

# The Influences of Gothic and Renaissance Textiles on Sgraffito in Catalan Modernisme<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the fruit of extended research deriving from a previous study for the catalogue MALLART, Lucila (ed.), *Josep Puig i Cadafalch: visió, identitats, cosmopolitisme*, Museu de Mataró, Mataró, 2018. It also forms part of the research project *Entre ciutats: paisatges culturals, escenes i identitats (1888-1929)*, funded by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (HAR2016-78745-P).

<sup>2</sup> This is the central theme of the author's doctoral thesis. See PIFARRÉ YAÑEZ, Daniel, *Els esgrafiats del Modernisme a Barcelona. Obres i repertoris ornamentals*, Universitat de Barcelona, 2015, doctoral thesis available online.

Some of the most renowned names in Catalan culture and artistic creation have emerged from the *Modernista* period, with Catalan architecture becoming one of the most recognisable and most admired forms of the discipline at home and abroad. The role of the architect in Catalonia in 1900 is crucial to the story. The architect exerted creative control over the entire decorative programmes of his buildings, either designing them himself or delegating the work to specialists in different disciplines. Out of the wide range of decorative arts available to professionals for the embellishment of façades and interiors, the technique of sgraffito became one of the most commonly utilised to cover the surfaces of walls, with the world of nature providing the most typical source for ornamental compositions. The aim of this paper is to show clearly that the artists and craftsmen of the *Modernista* period, when they created sgraffito, very frequently found an extremely rich field of decorative solutions in early textiles, primarily those of the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance, because they were an ideal source of inspiration. This is because the two artistic disciplines, sgraffito and textiles, share a number of specific formal and sensory characteristics that foster good dialogue between them.

The sgraffito of *Modernisme*<sup>2</sup> is applied in a variety of different ways: as a frieze, as a ceiling rose or mimicking tapestry. Sgraffito appears on façades and in interior spaces in common or domestic use. As mentioned above, the designs feature plants of all sorts. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, we can find sgraffito primarily representing flowers and other motifs from Gothic textiles, particularly from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. From 1900 onwards, with the introduction of the *Modernista* style, sgraffito depictions of flowers and plants tended to become more sophisticated and refined. One of the clearest influences appears to be textiles from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It should be recalled that architects and craftsmen who make sgraffito are aware of the aesthetic and sensorial qualities that the technique conveys when it is applied to the facing of a wall in the style of tapestry. With this decorative approach, sgraffito no longer centres on a single specific figurative or architectural element, but covers the entirety of the wall surface, setting up

3 One of the first authors to link textiles and *Modernista* sgraffito was Josep Casamartina. Referring to the *Modernista* sgraffito work on façades and interiors he says: “They are a sort of giant covering, and they bear a very close relation to worked velvets, damasks and brocatelles for upholstery”. CASAMARTINA I PARASSOLS, Josep, *L’interior del 1900. Adolf Mas fotògraf*, Centre de Documentació i Museu Tèxtil and Institut Amatller d’Art Hispànic, Barcelona, 2002, p. 59. On sgraffito designed in the style of a wall hanging, see also PIFARRÉ, 2015, pp. 112-118.

4 CARBONELL I BASTÉ, Sílvia, and CASAMARTINA I PARASSOLS, Josep, “Creadors de somnis”, in *Les fàbriques i els somnis: modernisme tèxtil a Catalunya*, Centre de Documentació i Museu Tèxtil, Terrassa, 2002, p. 59.

5 *Ibidem*, p. 59.

6 BARELLA MIRÓ, Albert and BARELLA CIVI, Fátima, *Iniciación a la historia del arte en el tejido*, Costura-3, Barcelona, 1984, pp. 49-53. On the subject of Venetian textiles, the authors note that they are the most varied example of the art over these centuries in Italy, and indeed across Mediterranean Europe in general, thanks to its strong links with Turkey and the Orient.

7 The late-nineteenth century Catalan collections containing medieval textiles are those of Francesc Miquel i

an aesthetic interplay of reliefs and colours. In this case, it is always based on the repetition of the same ornamental motif, which is known as a rapport, and it reflects a clear desire to achieve a continuous overlay in the style of a textile hanging on a wall<sup>3</sup>.

