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Exhibition

A new exhibition on fashion and Catholicism. *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*

New York Metropolitan Museum of Art

■ Silvia Ventosa

The Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York hosted an impressive exhibition entitled *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*, based on the idea that fashion and religion are intertwined and that they inspire and engage each other, in the words of Curator in Charge Andrew Bolton. This researcher explains that the starting point for the exhibition was an article published in *Newsweek* on 20 November 2005 entitled *The Pope wears Prada*, referencing the designer red loafers worn by Benedict XVI. And the conceptual framework for the exhibition comes from the book by Catholic sociologist Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, which looks at a uniquely Catholic awareness or sensibility, which has its own visual representation and narrative.

Although it could have been controversial to create an installation of clothing and other pieces associated with 20th and 21st century fashion in the Medieval, Byzantine and Renaissance halls of the museum, as well as the possible criticism of the Catholic religion and its influence on dress style, the script and set-up were both extremely respectful of Catholicism. The curator says most of the designers represented in the exhibition come from a Catholic background. Only the somewhat hidden projection of the ecclesiastical fashion shows from Federico Fellini's 1972 film *Roma* in one corner of the room sheds a slightly more ironic light on the topic.

The exhibition is divided into three sections. In the basement, where the Costume Institute halls are, is a selection of forty holy vestments from the Vatican, most of which had never before left Rome. The work of fashion designers from



the 20th and 21st centuries is on display in the Medieval, Byzantine and Renaissance halls of the Fifth Avenue Metropolitan Museum, as well as in the far-off Cloisters, where the pieces co-exist with gardens, cloisters and Medieval chapels from France and Spain. Apart from the pieces from the Vatican, more than 150 contemporary dresses engage in a dialogue with the pieces in the permanent collection. In some cases, the dresses are displayed on the same level as the other items in the room, but in others they are on tall posts, hanging over visitors' heads.

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A fastidious two-volume hardbound catalogue in a slipcase accompanies this exhibition. The first volume features the pieces from the Vatican, most from the 19th and 20th centuries. It has an introduction by the president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art explaining that this is the first time the Vatican and the Costume Institute have ever collaborated. This is followed by a text by Marzia Cataldi Gallo on the history, types, colours and shapes of the liturgical items. This volume also features large photos of the pieces that travelled to New York for the exhibition, with a long description of each one. The second volume has two parts: Fashioning Worship and Fashioning Devotion. The first features the items on display in the Medieval and Byzantine sections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and compares them to dresses from different eras of the 20th and 21st centuries, establishing a dialogue that aims to compare the images, shapes, colours, etc. The second part focuses on the habits of Catholic congregations, tying them to the pieces and interior of the churches at the museum's The Cloisters building. The outstanding work of photographer Katerina Jebb must be noted. She has de-constructed the image of each dress in separate photographs that she later juxtaposes to represent the dress and its mannequin again. All of the photos were done this way, which meant the pieces had to be in New York six months before the inauguration. For this exhibition, the Museu del Disseny de Barcelona loaned the Met three dresses by Cristóbal Balenciaga, which are compared to the clothing of virgins and saints, with their shiny stoles, that can be seen in the paintings in the Renaissance room.



The exhibition is ambitious and surprising without being provocative, as the tranquil rooms of Medieval and Byzantine art make room for huge, tall mannequins with extraordinary dresses that display a different language from that seen in the permanent collection, given their proximity to our time and their connection to the human body. And, curiously, when you look at the tags, you can see that there are many pieces selected that were designed after

2015-2016 and you have to wonder whether they were designed expressly for the exhibition. And this question leads to another when you walk down Fifth Avenue and look at the windows of the top fashion brands featuring garments with Catholic iconography and clear nods to the exhibition at the Met. Not to mention the famous Metgala: the inauguration of the exhibition, when celebrities from all walks of life parade around in dresses from the same designers, this year with clear allusions to Catholic iconography.

