

The Textile Museum and Documentation Centre, a brief account of a long and unknown history

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Early years: The Biosca Textile Museum

1 Copy of the deed of sale. CDMT archive.

2 Correspondence between J. Biosca and F. Torrella, 1950–1951; Algunos datos sobre el Museu Textil Biosca. Typed document, unsigned, dated March 1969. CDMT archive.

3 Museo Provincial de Tarrasa: resumen de datos sobre el Museo. Typed document, undated and unsigned. CDMT archive. Handwritten notes on visitor numbers and museum expenditure, 1947–1958. CDMT archive.

The institution we know today as the *Centre de Documentació i Museu Tèxtil*, or CDMT, has its origins in a small industrial warehouse at Carrer Sant Isidre, 6, in Terrassa, where Josep Biosca Torres chose to house a collection of historical fabrics and costumes he had acquired from Ignasi Abadal. The purchase, for the sum of 500,000 pesetas, was funded by profits from the company AGILESA-ETSA and completed on 21 February 1946¹. According to the inventory supplied with the deed of sale, the collection consisted of 680 individual items and 1,860 card-mounted fabric samples. Most of the items were European in origin, dating from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries, while a small number of older pieces from Egypt were also included.

Following Abadal's death, his son-in-law Josep Llussà announced the sale of a second group of items from the same collection, courting several potential buyers. Biosca, who appears to have been a shrewd negotiator, outmanoeuvred his rivals and, in March 1951, closed the deal that would expand his private museum with 1,330 new pieces. Documents from the period held in the CDMT archive² do not record the sum that was paid for this second acquisition, but they do confirm that the pieces were identical in nature to the first group, and that some were duplicate items. Biosca had planned to exchange exhibits with other museums in Europe, although the idea ultimately proved unsuccessful.

In 1953, the first board of trustees of the Biosca Textile Museum was created, and the museum was installed in the central part of the building housing the Terrassa Industrial Institute – the former Pasqual Sala warehouse located at Carrer St. Pau, 6. The Institute made a substantial contribution to the installation and maintenance costs.

The museum was formally opened to the public in January 1956, although handwritten notes by Dr Torrella confirm that private visits had been arranged since as early as 1947.³

From 1956 onwards there are reports of numerous activities organised by the museum, from the “Exhibition of selected works of Textile Art from the



4 From a signed record by José Cristófol Freixa, secretary of Edificaciones Textiles S.A., referring to the company's extraordinary general meeting in Madrid on 21 December 1958. CDMT archive.

collections of the museums of Catalonia”, installed in the Casa Soler i Palet (November–December 1956), to a display of selected pieces from the Biosca collection at the Biosca gallery in Madrid, owned by a brother of Josep Biosca, and a special exhibit at the Barcelona trade fair in 1957.

Not everything was wine and roses, however, and in late 1958, AGILESA-ETSA, “*recognising the need to resolve the museum’s situation permanently, given that its holding by the company carried serious responsibilities (...) and would no doubt demand considerable sacrifices in the future*”,⁴ agreed to hand control to the city of Terrassa. The offer was made on the condition that the City Council assume all of the costs and award the Industrial Institute an active role in the management of the museum, in acknowledgment of the investments made during the period it had housed the collection on its own premises. The City Council accepted the terms, and approval was announced in a plenary meeting on 17 April 1959. In September 1960 a new board of trustees was created, chaired by the mayor of Terrassa and formed by a variety of members including representatives of textile firms and municipal organisations, and the Museo Municipal Textil Biosca was born.

Spatial constraints and the stubbornness of Biosca – who had influential political contacts – placed pressure on the City Council to provide a new home for the museum. The decision was eventually taken to use a site opposite the Castle of Vallparadis, and on 15 December 1963 the president of the Provincial Council of Terrassa, the Marquis of Castell-Florite, and the mayor of Terrassa,



▲ The president of the Provincial Council, Josep Buxó, and the mayor of Terrassa, the signatories to the agreement for the creation of the new Provincial Textile Museum.

► Facade of the new building, designed by Camil Pallás, the architect at the Provincial Council.



