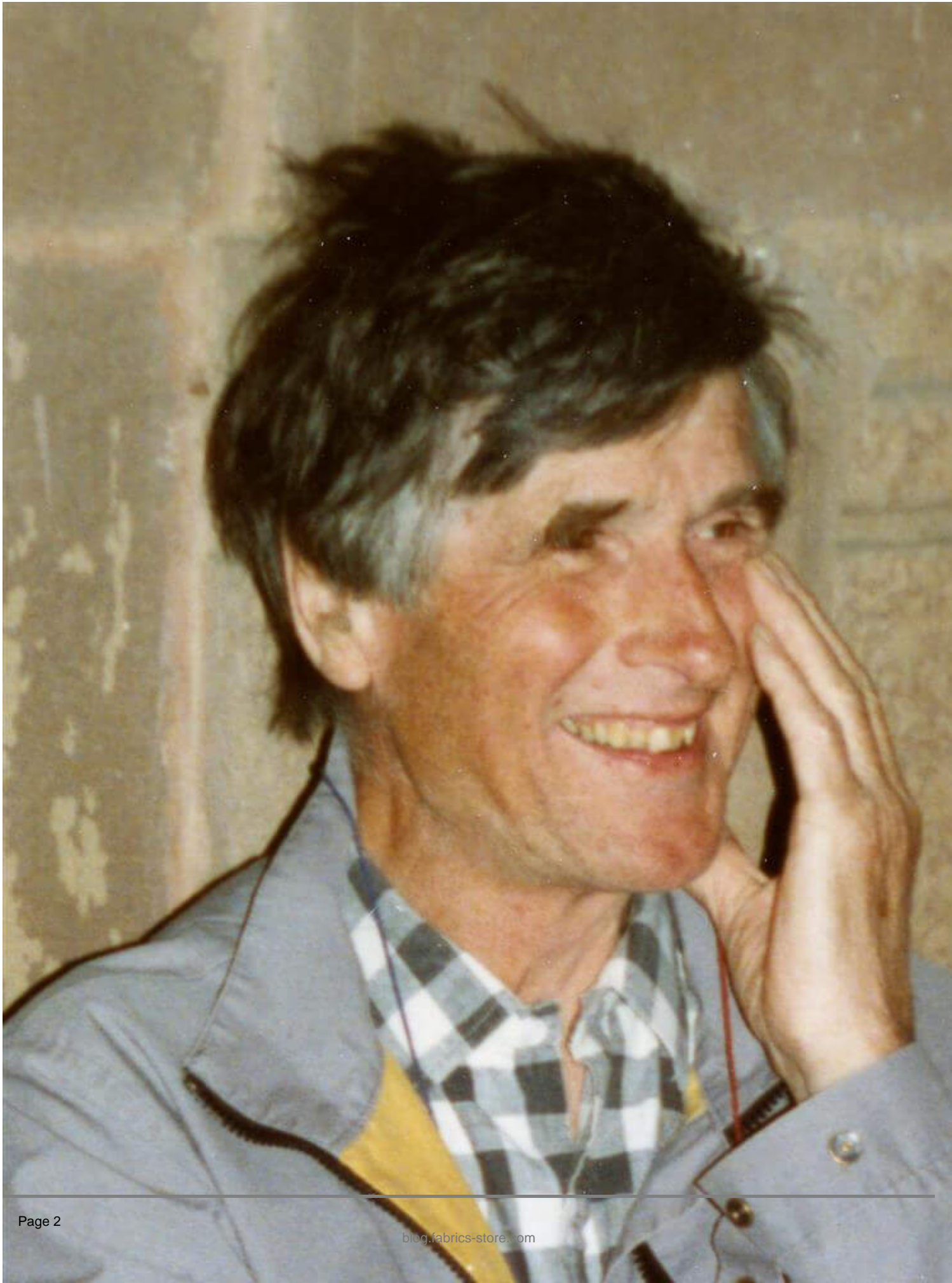




Shaft-Weaving and Macro-Gauze: The Textile Art of Peter Collingwood

Description



Peter Collingwood

A master weaver of the 1950s to the early aughts, British textile designer and artist Peter Collingwood made highly skilled rugs, split-ply baskets, wall-hangings and installations with intricate and fascinatingly complex designs. With a muted, pared back colour scheme, he focussed his energy on producing exquisite geometric patterns resembling Celtic knots or Afghan rug patterns. Through his innovative shaft-switching and macro-gauzes he was able to break free from the traditional straight lines and sides of weaving, moving outwards into three-dimensional space with suspended, sculptural works resembling fine nets and webs. Collingwood made extensive notes along this creative journey which became the backbone of his teaching practice, and, eventually, several instructional books including most famously *The Techniques of Rug Weaving*, 1968.



Peter Collingwood at his loom

Collingwood was born in Marylebone, London in 1922 to academic parents who pushed him into the field of medicine from a young age. But looking back, he recognised an overwhelming desire to do and make, remembering in an interview, "As a child I was always confident in the way that I could do things with my hands. My favourite game was to balance a stick on my fingers and toss it up in the air and catch it, balancing it again."

Nonetheless, Collingwood trained to become a doctor at Epsom College, Surrey, and St Mary's Hospital Medical School. He came across weaving one day quite by chance, having discovered a weaving loom in the occupational therapy department of the hospital. He noted, "At the time, I knew absolutely nothing about weaving; all I saw was a machine." Curious to learn more, Collingwood found himself experimenting with weaving and looms at home in what little free time he could muster. In his early days as a weaver, he built his own inkle loom with a pedal, fashioned out of two deck chairs, which gave him his first taste of how to begin making textiles.



Peter Collingwood at his loom

While carrying out National Service in the Royal Army Medical Corps and the Red Cross in Jordan with Arab refugees, Collingwood took his small loom with him, continuing to perfect his craft when he could by making scarves for the officersâ wives. In Jordan, he encountered ethnic weavings for the first time and was gifted a Bedouin tent-hanging, which came to inspire his own designs.