This exhibition will be at the Met from this May to 8 October. It is in two locations, the main Fifth Avenue museum and The Cloisters. ■

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Exhibition

Posem fil a l'agulla. La indústria del gènere de punt a Arenys de Mar ***Threading the needle, industrial knitting in Arenys de Mar***

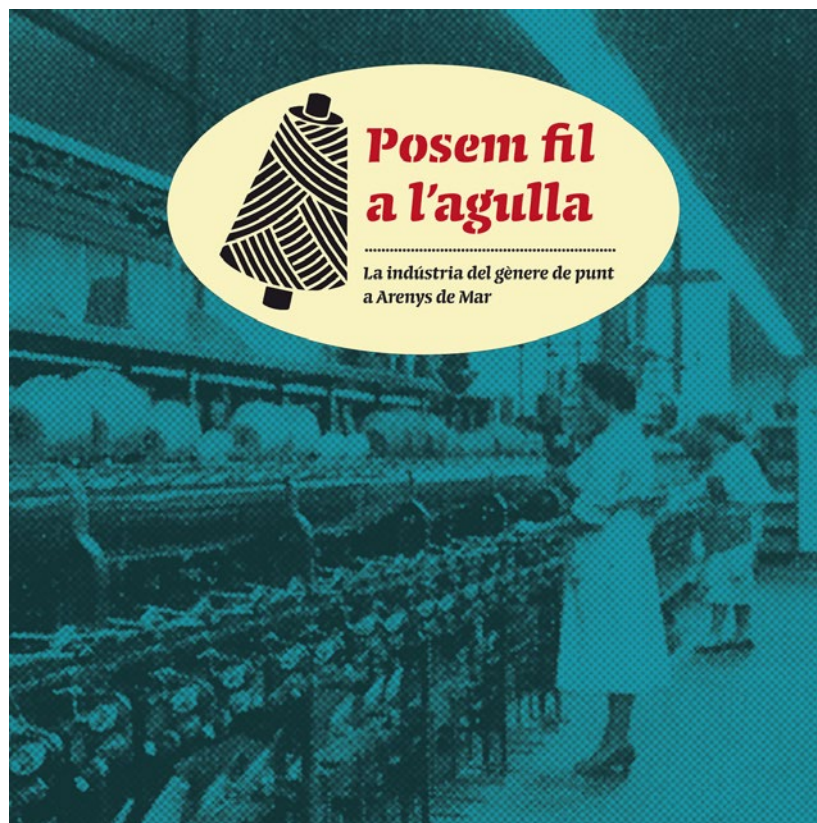
Arenys de Mar Museum
From 28 January to 23 December 2018

■ Neus Ribas

The exhibition and catalogue *Posem fil a l'agulla, el gènere de punt a Arenys de Mar* (Threading the needle, industrial knitting in Arenys de Mar), produced by Museu d'Arenys de Mar, are a labour of love to save the history of a sector that was essential in Arenys de Mar and the whole county of Maresme. But, above all, they are a tribute to the businesspeople and workers associated with industrial knitting, who were the true stars in this story.

The articles in this catalogue were written by experts or researchers who focus on the topic, as well as people with professional ties to the sector, to show the deep roots it has in our town. Montserrat Llonch, who has published several papers on industrial knitting in Maresme, is one of the authors, providing a general overview of the history of this industry. Jordi Julià, curator of the exhibition and descendent of one of the most important knitting factories in Arenys de Mar, now defunct, covers the history of this industry in Arenys de Mar from the early years through the crisis in the 1980s.

The other articles sought a more local, experimental vision from two generations. The first comes from Joaquim Cassà, a worker and businessman in the knitting industry for more than 50 years, and the second, from Mireia Bibolas, daughter of an engineer at the company Jumberca who still works in the knitting industry,



which has given her a look at all the changes this sector has seen lately.

