



Selling Silks: A Merchant's Sample Book

Lesley Ellis Miller

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In 1764, British customs confiscated a book containing hundreds of samples of different qualities of silks from French agents who were attempting to sell them illegally in London. This merchant's sample book was acquired in 1972 by the Victoria and Albert Museum, and today it provides a fascinating record of the 18th-century French and English silk industries and their commercial practices. Alongside a full and faithful reproduction of the whole beautiful album—an extremely rare, fragile, and significant object—Lesley Miller describes how the sample book was a marketing tool for the premier European silk-weaving center of Lyon, France, and a model for English textile manufacturers in Spitalfields. She also discusses how the silks were made and for whom through the use of contemporary portraits and archival documents dating to the 1760s. The album itself is astonishing, reproducing hundreds of patterns.

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