

Museu Tèxtil of Terrassa: 75 Years of History

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The Museu Tèxtil is celebrating a big anniversary! On 21 February 1946, **75 years ago**, businessman and financier **Josep Biosca Torres**, with support from another industrialist from Terrassa called **Josep Badrinas Sala**, purchased a collection of textiles from Barcelona resident Ignasi Abadal Soldevila and founded the **first textile museum in Spain**. Terrassa had a long history in the textile industry, with its schools of Textile Engineering, Technical Engineers and Arts and Trades, as well as the Industrial Institute. The museum was seen as a centre for study and research, to broaden the knowledge of students, businesspeople and tradespeople in the city.

The early years

Then known as **Museo Textil Biosca**, all at once the museum received 680 loose textiles and another 1,860 mounted on cardboard, from a variety of countries and time periods. Its first home was in an industrial warehouse at Carrer Sant Isidre 6 in Terrassa. It opened in 1947, by appointment only, with funds from the Industrial Institute of Terrassa.

From the very beginning, it was clear the museum would have Biosca's name, Badrinas would be president and the young historian **Francesc Torrella Niubó** would be its director.

Abadal died in 1947 and, three years later, his son-in-law Juan Llusà del Corral put a second part of the collection up for sale, which the museum in Terrassa purchased. With this second acquisition (1,429 textiles), the collection then had nearly four thousand textiles from time periods ranging from the 4th through the 19th centuries: **Coptic, Andalusian, Byzantine, Persian, Chinese, Japanese, Turkish, Pre-Colombian, European, prints, religious items, passementerie** and more. It was, by far, the largest collection in the country. From that point, the collection grew modestly through individual donations, as the textiles were organised and classified.

From the beginning, the museum sought a permanent location, which was seen as urgent given the horrible conditions the industrial warehouse was in, which affected the textiles. Torrella called for proper facilities with an office,



Images of the museum in the industrial warehouse on Carrer Sant Isidre.



library, archive, storeroom and other spaces, and proposed the building that was to be home to the Industrial Institute, even though it wasn't the most appropriate for exhibitions. Another option was the Charterhouse castle, although it was too out of the way. The third space they considered, although it was a more ambitious project, was to build a new construction on land near the Engineering schools and the Institute of Textile Research.

From private to municipal museum

In **1953**, the museum was set up as a **trusteeship of Museo Textil Biosca** and the collection was finally moved to the **Industrial Institute of Terrassa**, in the former Pasqual Sala storehouse at Carrer Sant Pau 6, with the corporation of the city's textile businesspeople in charge. In early January **1956**, the new exhibition space opened to the public in the mornings, by appointment and free of charge. Three years later, in **1959**, the industrialists decided to gift the museum to the city, on the condition that the city council would cover the expenses and the Industrial Institute would play an active role in managing it. So, in September **1960**, a new board of trustees was set up, chaired by the mayor of Terrassa, with members from the Industrial Institute and other organisations. At this time, the name was changed to **Museo Municipal Textil Biosca**, although it remained in the same provisional location.



The museum at the Industrial Institute of Terrassa.

After the city took over the museum, it was further consolidated through the acquisition of the **Josep Moragas Pomar** clothing collection in January **1964**. There were 78 pieces in total. In addition to clothing and accessories (dresses, bodices, skirts, bibs, cloaks, justacorps, pouches, etc.), it also included a magnificent collection of ornamental horse blankets, holsters and cartridge belts. Apart from a few pieces of religious apparel in the Biosca collection, it was the first time the museum had acquired clothing.

Later in **1964**, **Lluís Garcia Capafons**, a great friend of Moragas, gave the museum his collection of old Spanish passementerie, which had 860 pieces spanning the 16th to 19th centuries. Two years later, he donated four corselets (18th-century bodices) and two vests from the old Moragas collection. Years later, this passementerie, along with the Viñas collection acquired later, would become the most important collection in the country.