The exhibition and its catalogue aim to raise awareness of the history of the textile industry in Arenys de Mar in the 20th century and its influence on social life, culture and sports. An industry that has practically disappeared today, but still survives in one of the oldest companies: Cónдор, which is celebrating its 120th anniversary this year. ■

<http://museu.arenysdemar.cat>

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Exhibition

Pedro Rodríguez. The art of dressing. Carme Ensesa de Bencomo Private collection

Calella Old Town Hall
From 19 Mai to 2 September 2018

■ Carmen Torm

Over the course of his career, designer Pedro Rodríguez met and dressed the most elegant women of the time. The close relationship between the designer and his clients led to lifelong friendships. One such case was with Ms Carme Ensesa de Bencomo, a client and friend of the designer. Over the years, this relationship materialised in the exclusive outfits and accessories created for the social events attended by this lady of Catalan high society. The exhibition displays just some of the creations in the extensive private wardrobe of Carme Ensesa de Bencomo

and will be at the Calella Old Town Hall through Sunday 2 September, organised by the Museu de Calella.

Pedro Rodríguez was born in Valencia in 1895. After his father's death, the family moved to Barcelona. In the first few years of the designer's training, he learned the basics of the trade from Barcelona's most important tailors. In 1919, he and his wife Anita opened the first high-fashion house in Spain, following the strict guidelines set out by the *Chambre syndicale de la haute couture parisienne* (Haute couture trade union of Paris).



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This is when the designer's professional career really took off.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out on 18 July 1936, it put a stop to fashion production in Barcelona briefly, although he continued to work with an extensive list of foreign clients, mainly in the Americas and Europe. The firm's success allowed them to open two more fashion houses, one in Madrid in 1939 and the other in San Sebastian in April 1937.

From the beginning, a cosmopolitan vision of fashion was always part of Pedro Rodríguez's creations. His curious nature and passion for his trade brought him international renown, for the most part in Europe, the United States and Mexico, and Asia, mainly in China, the Philippines, Japan and Thailand. It wasn't until the 1950s, however, that Pedro Rodríguez made his first incursions into the US market. The success of his proposals opened the door to collaborations on many films

in the 1960s. This introduced him to US celebrities, adding actresses like Ava Gardner, Bette Davis and Rita Hayworth to his already extensive list of prestigious American clientele.

The peak of his career, in terms of both productivity and creativity, was the 1950s and 1960s. In this period, he was recognised as one of the top designers in the world of haute couture, winning awards, medals and many distinctions and recognitions that highlighted the value of his innumerable contributions to the world of fashion.

Despite the changing trends brought about by prêt-à-porter, Pedro Rodríguez continued presenting elaborate creations in luxurious fabrics of the best quality without sacrificing the creativity or exclusiveness of haute couture until he closed his doors in 1979. ■

Exhibition credits

Carme Torm i Elies. Direction and coordination.
 Victòria Garcia i Vila. Documentation and texts.

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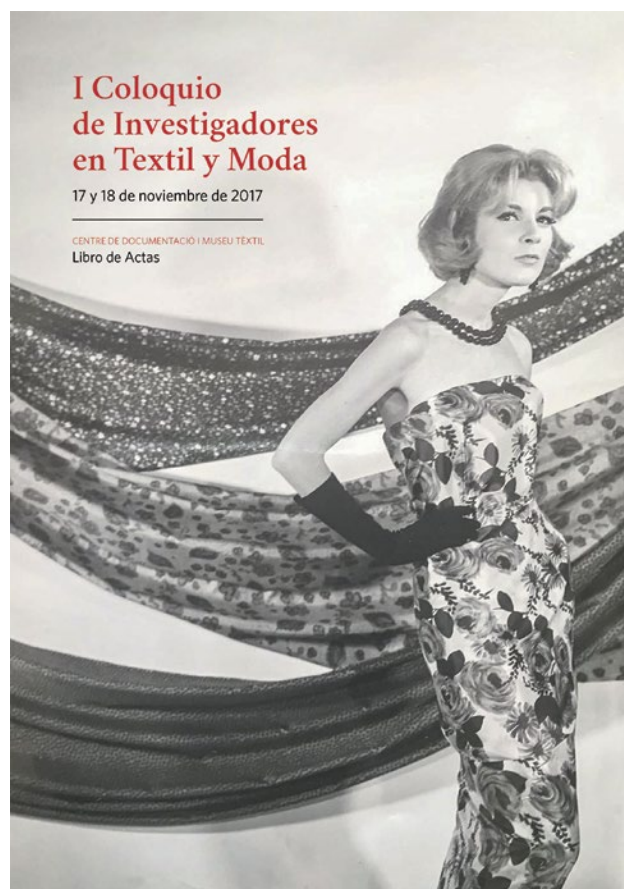
Proceedings Book of the I Colloquium of Researchers in Textile and Fashion.