Weavings in the home of collector Dr Brian Harding



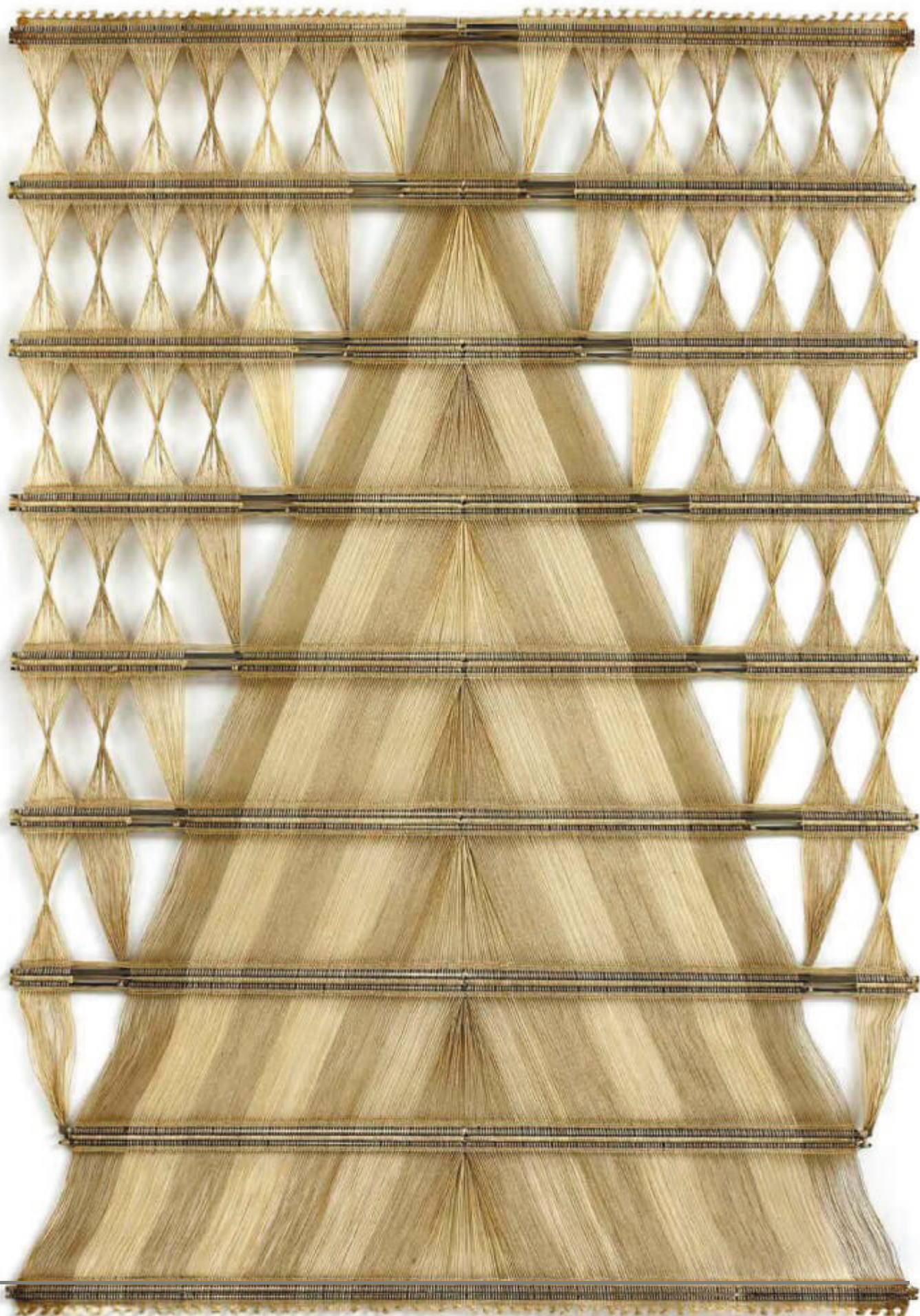
Detail of weaving by Peter Collingwood

In the years that followed Collingwood abandoned medicine, training in the studio of the renowned textile artist Ethel Mairet, who had an established textile studio in Ditchling, East Sussex. She profoundly altered his approach to making, as he recalled, "For me, it was a very strange experience, but it was an eye opener because it was the first time I had met somebody who you'd now say was weaving art fabrics." More work experience weaving rugs with the two British weavers Barbara Sawyer and Alastair Morton gave Collingwood enough confidence to establish his own studio in Archway, north London, in 1953. Around this time he began creating multi-shaft rugs on another invented, hand-made loom, which he described as, "a funny little eight harness loom which had keys like a piano, one for each harness."



He worked tirelessly and determinedly for the next few years, swiftly producing a large body of textiles, some he would sell to large department stores, others saved for design exhibitions and showcases, while teaching on the side to make ends meet. In 1957, Collingwood became a fellow of the Digswell Arts Trust in Hertfordshire, during which time he was able to secure a series of large-scale commissions. It was here that Collingwood first discovered a process he called "shaft-switching", in which he adapted his loom to allow him to produce tapestries and rugs at half the usual speed, as well as weaving at an angle, a technique he called "anglefells."





Macro-gauze wall hanging from the 1970s (plus detail)

Throughout the 1960s Collingwood purchased an old school near Colchester in Essex, which he converted into a home and studio with his wife, the teacher Elizabeth Brunsdon. Here Collingwood pioneered his Macro-gauze wall-hangings, made by crossing warps over one another in zigzag and sideways patterns, which eventually led him into three-dimensional, installation art with an airy, spirited and weightless quality which demonstrated the freeing possibilities of textile art. Up until his death in 2008, he was consistently dedicated to innovation, through pushing, pulling, and trying things out. Ultimately, the Eastern saying that he had pinned to his Macro-gauze loom came to sum up his creative sensibilities: "The simple only reappears after the complex is exhausted."

CATEGORY

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