Josep Clapés, agreed to join forces to create a new museum. The city would cede the land and its collections in perpetuity, and the Provincial Council would curate the **Viñas Collection** and transfer it to the new institution. By 1964 the architectural plans were ready, and work was completed in 1969, making way for the unveiling of the new museum on 14 June 1970.



Eighteenth-century cape, in embroidered velvet, from the Moragas Collection. CDMT 07239.

The Provincial Textile Museum

The new building provided the space to house the textile collections held by the City and Provincial councils. Thus, the original pieces assembled by Biosca were joined by two collections acquired from the City Council (the Moragas Collection, comprising 78 items of clothing from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the Garcia Capafons Collection, formed by 860 pieces of *passmanterie* covering the period from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century) and by the Viñas Collection, purchased by the Provincial Council from the industrialist Ricard Viñas Geis, which comprised 2,661 fabric samples and 442 examples of *passemanterie* dating from Late Antiquity through to the end of the nineteenth century, together with oriental fabrics and a series of documents and decrees from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries.

Management of the museum was entrusted to a new board of 18 trustees drawn from a public-private corporation: six *ex officio* members (the president of the Provincial Council of Terrassa, the mayor of Terrassa, two provincial councillors, one city councillor, and the museum's director), eight representatives of the Barcelona and Terrassa chambers of commerce, the Terrassa Industrial Institute, the Col·legi de l'Art Major de la Seda (the institution representing silk industry guilds), Caixa d'Estalvis de Terrassa savings bank, the Manufacturers' Union of Sabadell, the cotton textile industry,

5 “The President wishes it to be known that, in light of the fact that until now the financial costs of the Institution have been met almost in their entirety and under the sole responsibility of the Provincial Council, he believes that if the current outlook does not change, the clearest solution may be to manage the museum directly through this Corporation without the intervention of a special entity for the purpose, notwithstanding that a decision must be taken regarding the formula for creating a board with exclusively advisory functions that includes representation of the interested parties (...) and the potential repercussion of the participation of the City Council”. Minutes from the meeting of the board of trustees of the Provincial Textile Museum on 23 February 1981. CDMT archive.

and the Textile Workers’ Mutual Society; and three individual members, Manuel Rocamora, Lluís Garcia Capafons and Carlos Duran Torrens. The role of secretary was held *ex officio* by the secretary of the Provincial Council.

As laid down in the new statutes, the budget for the museum combined subsidies from its two public trustees with additional funding provided by the private trustees. The CDMT archive holds several letters of request or reminder sent to private trustees regarding their annual contributions, as well as receipts that illustrate the gradual decline in private funding over the years, creating a shortfall that was met by the Provincial Council of Barcelona, which increased both its funding and its involvement in the running of the museum. By 1981, under the presidency of Martí Jusmet, the situation had become untenable and the museum was placed under the direct control of the management corporation⁵.

A decade at the forefront of cultural life

Despite the difficulties described above, over the course of the 1970s the Provincial Textile Museum became the preeminent cultural institution of a city sorely lacking in infrastructures of this type. The new museum used a hall on the ground floor for temporary exhibitions that gave it a prominent role in the contemporary art scene throughout the decade, thanks to exhibitions by a number of artists associated with the Catalan School of Tapestry. During this period, the museum hosted 18 individual and collective exhibitions, which received extensive coverage in the media and are still fondly remembered by many people involved in this area of artistic creation.

With this focus on temporary displays, the collection of historical fabrics was relegated to the permanent exhibition halls, while the temporary spaces housed exhibits of paintings, sculptures, engravings, photographs, arts and crafts, and special historical or commemorative collections.

Moving into the 1980s, the Caixa de Terrassa Cultural Centre became the new dominant force in the cultural life of the city, and a variety of new municipal amenities emerged. The opening of the Catalan National Museum of Science and Technology in 1984 saw a definitive shift of the city’s cultural centre towards the Rambla d’Ègara, and the Provincial Textile Museum, which lacked the financial muscle and the technical expertise to promote new projects or major exhibitions, was gradually reduced to hosting smaller touring exhibitions supported by the Provincial Council or Caixa de Terrassa.

