

Charting the memory of textiles: generating activity and knowledge through collaboration between the museum and civil society

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For more than a decade the Sabadell History Museum has been working with a group of retired textile experts on a project that is proving highly successful. The collaboration has seen valuable progress in efforts to catalogue and document the Museum's textile collection, to systematise the body of knowledge on the wool textile production process, to delve into the historical memory of Sabadell as a centre of textile manufacturing, and to launch new initiatives that teach visitors about the significance of the wool textile industry in the evolution of the city.

Sabadell, city of textiles

The manufacturing of quality wool textiles was the main economic activity in Sabadell from the mid-nineteenth century to almost the end of the twentieth. The success of local companies saw the city become the leading centre of wool production in Spain and one of the driving forces behind Catalonia's industrial revolution.

The complex evolution of Sabadell as an industrial centre was reliant on the market success of its textiles. In 1837, the local firm *José Duran y Compañía* became the first manufacturer in Spain to produce what was called *el teixit de novetat*, textiles specifically designed to reflect changing fashions. From this point on, trends and fashions played a decisive role in manufacturing.

Textiles were produced to be sold and to generate profits; each manufacturer put together an attractive sample book to stand out from the competition and increase sales. To assist in the task, companies worked with a *teòric*, an expert in textile theory who oversaw the creation of each year's summer and winter sample books, which presented the creations for the upcoming season.

Once classified and archived, these sample books were of great value to the companies in later seasons, whether for supplying further orders of previous collections or as inspiration for the creation of new samples.



Group of theory experts who made up the *Comissió de Mostraris*. Front, from left to right: Lluís Marquès, Sebastià Serra, Josep Llobet, Roser Enrich (MHS), Lluís Clapers, Manel Borrell and Ramón Vila; back, from left to right: Frederic Gutés, Ricard Sáez, Pere Nogué, Josep Maria Ramoneda, Josep Maria Peret, Josep Cusidó, Joan Carles Miquel, Antoni Ribera, Albert Puigdel·líbol, Josep Armesto, Antoni Vázquez, Josep Puigdel·líbol and Orsini Sotorra. Absent from the photograph is Jordi Marmiñà, one of the founding members. Photograph Carlos Rivera/MHS, June 2014.

The MHS sample book collection

1 ENRICH, Roser, “Els mostraris. Creacions i història del tèxtil sabadellenc”, *Arraona: Revista d’història*, 2012, vol. 33, 4a època, pp. 276-285.
<http://goo.gl/yf1xcT>.

Since the end of the 1980s, one of the mainstays of the Museum’s acquisitions policy has been to increase its collection of sample books from local companies, to offer the broadest possible representation of textiles produced in Sabadell over the last 150 years.

The collection now has more than 4,000 documents of varying types, corresponding to each of the processes and operations involved in the production of a fabric, from conception and design to the completed textile ready for sale.¹ The documents come from more than 30 textile manufacturers based in Sabadell, and cover the period from the latter half of 1857 to the very end of the twentieth century.

Cataloguing the sample books

In 2004, the Museum embarked on the task of cataloguing the collection. A specific collaboration agreement was signed for the purpose with the textile section of the representative body *Agrupacions Professionals Narcís Giralt*, formed primarily by experts in textile theory with extensive experience in the production of national textile firms. The agreement ensured the experience and expertise required for the task, and the *Comissió de Mostraris*, or committee of sample book experts, was given the opportunity to pool its knowledge, which could then be channelled through the Museum, coherently organised and made available to the public.

The committee, which also includes dyers and spinners, has spent more than a decade studying and cataloguing the production records and dye sample books in the MHS collection.

Documentation guidelines

Given the nature of the collection, the committee and the MHS agreed that the most suitable starting point would be to catalogue the general production records.² This was done by creating a template with a series of specific fields that could be used to create an individual file for each volume. As they were completed, the files were then integrated into the Museum's management software, *MuseumPlus*.

As work has progressed to catalogue the production records, efforts have also begun to order and inventory the production specifications, strike-offs, cost projections, order books and other documents, tying them in with the relevant production records where possible. This additional classification is being compiled for companies with the most comprehensive body of records available: *Molins Hermanos*, *Planas y Rosson* and *Garriga Hermanos*.

In 2009, work began on the dye sample books, which required new fields to be added to the existing template. In this case, the bulk of the collection comes from the company *Estruch Tèxtil*.

