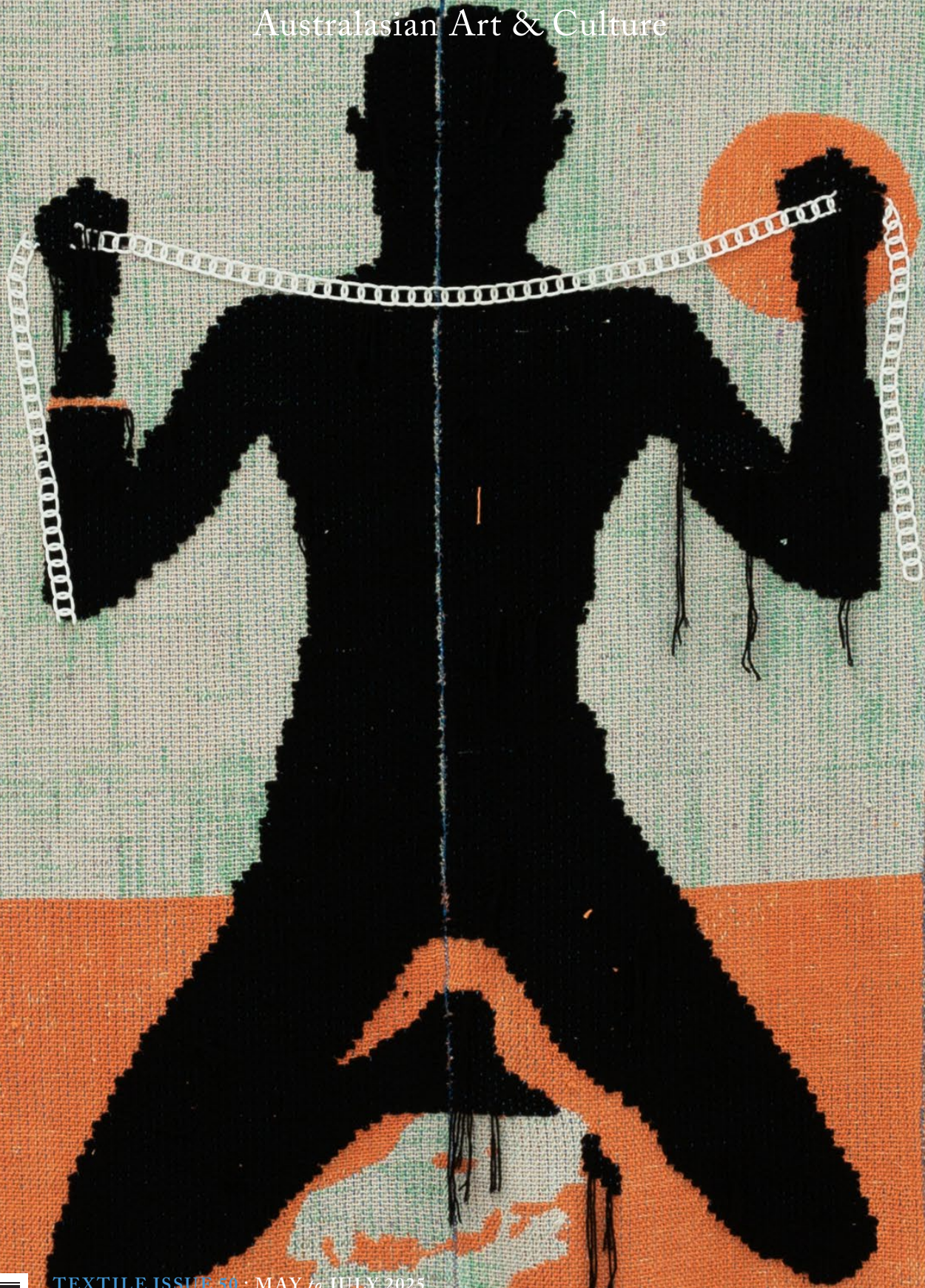


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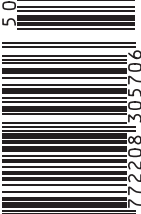


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# CATALYST

## ISABELLA DUCROT



In her nine decades, Isabella Ducrot has made significant contributions to the field of textile art – as an artist, but also as a collector and theorist. *VAULT* spoke to Ducrot, who, following her collaboration with Dior on a runway in 2024, has enjoyed a new wave of well-deserved attention.