As the museum acquired more pieces, the lack of space became a bigger issue and external funding, essential. Both Biosca and Terrassa Mayor Josep Clapés Targarona insisted the Barcelona Provincial Council get involved. That institution had acquired the **Ricard Viñas Geis** collection in **1957**, which was in Barcelona awaiting a permanent location. Finally, the **plenary session of the Provincial Council approved the creation of a provincial textile museum on 27 November 1957** and considered the Museo Textil Biosca and the city of Terrassa had all the right conditions to house it.



Works on the new building besides Parc Vallparadís.



Museo Provincial Textil

It wasn't until **1963**, though, under Provincial President Joaquim Buxó, Marquis of Castellflorida, that the provincial museum became a reality, with another name change: **Museo Provincial Textil**. Barcelona contributed the **Ricard Viñas** collection of old textiles, over 2,700 pieces and the library that went with it, committed to constructing a new building and maintaining the services; and the Terrassa City Council provided the land, next to Vallparadís park, and the collections it had amassed to that point. By joining these collections, the museum became one of the most important textile museums in Europe. To manage it, a **new board** was set up with 18 trustees: the president of the Barcelona Provincial Council, mayor of Terrassa, two provincial council members, one city council member and the director of the museum, plus eight additional representatives of the Barcelona and Terrassa chambers of commerce, the Industrial Institute, Col·legi d'Art Major de la Seda, Caixa d'Estalvis de Terrassa, Gremi de Fabricants de Sabadell, Industria Textil Algodonera and Mutualidad Laboral Textil; plus collectors Manuel Rocamora and Lluís Garcia Capafons and photographer Carlos Duran Torrens, on a personal basis. In **1964**, the architectural project was completed, by Barcelona Provincial Council architect Camil Pallàs Arisa. Work on the new building broke ground in **1965** and finished in **1969**. The new museum was inaugurated on **14 April 1970**.



Exhibition halls in the new museum on Carrer Salmeron.

The building was designed to be one of the most modern museum spaces of its day, with rooms for temporary and permanent exhibitions (clothing, textiles, religious apparel, accessories, in chronological order and by theme, type, origin and fibre), conservation spaces, storerooms, workshop, library, archive, machine and fibre room, and conference spaces. In fact, the museum had hosted several activities since 1956, including one entitled “*Exposició de obras seleccionadas de Arte Textil procedentes de las colecciones de los museos de Cataluña*” (Exhibition of selected works of Textile Art from museum collections in Catalonia), at Casa Soler i Palet in Terrassa, and an exhibition of a selection of textiles from Galerías Biosca, in Madrid. But now the new museum, strategically located next to Vallparadís park, had a space for temporary exhibitions on the ground floor, where it displayed paintings, sculpture, photography and other pieces, as well as tapestries from Escola Catalana de Tapís. The permanent collections, meanwhile, were exhibited in the halls on the upper floors. This way, in the 1970s and 1980s, the museum was the city’s cultural centre.

The textile assets grew considerably over the years, with interesting donations, acquisitions and legacies from specialised collectors like **Manuel Rocamora**, **Antoni Suqué**, **Lluís Tolosa** and **Carmen Tórtola Valencia**. Individual donations were mostly from family trousseaux. At the same time, ties to the textile industry and proximity to the Engineering schools also brought in donations of interesting books and notes on textile history, theory and practice, steadily expanding the museum library and archive with samples from the country’s textile industries.

In terms of apparel, the first haute couture garments came from Maria Teresa Salisachs, who donated an evening gown by Elio Berhanyer, and her sister-in-law Maria Luisa Lacambra, with two Christian Dior dresses, in 1973. Thanks to Cecília Cortinas de Malvehy, a Balenciaga three-piece evening gown was added to the collection in 1974. Among others, Soledad Corbera, of Terrassa, donated several dresses by Pedro Rodríguez. In recent years, dresses from Terrassa-based designers have been added to the collection, and a lot of effort has gone into the collection of Modernisme garments.



Halls with clothing from the Tolosa collection.