Despite this changing role, the Provincial Textile Museum continued to build its collection through private donations and a series of acquisitions (the



Exhibition of tapestries from the Catalan school.

Suqué and Tove Alm collections of Egyptian textiles and the Tórtola Valencia Collection of European, Oriental and Latin American fabrics), in addition to a major transfer from the Provincial Council of 1,275 items of clothing and accessories dating from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, originally bequeathed by the artist Lluís Tolosa Giralt. The halls on the second floor of the museum were renovated in 1985 to accommodate the new pieces, many of which were installed in large glass cabinets that presented the collection in spectacular fashion, though they also caused numerous difficulties of conservation.

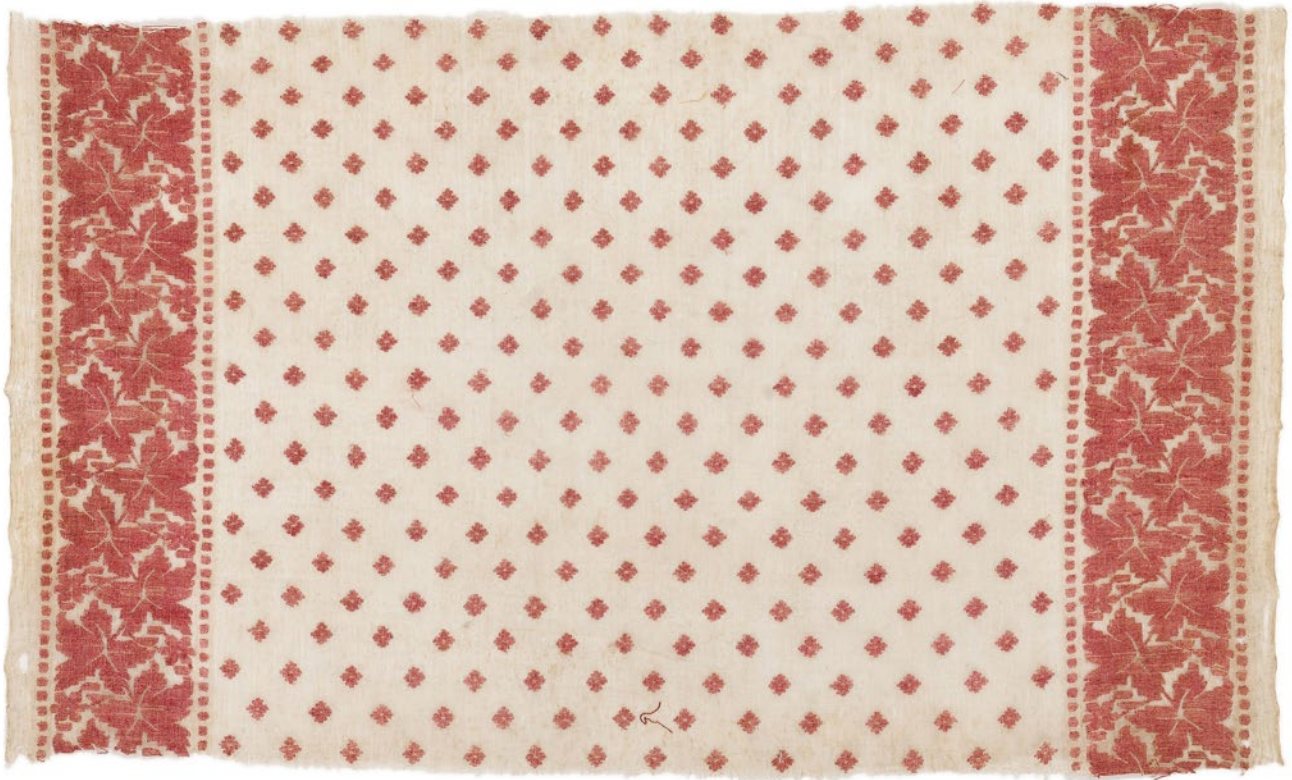
6 Textile Museum. Terrassa: Future guidelines, an initial approach (August 1987) and Plans for the refurbishment of the Textile Museum (March 1988). CDMT archive.