Dissemination of the textile collection

Following more than a decade of research and documentation, the MHS and the committee of experts have embarked on a series of projects and initiatives designed to foster greater public awareness of the role and significance of the textile industry in the history of Sabadell.

² Volumes used to store the samples listed in the sample book for each season.



Open volumes. Photograph by Isabel Pardo/AHS. April 2016.

1. Wool textile dictionary

It was apparent from the outset of the project that a consensus would be required over the terms used to describe the textile samples. The committee members had backgrounds in a range of specialisations, and each had acquired specific experience at different companies, so a variety of terms were often used to describe a single sample.

The committee periodically reviewed the terms added to individual records, to validate their use and ensure that the same criteria were applied in each case. Once a complete list had been approved, some of the committee members proposed an additional project: the compilation of the *Diccionari de mostres vives* [Dictionary of living samples], in which each textile record would be presented alongside a genuine sample, truly bringing the collection to life.

The textiles were divided into two groups on the basis of their original use: men's or women's attire. After several months gathering together and organising the sample pieces, the committee finally completed the *Diccionari tèxtil llaner* [Wool textile dictionary], which was presented in June 2013. The two volumes, on *llaneria* (woollens, for women's clothing) and *panyeria* (worsted, for men's clothing), are an encyclopaedic guide to the different types of textiles in the Museum's collection, all produced in Sabadell. The city in fact had a particularly diverse textile industry, but wools were the quintessential product and are therefore the dictionary's exclusive focus.



2. Exhibition *Diccionari dels teixits fets a Sabadell* [Dictionary of textiles made in Sabadell]

3 Built by Emili Grau Vallribera, who gave the demonstrations.

4 With assistance from the staff of the Sound and Image Section at the AHS.

The MHS presented its textile dictionary to the public through this temporary exhibition, which was on show at the Museum from 4 September 2014 to 31 May 2015.

This exhibition, curated by committee members Orsini Sotorra Sanmartí, Josep Armesto Beneyto and Frederic Gutés Pujadas, showcased Sabadell's rich and diverse textile production, presenting each textile sample alongside a description of its most notable features. Visitors could read about the fabric itself and the creator behind it, giving them an introduction to the theory involved in the textile design and manufacturing process.

The next area of the exhibition showcased the *Diccionari tèxtil llaner*, which was presented alongside a variety of fabrics produced in Sabadell, grouped according to the garment for which they were intended and further divided into winter, summer and pre-season collections. A projection in the centre of the hall showed the process of textile transformation from raw wool to finished fabric, and scale models of a mechanical warp spooler and loom situated next to the projection³ were used to give a series of real-life demonstrations over the course of the exhibition period.

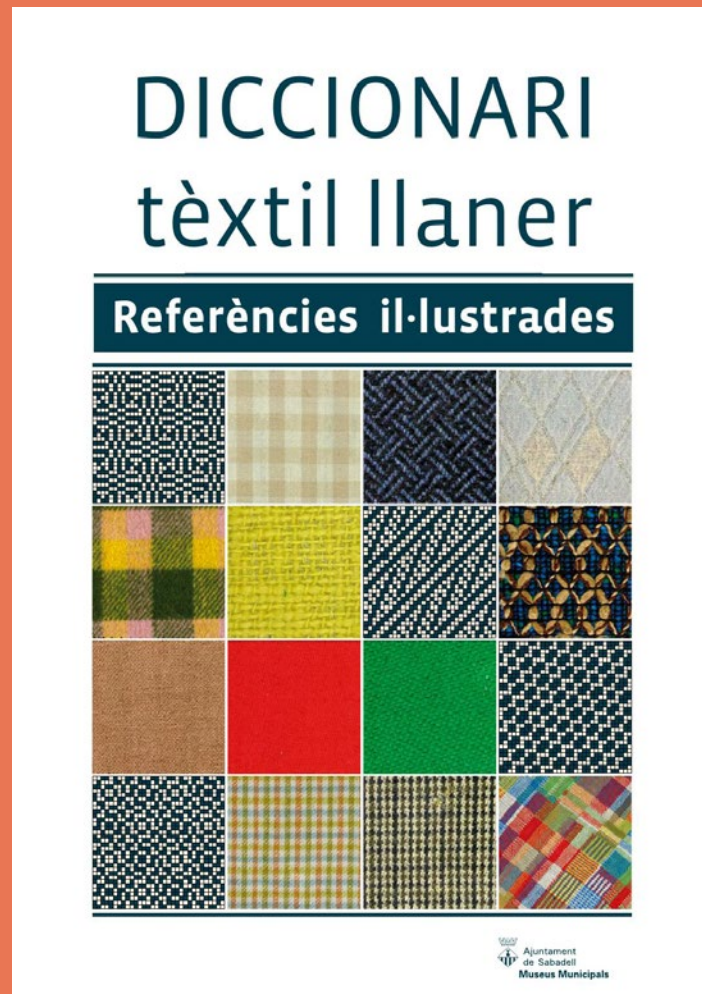
The exhibition concluded with the video presentation *Del be al teixit*, which offered an overview of the wool textile production process.⁴