The relationship between medieval textiles and *Modernista* sgraffito can be seen in the works of particular architects, extremely important figures in *Modernista* architecture who not only designed some of the major works of the movement, but also demonstrated a strong link to the medieval past and the elements of medieval art. Josep Vilaseca, Lluís Domènech i Montaner, Antoni M<sup>a</sup> Gallissà and especially Josep Puig i Cadafalch are four of the most prominent figures who employed sgraffito with medievalising connotations, specifically drawing on the Gothic period in their architectural projects, primarily those of the eighteen-nineties and the early years of the twentieth century. All four men showed a keen interest in early textiles<sup>4</sup>, from which they took many of the ornamental motifs that they would later use not only in decorative solutions involving sgraffito, but also in low reliefs, wrought-iron grilles, ceramic tiles, hydraulic tiles and mosaics<sup>5</sup>.

If we analyse examples of sgraffito on display in these architects’ buildings, it becomes apparent that they share features in common. For example, most bear a resemblance to tapestry and draw inspiration from textiles characteristic of courtly Mediterranean Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, particularly Venice. Such textiles were basically made of silk and velvet, luxuriously crafted, featuring the embellishments of wall hangings based on the repetition of ornamental motifs such as the leaves, flowers and fruits of pineapples, pomegranates, artichokes and thistles, or branching stems, or small floral elements. Typically, the motifs cover the entire surface of the textile and are arranged in transversal bands or framed in diamond and scalloped shapes<sup>6</sup>. During the period of *Modernisme* in Catalonia, direct contact to such textiles was possible thanks to public and private collections that contained a number of examples, while others could be found in the illustrated catalogues of foreign museums<sup>7</sup>. As a result, it is easy to deduce which architects and other

Badia, Josep Pascó and Emili Cabot i Rovira. ALSINA, Laia, *Francesc Miquel i Badia (Barcelona, 1840-1899): crític, tractadista i col·leccionista d’Art*, UAB, 2015, doctoral thesis available online. The principal European museums

whose catalogues also included textile collections in this period were the Victoria & Albert Museum, in London, the Musée des Tissus et des Arts Décoratifs, in Lyon, and the Musée du Louvre, in Paris.



8 MONNAS, Lisa, *Renaissance Velvets*, London, V&A Publications, 2012, pp. 74-75.

9 *Silk Gold Crimson. Secrets and Technology at the Visconti and Sforza Courts*, Silvana Editoriale Spa, Milà, 2009, pp. 70-71.

10 As with many *Modernista* architects, Gallissà reused his sgraffito designs in subsequent projects. The floral sgraffito, for example, was can be seen on the exterior of the *Fàbrica de la Compañía General de Alumbrado por Acetileno* (1904?), in *Cassà de la Selva*.

professionals at work on their buildings took inspiration from the ornamental motifs that adorned the textiles and provided such a wide range of models. In addition, the garments depicted in Catalan Gothic paintings produced from 1450 onwards had a direct influence on the adoption of decorative solutions.

If we focus on specific examples of sgraffito that reflect the influence of late medieval textiles, one of the most illustrative cases is that of Gallissà and the façade of Casa Carlos de Llanza i de Carballo (1897-1898, refurbished) in Barcelona. Of the various applied arts that Gallissà put to use, a sgraffito in the form of a large tapestry makes the greatest contribution in terms of colour and plasticity. The serially repeated ornamental motif features a large flower with a broad, rounded corolla and a sinuous stem tilted at an angle. While the inside of the motif is not very descriptive, possibly because it is an artichoke flower, the lobed and scalloped shape of its profile coincides with how it is represented in Gothic and Renaissance textiles. More specifically, based on the configuration of the sgraffito, Gallissà borrowed directly from worked velvets produced in Venice in the second half of the fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century, which featured decorations of vivid, multi-coloured rosettes. The sgraffito can be linked on the one hand to a red and green silk velvet embroidered in gold that is now housed in London (V&A:859-1894)<sup>8</sup> and on the other to a glossy red velvet embroidered in gold and currently preserved in Lyon (MT31231)<sup>9</sup>. In both cases, the floral motifs have a lobed profile and appear with stems and foliage at an angle.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, Gallissà oversaw the refurbishment of Can Camps (1898-1899), a Gallissà family home in Barcelona. The entrance hall features various sgraffito compositions, including a large St. Anthony of Padua designed by Josep Maria



Sgraffito rosette in the entrance hall of Can Camps (1898-1898, refurbished), in Barcelona.  
© Daniel Pifarré.

<sup>11</sup> MONNAS, 2012, pp. 80-81.  
<sup>12</sup> <http://goo.gl/t2gUcA>  
(23/01/2018).