The Museu Tèxtil, an international benchmark

After 40 years as director of the museum, Francesc Torrella retired in 1987 and Eulàlia Morral Romeu took over, who in turn retired in 2016, bringing in a new perspective on museology and museography, adapting to new trends in Europe, and the drive to promote the museum as a centre for documentation and services. Without forgetting the preservation of heritage (acquisitions, documentation, conservation and dissemination), a new museum policy was promoted, focusing on services mainly for the textile/fashion industry. So, work began to **remodel** the building, which finished in 2002, with a new programme of temporary exhibits instead of the permanent ones, publications, conservation, library, workshops/classrooms and specialised training, and storerooms for each sort of collection.

Storerooms for accessories, fabrics, swatchbooks and garments.



From that time, there was a leap in quality at the museum, remodelling the exhibition halls, creating customised storerooms for different sorts of pieces with proper conditions, adding staff to start providing documentation, photography and conservation services off site, expanding the specialised training offered and starting the first online database in the country, **Imatex**, which today has over **31,000 documents** and more than **100,000 photos** and now totally updated design.



Exhibitions: The Modernist-style herbarium and *La llana, el teixit intel·ligent* (Wool, the smart fabric).



In recent years, work has turned to documenting the collection (the museum currently has **over 130,000 pieces**), expanding the database, creating the online library catalogue linked to the Consortium of University Libraries of Catalonia (Consortori d'Universitats i Biblioteques de Catalunya), and adding the collection dating from the 14th to early 20th centuries to the Digital Memory of Catalonia (Memòria Digital de Catalunya). At the same time, temporary exhibitions have helped develop programmes of activities for schools, the general public and specialised audiences, consolidating an increasingly loyal following.

The Centre de Documentació Museu Tèxtil has been a **consortium** since **1995**, presided by the Terrassa City Council with the Barcelona Provincial Council. The museum is known for its long history, especially in research, conservation, documentation and dissemination of textile heritage associated with the collections it houses, their history and culture, promoting the transfer of knowledge and offering quality specialised services. As a public centre, it promotes social and educational use, and the intellectual enjoyment of all citizens. It makes the knowledge and expertise derived from its collection and research into textile culture available to the public and encourages the creation of art and design.



Works by Assumpció Espada and Anne Moreno at Espai Zero, featuring contemporary textile artists.

The Museu Tèxtil is a public benchmark in the country’s textile culture and cutting-edge research, conservation, documentation, contributing through its collections, valorising them and using them to develop the country’s history. It is responsible for increasing the museum assets, sharing them in a way that is both scientific and fun, and preserving them for future generations. The museum aims to contribute to sustainable development, with a social responsibility programme that looks out for the most vulnerable groups, while working for the environment and sustainability. The Museu Tèxtil aims to contribute, through its programmes, knowledge, intellectual wealth and emotional enjoyment, getting all visitors involved with a permanently dynamic approach. It hopes to encourage debate and reflection on the past and future,

Beginning of the Modernist Fair Terrassa fashion show.





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with growing citizen participation. It aspires to collaborate with other institutions, companies and people working towards similar goals, whether in the private or public sector, seeking out external alliances for public/private co-production. The Museu Tèxtil works with other textile museums in the country and provides its services and expertise to other public and private textile and clothing collections.

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, part of the museum's efforts have focused on growing its virtual visitors through social media and we are now working to put the exhibitions online, taking 3D photos of the garments and accessories, which will also be online, and creating an updated look for the Imatex database of images, which will be launched in May.

One of the biggest projects to celebrate our 75th anniversary is an **exhibition** of the museum's star pieces (textiles, apparel, accessories, swatches) that will be inaugurated this autumn, with a **catalogue of the museum's collections**.

We hope to enjoy this celebration with everyone who gives meaning to Museu Tèxtil. So, we encourage you to take part in the activities and proposals the museum is offering throughout this anniversary year. ●

75 ANYS **MUSEU TÈXTIL**
TERRASSA