By the end of the decade the museum's model had run its course. The influence of European museology and museography had grown dramatically during the last years of the Franco regime, thanks in no small part to the work of the Assembly of Museum Staff of Catalonia, and the Provincial Council needed to update its museums. Terrassa posed a unique challenge, since although the museum was located in one of the most important textile cities in Catalonia, its collection included very few examples of local textile production. As such, was there sufficient justification for keeping the museum open?

This question sparked a radical transformation⁶, approved by the Provincial Council and ratified by the International Council of Museums, which entailed scaling back conventional museum activities and focusing instead on a new dynamic as a documentation centre and specialised service provider to the local population and textile sector.



Silk gown decorated with religious imagery, bequeathed by Lluís Tolosa. CDMT 11573.



Brocaded muslin cloth from India, from the Tòtola València Collection. CDMT 7761.

A new model for a new context

The transformation of the Provincial Textile Museum addressed three areas: concept, space and management. The new concept was clear; the centre would operate less as a traditional museum and more as a hub for a range of key services, making its resources available to the textile and fashion industries to support the creation of new designs, and seeking greater involvement in the work of local industry stakeholders, which generate wealth for the region through the knowledge and experience acquired over centuries of textile production in Terrassa. Heritage is the warp that gives consistency, the structure through which the weft of innovation is threaded, thus the fundamental mission of a centre like the CDMT must be to preserve the national textile heritage. To achieve this, it was necessary to prioritise the collection, conservation and diffusion of the materials that chart the industrial history of Catalonia, before they were irretrievably lost.

The public consortium set up to manage the museum in January 1995 brought a more dynamic management structure and reinstated the municipal representation that had been lost in 1981. Renovation work, however, had yet to be started and would take some 14 years to complete, during which time the museum remained open to the public. Finally, in December 2002, the CDMT as we know it today was officially inaugurated, with modern facilities better suited to the conservation of its collections, a new conservation workshop and library, interactive learning spaces, a conference room, and temporary exhibition halls.

Between 1990 and 2011 the museum devoted most of its efforts to **temporary exhibitions**⁷, which entailed constant documentation and the study, conservation and exhibition of work in specific styles. This approach brought considerable advances in the scientific and historical understanding of textiles

⁷ Between 1990 and 2014 the museum hosted a total of 63 temporary exhibitions, 20 of them curated by its own staff, eight organised in conjunction with other museums, and 35 brought from outside Spain (25 by contemporary designers and artists, and ten by other organisations). Of the exhibitions created by the museum, five were also shown at various museums across Catalonia. The exhibits themselves form the basis of 22 publications.



► Original design on paper, probably from the study of Gràcia i Ferrater, dating from 1908/1910. CDMT 15000 (1)-860.

▼ “Banderes” (samples of the same fabric in different colour combinations) from the Felipe Igleles silk firm, 1915/1930. CDMT 20018.



► Worsted manufactured by Textil Vallhonrat, Terrassa (1930/1939). CDMT 15135-045 (084-1421).



Cotton sample, Algodonera
Canals. Barcelona, 1955.
CDMT 11228-010 (086-546).



and was successful in attracting and establishing stronger links with new visitors not traditionally drawn to the textile industry. Unwavering support from the Provincial Council of Barcelona, under the presidency of Manuel Royes, enabled the CDMT to make dramatic qualitative improvements, bringing it to greater prominence on the European cultural scene, opening the doors to participation in collaborative projects with institutions in other countries, and creating a more favourable environment for specialised services such as documentation, restoration and training, as well as the design of official curricular workshops for schoolchildren in the region.

Today, the CDMT forms part of a network with the Marès Lace Museum in Arenys de Mar and the Textile Printing Museum in Premià de Mar. It is also actively involved in collaboration agreements with Catalan universities (the UPC, UAB and UB), the schools of Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage of Catalonia and Madrid, the textile industry (Texfor), and research organisations including the Centre for Historical Studies of Terrassa (CEHT) and the Grup d'Estudis Precolombins (GEP).

Much of the CDMT collection (in excess of 120,000 items) can be viewed [on line](#), as can the specialist library catalogue, through the Consortium of Academic Libraries of Catalonia (CBUC), and the [rare books and manuscripts collection](#), much of which has been integrated into the “Digital Memory of Catalonia”, a cooperative, open-access repository managed by the CBUC.