▲ View of the second hall in the exhibition *Diccionari dels teixits fets a Sabadell*. Photograph by Roser Enrich/MHS. June 2015.

► Detail of a display at the exhibition *Diccionari dels teixits fets a Sabadell*. Photograph by Roser Enrich/MHS. June 2015.





3. Publication of the *Diccionari tèxtil llaner. Referències il·lustrades* [Wool textile dictionary. Illustrated references]

The illustrated dictionary, a single-volume reprint of the two volumes that made up the original dictionary compiled by the expert committee, was presented to the public in December 2015. The first part contains the volume on woollens for women's clothing, in which the samples are categorised according to garment, design and fibre, and further ordered alphabetically within each category. The second part presents the volume on worsteds for men's clothing, where samples are categorised according to their eventual use, then by season, further classified by garment and design, and finally ordered alphabetically. The book is completed by a comprehensive index of terms.

The *Diccionari tèxtil llaner* gathers together the knowledge of a group of professionals with decades of experience at the forefront of wool textile design and manufacturing, the primary activity in Sabadell's economic growth over the years. The book revives the memory of local textile production, rekindling part of the collective memory of a city that owes its importance to this industry, which has left a mark not only on the physical appearance of Sabadell but also on the unique character of its inhabitants. For more than 150 years, textile manufacturing and satellite industries in the textile sector provided employment to the vast majority of the local population.



View of the exhibition
Tints i colorants a Sabadell.
Una història que ve de lluny.
 Photograph by Roser Enrich/MHS.
 February 2014.

4. Exhibition *Tints i colorants a Sabadell. Una història que ve de lluny* [Dyes and colourants in Sabadell. A long history]

Once the 376 volumes of dye sample books from *Estruch Tèxtil* had been catalogued, giving an overview of almost the entire twentieth century, the MHS organised an **exhibition** to disseminate the results of this major research and documentation undertaking, which was open to visitors from September 2013 to mid-April 2014. The exhibition was curated by the dyers Sebastià Serra Rof and Antoni Vázquez Barrera, both members of the Museum's committee of experts.

Dyeing is an important process in the textile industry. The abundance and variety of textile products to emerge from Sabadell over the years owed much to the city's community of dyers, skilled professions professionals whose permanent contact with technicians and manufacturers contributed greatly to the commercial success of articles designed and produced in Sabadell.

A brief accompanying guide was released, and various activities were organised on Sundays during the exhibition period, including the workshop *El blau, de la planta al teixit. Taller de tintura amb anyil natural* [Blue, from plant to textile. Dyeing workshop with true indigo], led by Anna Homs Padrisa, a specialist in the field of natural colourants. A full **catalogue** was also published, which goes into greater detail on the exhibition content and gives an in-depth account of the manufacturers who built the dyeing machinery used in the city.



Photograph 2
Workshop: *El Blau, de la planta al teixit*. Explanations by Anna Homs Padrisa. Photograph by Roser Enrich/MHS. April 2014.
[See more.](#)

Cloenda

The collaborative framework established more than a decade ago has grown in scope and solidity and continues to generate new initiatives. Currently underway is a project to digitise and analyse in greater depth the most important pieces in the sample book collection.

A few months ago, the committee of experts acquired official status under the name *Associació de Professionals i Amics del Tèxtil de Sabadell* [Association of Sabadell textile professionals and friends of textiles], with a view to creating a dedicated wool textile museum that will teach future generations about the history of the wool textile industry in Sabadell and its importance in the life of the city. ●