



## Bias

THE IDEA OF CHANGE frightens and fascinates. A few rare people manage to “change the world” in dramatic ways – Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Emmeline Pankhurst – but for most of us change for the better is a slow process.

2007 is the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade. Many institutions are taking part in celebrations, the V&A is holding an exhibition featuring the work of **El Anatsui, pg 44**, among others. Key figures in the fight to end the shameful practice such as William Wilberforce (the subject of the new film *Amazing Grace*) are rightfully lauded but resistance occurred through all ranks of society. During the American Civil War the supply of cotton from southern slave plantations was severely restricted. Lancashire mills were closed but despite the hardships, cotton workers in Rochdale refused to handle slave-grown cotton. To thank them Lincoln sent food supplies, a rare surviving barrel is inscribed “I am one of the thousands that were filled with flour and sent by the Free States of America... to the starving people of Lancashire whose miseries were caused by the aggressive and civil war of the slave owners in 1862-3-4”.

The slaves themselves were not passive figures in the fight – they risked their lives to assert their humanity and spirit in many ways including art. The early quilters of Gees Bend refused to be cowed, and from them descendants of slaves and African American artists inherited a vibrant legacy. None have done it greater justice than quilter **Rosie Lee Tompkins, pg 36**, whose use of colour and composition is unparalleled. A playful celebration of colour and freedom was also captured on the streets of **Bahia, pg 16**, by Fedor Van der Valk in our photo story. And a welcome sense of pride and authority can be found in the traditional **Fante Asafo Flags of Ghana, pg 96**.

There are those working in textiles whose conditions are still akin to slavery. Nelson Mandela once said “education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.” The links between textiles and slavery are numerous and surprising, it’s a history that can shock or inspire – and it’s one we should all learn.

**Polly Leonard, Editor**

## Contributors

We asked our contributors to tell us what’s new...



YOSHIKO WADA pg 36

The Issey Miyake Foundation officially opened its new museum, 21\_21 Design Site on March 30, 2007. Fashion designer Issey Miyake undertook this project to open a discourse between design, art and the public. While normal sight, or 20/20 vision, is seen as perfect, Miyake’s new museum proffers something better – a vision of the future.



JAMIE MARSHALL pg 96

“Red” at The Textile Museum in Washington D.C is an exhibition of rare textiles showcasing arguably the world’s most provocative colour. Exploring the complex uses and meanings of red across time and place, the exhibit’s oldest example – a two thousand year old textile fragment from Peru-depicts a fanged deity which highlights red’s early associations with power and religion.



RINNE AND LUCY ALLEN pg 50

To us, old is new. Rediscovering our roots in the southeastern United States after living elsewhere has put us in touch with traditions of our ancestors and our southern heritage. We are inspired to interpret these lessons for the future, and we are on a quest to find others – fellow travellers – who are doing the same.