▲ Storage 1, containing floor textiles.

▶ Storage 6, containing clothing and large-format textiles.





Storage 5, with sample-books.



Conservation workshop. [See more.](#)



Library.

The CDMT is now more widely known for its industrial heritage and for Catalan *modernisme* than for the historical collections that formed the basis of the original institution. These older pieces retain a certain importance, and have an encyclopaedic value as learning tools and as a source of inspiration for industrial design, but similar collections can now be found in many other museums around the world; it is the industrial archives and *modernista* collections – clothing, accessories, household items, original designs – that most strongly root the CDMT in the surrounding region and local community.

Looking to the future

Heritage centres cannot work in isolation from the world around them; we must be able to evolve in response to new demands, particularly at a time when such demands are more numerous (and more contradictory) than ever. The intrinsic balance of conservation and public accessibility must now be reconciled with the demand to offer more (exhibitions, school workshops, longer opening hours, greater availability for consultation...) for less (free or at minimal cost); as funding falls (in a few short years we have seen our budget cut dramatically), visitors numbers and revenue must increase.

We must acknowledge that heritage is not foremost among our national priorities, and it is perhaps impossible to build the collaborative frameworks and social prestige of institutions in the English-speaking world that we often seek to emulate. A museum, by definition, belongs to society, but this is not to say that it necessarily reaches everyone in that society, whether because it lacks the capacity to attract the public or because the public is simply not interested.



“The modernist-style herbarium”, exhibition (2006/2009).

Each country and culture has its peculiarities, and any new policy initiative must face this fact. In Catalonia, there are too many museums and too few visitors; too much investment in new projects and too little money to maintain them. We have a culture of individualism and little willingness to join forces; a tradition of centralism and little experience of working together across the Catalan territory, as beneficial as this would be.

The efforts put into modernising the CDMT over the last few years stemmed from the conviction that both industry and the education system (specifically, schools of fashion and design) could creatively “exploit” the heritage we conserve, yet the results suggest that this has not been the case, or at least not to the extent we had intended. It is also true that we have been unsuccessful as a showcase for industry, a function we believed could be of interest to the sector, to bring its innovations to the public each season. Rather, we have discovered that our “natural” users are the museums of Catalonia, which need assistance with conservation and, above all, with restoration. So although we have had to change our focus in terms of users, we have consolidated our role as a service provider, an activity in which we can be far more sustainable than if we continue to operate as a conventional museum.

We have yet to address several areas in which work should already be well underway: the integration of IMATEX content into a database to make it universally accessible; the design of a specialised and officially recognised teaching syllabus linked to different sectors (textile trade and retail, official vocational training, higher education); the digitisation and computerisation of our photographic and administrative archive; the creation of online teaching resources...

But responsibility for the change of model before us is not in the hands of the CDMT team (which has submitted various strategy proposals since 2007, none of them given serious consideration) and lies squarely with the trustees, since the redesign is necessarily of a political nature. This situation is unavoidable given that the Provincial Council – which has covered 90% of the CDMT’s ordinary operating budget until now – intends to withdraw from its commitment and pass it to the City Council, which has had little involvement since the 1980s, despite providing half of the consortium’s members since 1995. And while it seemed for a time that the future of the CDMT would be an alliance with Disseny Hub Barcelona (DHUB), more than one administration has been and gone, and the initiative is no longer discussed.

A great deal of work remains to be done, much of it technical, but first a clear decision must be taken at government level regarding the desired role and prominence of the CDMT, both in Terrassa and across Catalonia. This decision must reflect the need to foster relationships with industry and the higher education sector, through which we can leverage our area of specialisation, the only area in which we can be a singular and competitive institution; it must strengthen our ties with the Circuit of Catalan Textile and Fashion Museums, and not with strange “constellations” drawn up in an office in Barcelona; and, harsh as the reality is, it must clearly acknowledge that visitors to museums in Catalonia are overwhelmingly tourists, and Terrassa is not a major destination on the tourist map... ●