Jujol and two large artichoke rosettes. The flower is depicted in great detail, with a superior flourish, and is surrounded by a lobed corolla. In this case, the textile connection must be sought in embroidered motifs in which plant details are prominent and the central part of the flower is the ornamental focus. Poring through the many examples of textiles with these characteristics, we can cite the blue-velvet chasuble of Canon Franz Bock (third quarter of the fifteenth century, V&A:8704-1863)<sup>11</sup> and a piece of red and gold velvet preserved in Barcelona (MTIB-28331)<sup>12</sup>.

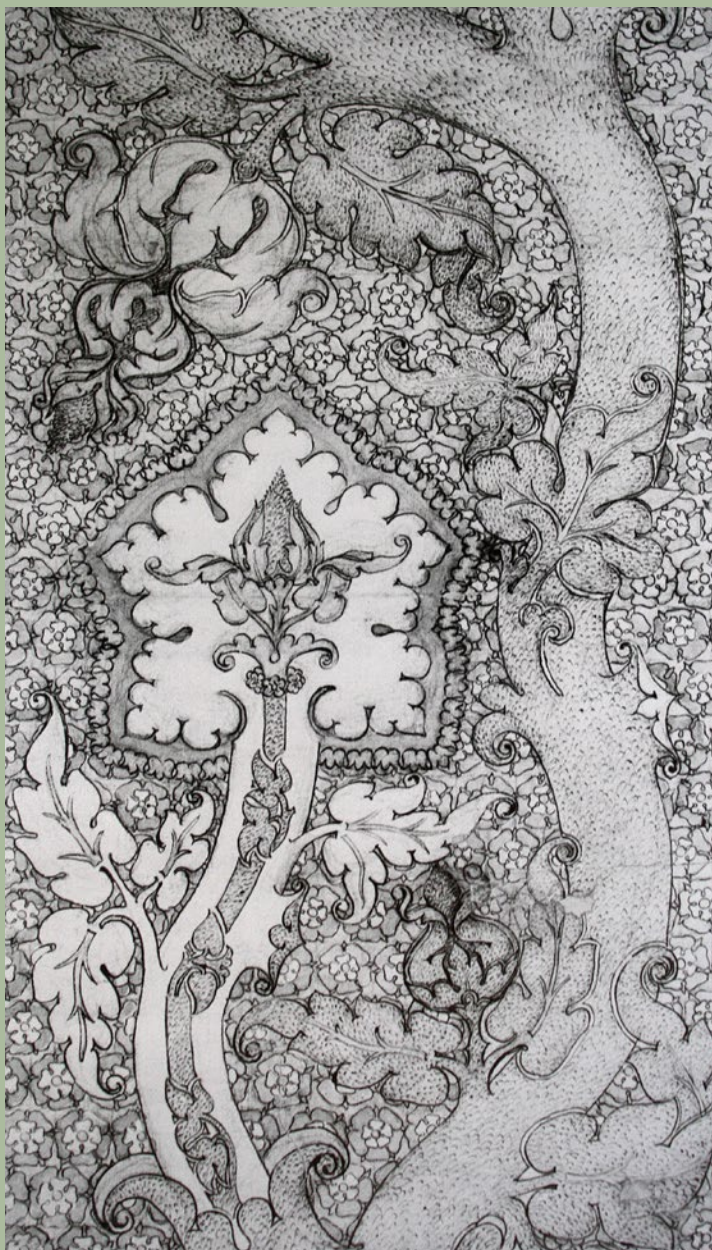


Velvet with gold thread (c.1475-1525), ©MTIB-28331.



▲ Detail of sgraffito in the entrance hall of Casa Pia Batlló (1892-1896), in Barcelona. © Daniel Pifarré.

► Design drawing for worked velvet produced by Pisanello (c. 1395-1455), ©Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, 2537.



<sup>13</sup> MONNAS, 2012, pp. 76-77.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 27-29.

In the case of Vilaseca, highlights include the sgraffito in the entrance halls of Casa Pia Batlló (1892-1896) and of one of the two Casa Cabot (1901-1904), both in Barcelona's Eixample neighbourhood. In each case, the interior walls feature large, vertical, sinuous stems with sprouting leaves and flowers of fantastical conception. All of the elements take direct inspiration from textiles with motifs of very similar characteristics, such as an Italian velvet brocaded in burgundy and gold, housed in London (V&A:774&a-1900)<sup>13</sup> and a design for a brocaded velvet made by Pisanello (c. 1395-1455) and housed in Paris (Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques-2537)<sup>14</sup>.