Centre for Documentation and Textile Museum
Terrassa, 17 and 18 November 2017

ISBN 978-84-697-7760-2 | 232 pages

The Textile and fashion research group, as part of the Design History Foundation, and the Centre for Documentation and Textile Museum in Terrassa, organised the I Colloquium of Researchers in Textile and Fashion in November 2017. The event saw a great turnout, with some 50 speakers from universities and teaching centres, museums, archives and study groups or independent researchers. The research group was created in 2016 to join forces and share experience and knowledge. Soon afterwards, they began working on the I Colloquium. Leslie Miller gave the keynote speech, *Interwoven stories: 30 years of textile research*, sharing her long career in academia and museums. It was a first-hand testimony that can guide researchers in future studies, which has been included in this publication.

The aim of the Colloquium was to share recent research on fabrics and fashion in Spain, promoting synergies among all participants. The growing interest in these two fields of study was reflected in the great response to the call. Given its transversal nature, these topics are covered by various disciplines, from history, art history and design history to anthropology and sociology, among others. In this regard, other institutions that also collaborated on the colloquium included Museu del Disseny de Barcelona, Museu d'Arenys de Mar, Fundació Institut Industrial i Comercial de Terrassa and the University of Terrassa, with participation from the National Museum of Science and Technology of Catalonia. The two-day event dealt with topics like collecting, textile art, preservation, musicology, popular clothing, religious clothing, theatre costumes and haute couture, among others. The chronological range



encompassed everything from antiquity to present day. The works presented were previously unpublished or had a new focus, as well as the latest noteworthy projects in preserving and disseminating textiles. This was proof of the growing interest in the topic in the field of history, which also demonstrated the effort being made to bring this knowledge to a wider public. Given the great success of this event, the Textile and fashion research group is now working on the II Colloquium, which will take place in 2019. ■

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Design History Foundation Textile and fashion research group

■ **Dr Isabel Campi**, President of the FHD

The Design History Foundation (FHD, from its initials in Spanish), was established in Barcelona in late 2006 and has been active since 2008. It is a non-profit organisation that is focused on research, or generating new knowledge on the history of design; dissemination, meaning spreading this new knowledge on design; and promotion of design history, supporting this activity so it reaches the same level of importance as other branches of history. Although the Foundation isn't a museum or an archive, it also works to preserve design's documentary heritage, which is often endangered.*

Along with these scientific goals, the Foundation also aims to raise awareness and encourage cohesion among design historians, who are often separated and spread out among different academic institutions and museums. In this regard, it is following in the footsteps of institutions like the British Design History Society (DHS), which was founded in 1977 with similar aims and today is a world-renowned institution with members around the globe.

The Foundation is governed by a board of trustees, appointed periodically, made up of experts in design history from Catalonia, Spain and the world. This ensures the body has ties with foreign institutions that can contribute in terms of contacts and projects, as well as the vitality of their members.

The Foundation's activities focus mainly on scientific events (congresses, colloquia and symposia), research publications (their own or on

* Since 2015, the foundation has been the provisional home of the professional archive of designer Jordi Vilanova, which was in imminent danger of being destroyed.

commission) and training (conferences, courses and workshops).

