

A Designer's Life



Despite the disheartening fact that arts funding is being slashed mercilessly everywhere, it's nice to know that worthy work is still being rewarded. Renowned knitwear designer **Sasha Kagan** is about to mount a traveling retrospective—"My Life in Textiles: 4 Decades of Hand-Knit Design"—that's been "pump-primed" by a European arts grant known as Chance to Create. The first leg of the exhibition, segmented by decade into design themes Kagan has visited over her illustrious career, runs from November 10 through December 24 at the Llantarnam Grange Arts Centre in Cwmbran, South Wales.

"It's been quite a journey, going through the old stuff—press cuttings and exhibition catalogs," Kagan says, joking that "I don't need to see a psychiatrist; I'm looking at four decades of my work." More seriously, she says she's mounting the exhibit as part of her ongoing mission to "elevate knitting to a much higher status; it's more than just jumpers."

It certainly is in Kagan's hands. Among the exhibition features are her early geometrics, derived from Fair Isle and sweaters from the 1940s; her "whimsical, quirky" intarsia dog and cat motifs from the 1980s ("dear old Scottie looks as fresh today as he did when Henri Bendel had hundreds of of them," she says); the florals and leaves she explored in the 2000 book *Country Inspirations*, inspired by the Welsh countryside outside her studio window; and a newer collection of abstract designs based on geometry, with natural mosses and lichens and the like. Each section will be anchored by two or three garments, with framed photos and mounted swatches acting as "design statements." Kagan will travel with the exhibit, conducting master classes and lectures to coincide with its openings.

And what's a retrospective without a companion book? Kagan is currently working on ***The Classic Collection: 4 Decades of Hand-Knitting Design***, a GMC-published pattern book with garments reworked in today's "softer, more luxurious yarns" and essays by a number of Kagan's colleagues, including Rowan's Kate Buller and the London College of Fashion's Sandy Black, to give the entire project what she calls "a formal gravitas. It's an enormous undertaking. I've given myself far more work than necessary," she muses. "But you have to do things properly or they're not worth doing." Find out more about the exhibition's first leg at **LGAC.org.uk**, and keep up with its peregrinations as dates are firmed elsewhere at **SashaKagan.co.uk**.