Turning to sgraffito in the work of Domènech i Montaner, we find two examples that originally come from decorative solutions for textiles and closely resemble one another: the sgraffito in the entrance hall of Casa Navàs (1901-1907) in Reus and the stucco fireplace surround in the drawing



▲ Stucco on fireplace surround in the drawing room on the main floor of Casa Lleó Morera (1902-1906), in Barcelona. ©Daniel Pifarré.

◆ Green silk velvet of Italian provenance, possibly from Venice (second quarter of the fifteenth century). ©V&A:T.117-1911.

**15** The interior sgraffito work of the Casa Macari Golferichs (1900-1901), by Joan Rubió i Bellver, also used a similar design, depicting a Phoenix motif within the scalloped form.

**16** *Silk Gold Crimson...*, 2009, pp. 80-81.

**17** MONNAS, 2012, p. 71.

**18** Puig had used this motif previously for the tomb of the Dam i Montells family (1897), in Montjuïc, and to adorn the tunics of the female figures on the façades of Casa Coll i Regàs (1897), in Mataró, and Casa Amatller (1898-1900), in Barcelona.

room on the main floor of Casa Lleó Morera (1902-1906) in Barcelona. Both compositions are laid out in the style of tapestries with diamond and scalloped shapes that each contain bunches of flowers, although the sgraffito in Reus is more complex because it includes corollas and other plant elements<sup>15</sup>. The models for these examples may have been taken from any number of European late medieval textiles, such as a red silk tablecloth preserved in Venice (Centro Studi Tessuto e Costume, Palazzo Mocenigo, n.210)<sup>16</sup> and a fragment of Italian green silk velvet, possibly Venetian, housed in London (V&A:T.117-1911)<sup>17</sup>.

The most obvious examples of the relation between the technique of sgraffito and textiles, however, appear in the work of Puig i Cadafalch. While there are many cases, space here limits us to two. The first is the sgraffito façade of Casa Martí i Puig (1898, refurbished), on the Carrer de la Boqueria in Barcelona. To update the original eighteenth-century house and bring it in line with the Modernista style, Puig created a tapestry-like sgraffito with a principal motif: a shape partway between the scalloped diamond that we have seen before and a heraldic shield. The motif is fleshed out with a thistle flower and foliage in the interior and a crown in the upper part<sup>18</sup>. The general idea of the design can be found in a variety of versions in many Italian silk textiles of the sixteenth

Detail of sgraffito in the entrance hall of Casa Garí (1899-1900), in Argentona. ©Daniel Pifarré.



Crimson velvet worked in gold thread, of Ottoman provenance (late fifteenth century). ©V&A:T.359-1977.



<sup>19</sup> MONNAS, 2012, pp. 126-127.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>21</sup> *Mostra de le Antiche Stoffe Genovesi dal secolo xv al secolo xix*, Ente Provinciale del Turismo di Genova, Genova, 1941, p. 77.

<sup>22</sup> <http://goo.gl/JQpMZp> (24/01/2018).

<sup>23</sup> MONNAS, 2012, pp. 146-147.

century: in a double stole of crimson velvet (V&A:587-1892)<sup>19</sup>, in an amber velvet brocaded in silver thread (V&A:715-1907)<sup>20</sup>, and in a cope known as “crown damask” (Cathedral of San Lorenzo, Genoa)<sup>21</sup>. All of these textiles have a principal motif based on a central form in scalloped profile with a crown and plant decoration inside. The second example in Puig’s work appears in Casa Josep Garí (1899-1900) in Argentona. Among the various sgraffito designs, many of which are inspired by late medieval textiles, the one in the style of a tapestry in the entrance hall repeats a large rosette from which pomegranates and thistles bloom. The connection to Italian velvets featuring lobed floral subject matter is plain to see. Of the many textiles that may have inspired Puig, we can cite a Genoese piece preserved in Barcelona (MTIB-22637)<sup>22</sup> and a crimson velvet of Ottoman provenance (V&A:T.359-1977)<sup>23</sup>.

By way of epilogue, it should be noted that the dialogue between Gothic and Renaissance textiles and the buildings of the great masters of Modernista architecture stands as a thought-provoking precedent for other architects of the same period, who are sometimes called “minor architects”. Sgraffito designs in their works appear to derive from the designs carried out by the master architects under discussion rather than from drawing their own inspiration directly from the textiles. The cases are quite heterogeneous. Examples include Domènec Boada and Casa Joaquim Cairó (1900), Murici Augé and Casa Josep Filella (1901-1903), and Frederic Soler i Catarineu and Casa Joan Vila (1902), all located in Barcelona’s Eixample neighbourhood. ●

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