In 2016, the FHD hosted a symposium called *Modernos a pesar de todo* (Modern in spite of it all) at the Museu del Disseny de Barcelona. The title was broad enough to encompass most research on the history of design conducted in Spain. The call was quite successful and the speakers were broken down into the following workgroups: Architecture and spaces (4), Archives and heritage (3), Graphic design (4), Teaching (3), Historiography (2), Furniture and objects (4) and Fashion (6). The last one was the biggest, with conferences by Núria Aragonès, Ester Barón, Laura Casal, Francesca Piñol, Sílvia Roses and Sílvia Ventosa. It was also the most dynamic group, with the most initiative, as the participants immediately began promoting the idea to create a textile and fashion research group (Grup d'Estudis de Tèxtil i Moda - GETM). Through periodic meetings, the GETM began to take shape, specifying its aims and finally requesting to join the Foundation. This gave them the tools to hold activities and mobilise resources.

This collective was created with the desire to bring rigour and depth to the study of textiles and fashion, to safeguard its historical heritage and to be seen as a benchmark in the field of research. Its founding goals are identical to those of the Foundation, but with an even more specific focus, and they are:

“The Textile and fashion research group, as part of the Design History Foundation, aims to be a place of sharing conceived to promote research and dissemination of knowledge

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in the fields of textiles and fashion through joint projects. Likewise, it aims to safeguard textile heritage, as well as raising awareness of private and public collections and archives. It also provides guidance to other researchers or institutions interested in these topics.

The study of the world of textiles and clothing is done from a multidisciplinary perspective, looking at history, art, technology, sociology, design and museology. GETM also plans to participate in national and international meetings and congresses on textiles and fashion, as well as organising trips to learn about these topics around the world.”

The group’s work areas are both general (fabrics, clothing and fashion as universal phenomena) and specific, contributed by each member of the group: industrial fabric swatches; dyes and colourings; raw materials; fabric design; knitwear; lace making; prints; popular clothing and costumes;

new fabrics; textile collections; creators, producers and designers; the fashion system; socio-economic history and clothes aesthetics; fashion media and circulation; fashion images; international trade, relations and flows; technology transfer.

The methodology and tools the GETM proposes to work with are exchanging knowledge through physical or virtual meetings; studying items in public museums or private collections, studying documents; creating glossaries and terminology, etc. The activities its members aim to carry out include periodic scientific events; monographic displays and exhibitions; digital and print publications; travel and any others that come out of the members’ initiative.

The group is promoted by Dr Sílvia Ventosa, curator of the textile and fashion collections at Museu del Disseny de Barcelona, member of the Design History Foundation board of trustees and group leader; Dr Sílvia Carbonell, managing director of the Terrassa Textile Museum and Documentation Centre; Dr Assumpta Dangla, museologist and PhD in architecture and design

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from the UIC; Neus Ribas, director of the Museu de la Punta d'Arenys de Mar; and myself, with my teaching experience, as I have always believed that the history of fashion and textiles is a very valuable and dynamic part of design history.

In April 2017, the group proposed to the Foundation to host its first national scientific event. The I Colloquium of Textile and Fashion Researchers was organised in record time in close financial and logistics collaboration with the FHD, Terrassa Textile Museum and Documentation Centre, Museu del Disseny de Barcelona and Museu de la Punta d'Arenys de Mar.

The conference took place at the Terrassa Textile Museum and Documentation Centre on 17-18 November 2017, with more than 100 participants from all over Spain and 41 speakers. To kick off the event, Dr Lesley Miller, curator of the textile collection at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, was invited to give the keynote speech, entitled *Interwoven stories: 30 years of textile research*. After the colloquium,

a beautiful catalogue was published, which can be downloaded from the websites of the Foundation and the Terrassa Textile Museum and Documentation Centre or purchased in print from the secretary of the Foundation.

The unexpected success of this colloquium was proof that a platform is needed to raise awareness of research being done throughout the country. So everyone was up for hosting another one. Now, we're all working on the 2019 colloquium, which will be called "Noms a l'ombra" (*Figures in the shadows*).

The GETM has a commitment to history and an encouraging future, and we hope to put together enough human resources and drive to keep it going. Because there's no lack of desire and motivation. To become a member, just join as a friend of the Design History Foundation and you'll be put on a specific list. ■

<http://www.historiadeldisseny.org/amics>