WRITTEN by GRACE SANDLES

The Chintamani pattern refers to an Ottoman motif: three circles clustered together as a triangle, typically accompanied by some wavy lines. Checks are generally worn by women and children and are associated with mundanity and domesticity through their use for tasks such as washing dishes; yet, inexplicably, an angel of the *Annunciazione* sports them in a medieval painting in the Uffizi – *Annunciation with Saint Margaret and Saint Ansanus* (1333) by Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi. These are some of the things you learn when you giddily launch yourself down the rabbit hole that is Isabella Ducrot, a textile artist known for her ‘paper tapestries’ depicting teapots, flowerpots and figures embracing in dreamy pastel hues.

Ducrot is Neapolitan, but her extensive collection of fabrics and rare papers is *cosmopolitan*, originating from Russia, Türkiye, China, India, Istanbul, Tibet and more – places she travelled with her late husband Vittorio

‘Vicky’ Ducrot – often accompanied by Cy Twombly and his wife Baroness Tatiana Franchetti – who, funnily enough, founded a travel company for the culturally curious. “In fact, my art begins to form itself, because I like the quality of the textiles and the papers. I collected fabrics and papers because they offered me the possibility to develop my imagination. Simply, textiles and papers were occasions to force myself toward new ways to transform them,” says Ducrot. The papers find their way into the company of diverse media including watercolour, pencil, ink and pastel in her ‘paper tapestries’ – delightful works that channel the pedigree of their components. Within them, femininity becomes an interface of infinite connection, a powerful lineage to be wrapped up within, divine all the way into the domestic.

The 94-year-old’s extensive travels and deep engagement with the traditions and philosophies of numerous cultures and time periods infuse her

work conceptually as well. “I can tell you immediately that visiting and travelling around India has been my ‘academia’.” I learned little by little a way of living that was nearer to my wishes, and my Western mental attitudes changed,” she explains. “For instance, I understood that I was obsessed by categories and that my language left less space for possibilities. Also, Indian art enjoys a kind of splendid freedom. And not only India – all the Eastern countries I travelled to gave me the feeling of being returned to home.” Her works synthesise folklore, religious iconography, textile and fashion history, her philosophical understanding of concepts such as happiness, and references to traditional art forms including weaving and Indian erotic ink drawing.

Her relatively new artistic fame is partly a byproduct of a late adoption of studio practice; Ducrot essentially only picked up a brush in her 50s. In the meantime, while traversing the planet and amassing her collection of antique fabrics and papers, she was busy building a collection of Baroque paintings with her late husband, which to this day still decorate the walls of her apartment in the centre of Rome. “The collection of paintings grew quite easily,” she remarks. “My husband and I loved the artistic quality of these paintings, and we could buy the works of very good painters, at a low price, because they were religious paintings.” Not only that, but the pair collected rose cuttings that they propagated on their property in Umbria.

Isabella Ducrot is prolific, creating with an energy that shines through her exuberant illustrations. Her numerous books and writings include *The Checkered Cloth* (2019) – inspired by the aforementioned anecdote about the angel at the Uffizi – as well as her brief memoir *Women’s Life* (2021), and several short stories. Her contributions to textile history as it is being written, in part by herself, reached a popular apotheosis with her collaboration with the fashion house Dior in 2024. She describes this collaboration as “very interesting: the work of Maria Grazia Chiuri shows her respect for the textile.” For the spring-summer haute couture 2024 show Ducrot created *Big Aura*, an installation of 23 five-metre-high dresses of the kind worn by Ottoman sultans, set against an abstraction of ‘warp’ and ‘weft’ while simultaneously referencing her beloved pattern of interest: the check. She states, “My attraction to fabric was not only to the precious ones but also to the simplest pieces of fabric. I began to ask myself about its structure, which was more interesting to me as one of the oldest human inventions.” **V**

Isabella Ducrot is represented by Sadie Coles HQ, London, Petzel, New York and Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne.  
sadiccoles.com  
petzel.com  
galeriecapitain.de

Top to bottom  
ISABELLA DUCROT  
*Orange Pot*, 2025  
pigments, paper,  
collage, fabrics and  
China ink on textile  
112 x 75.5 cm  
Photo: Andrea Rossetti

ISABELLA DUCROT  
*Red Pot*, 2024  
pigments, paper,  
collage, fabrics and  
China ink on textile  
107 x 68 x 0.5 cm  
Photo: Katie Morrison

ISABELLA DUCROT  
*Profusion XII*, 2024  
pigments, pastel, fabric  
and collage on paper  
94 x 62.5 cm  
Photo: Katie Morrison

Opposite  
Installation view  
ISABELLA DUCROT  
Dior Haute Couture  
Fashion Show, Musée,  
Rodin, Paris, 2024  
Photo: Adrien Dirand

Courtesy the artist and  
Sadie Coles HQ, London  
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