

Promoting artificial silk: Fashion design competitions organized by the Goldberger Textile Factory between 1929 and 1931

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Abstract:

From the 2nd half of the 19th century, Hungarian fashion was connected to Paris through the haute couture system. The tailors of Pest were used to buying and importing models of the Parisian fashion houses, so they were not trained as designers. In 1929, the successful Goldberger textile factory organized fashion design competitions in order to promote their new product, the "Parisette" artificial silk. This was a marketing campaign but also the first possibility to design dresses in Hungary.

Contents:

Hungarian Fashion / Parisian Haute Couture / Technical developments / Hungarian tailors after WWI / The Goldberger Textile Factory / Artificial silk production / Fashion design competition in 1929 / First steps towards Hungarian fashion design

Hungarian fashion

Fashion comes from Paris, every Hungarian female dressmaker and the fashionable customers thought that too in the last centuries. Otherwise, the national costume was the only type of dress to be designed in Hungary. 100 years prior to the first Goldberger competition the renewal of the Hungarian national costume began. The men's dress was designed by the tailors of Pest in the style of the 17th century (figure 1), and the dress of both sexes was made from fabrics produced in Hungary, for example by the Valero silk factory. Women often wore red-white-green coloured dresses even if they followed the international trend of the 1830s or 1840's or the traditional Hungarian costume. After the revolution, until 1859 it was forbidden to wear the national costume, but the fashion of the Hungarian style dress continued in the 1860's with the use of elements and motifs of folk costumes. These decades were affected by the politics, and the Hungarian motifs on the clothes were protests for the rights of the country.



Figure 1: Traditional Hungarian noblewear (men), Budapest History Museum - Kiscell Museum, photo: Judit Fáy Szalatnyay

The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was established in 1867 by the coronation of Franz Joseph and Elisabeth. This time was a period of development for Hungary: Buda, Óbuda and Pest were united in 1873, and in the next 3 decades a modern metropolis was born. Parisian Haute Couture dominated the 2nd part of the 19th century, and Hungary chose to follow international trends instead of wearing "old fashioned" Hungarian style costumes.

Parisian Haute Couture

The leaders of the big fashion houses of Pest (this side of the capital was the centre of business) began to travel to Paris every season. First, they only bought fabrics and saw the fashion on the streets, but around the turn of the 20th century they already got in close connection to the big Parisian houses. The artists of the art nouveau movement designed many types of objects, including dresses. In Hungary Mariska Undi was the only one who is known for this. In addition to Paul Poiret, the motifs of Hungarian folk art influenced her, but she didn't have any followers.

The Tulip Movement was established by aristocrats and politicians in 1906 to promote products of the Hungarian industry, even fabrics. For political reasons they wanted to support the opposition, the party against Vienna. The capital of the Monarchy was the leader in fashion as well, women of the aristocracy mostly ordered their dresses there. After WW I, this era ended and Hungary became much smaller, but independent. As seen before, because of the strong French fashion industry and its successful and well-organized spreading method it was not common to design female fashion outside of Paris. In Hungary it only happened for political reasons and therefore used national elements, whether folk or noble.

Technical developments

The 20th century brought a lot of novelties and technical developments. Electricity helped to cut and sew dresses quicker, so the fashion industry turned towards mass production, especially in the United States of America. Marketing and advertising became important, because cheap dresses were sold in big department stores for the broad middle class. This was the opposite of the Parisian art of fashion design and the French handicraft it was based on, the customers of which were members of the European elite. But mass production became more and more profitable with the fashion of simpler dresses. After WWI, the research in the textile industry turned towards the development of cheap fabrics.

Hungarian tailors after WWI

The fashion tailors of Budapest established the National Association of Women Dressmakers in 1918, which soon became a successful business federation. Every tailor master also had to be a member of the obligatory Industry Guild, which was established in 1903. Hungary became much smaller, but most of the dressmakers worked in the capital, so their number remained the same, while they lost many customers. This, and the lack of investments were the reasons that the mass producing fashion industry didn't start to develop in the country. There were famous and big fashion firms in the inner city, but there were dressmakers working illegally in the homes of customers for small amounts as well, so every level of society could find a tailor with matching price level. This began to change after 1926, when Corvin, a modernistic department store opened its doors and sold ladies' wear as well.

Without Vienna, the tailors felt closer to Paris than ever before, but the economy was weak in the 1920's. The biggest problem of the fashion industry was the lack of currency that would have been necessary to buy the newest fashions and fabrics abroad, as there was no silk

production and very little production of other textiles in Hungary. Despite this, they travelled to Paris as often as possible, and they continued to buy original patterns, models, fashion drawings and fabrics as they did in the past century. They were tailors, not designers, they were not even taught how to draw sketches or design. The National Association of Women's Dressmakers held fashion shows for those members who were not able to reach Paris season by season, and from 1926 on they also organized discounted tours to Paris for them. There was an agreement between the Hungarian Association and the Chambre Syndicale. One visit was allowed for a group of around 25 tailors each season, without the otherwise obligatory buying of original patterns.

The Goldberger Textile Factory

The Goldberger Textile Factory was established in 1784. Leo Goldberger, a descendant of the founder, was manager of the family-run textile mill between the two World Wars. He was a talented businessman who always tried to search for new ways to widen the product supply and to maximize profit. He bought a German patent called "Bemberg" for producing artificial silk from cotton. As patterned fabrics, especially with flowers, called "imprimé" were very fashionable, he also printed fabrics.

It was a long procedure to make the rolls used for the different colours in pattern printing. He found out that another patent, called "roll-photo" of Alexander Tausz, a typographer, which was originally used for press, could also be used for applying the pattern on the surface of the roll used for textile printing. He bought it immediately for a small fortune. Because of this, the production of a new printing roll was shortened to 8 hours, and that made him competitive even abroad.

Artificial silk production

Leo Goldberger was finished with the development of the new method. In 1929 he was able to produce cheap and fashionable patterned artificial silk under the name "Parisetette". He also employed textile designers to draw patterns for the factory. The Kiscell Museum owns some sample books of the factory, one of them is full with hand painted patterns (figure 2). Next to the patterns we can read the material types and their suppliers, among them we find firms from many countries: France, Austria or Germany, England, etc.

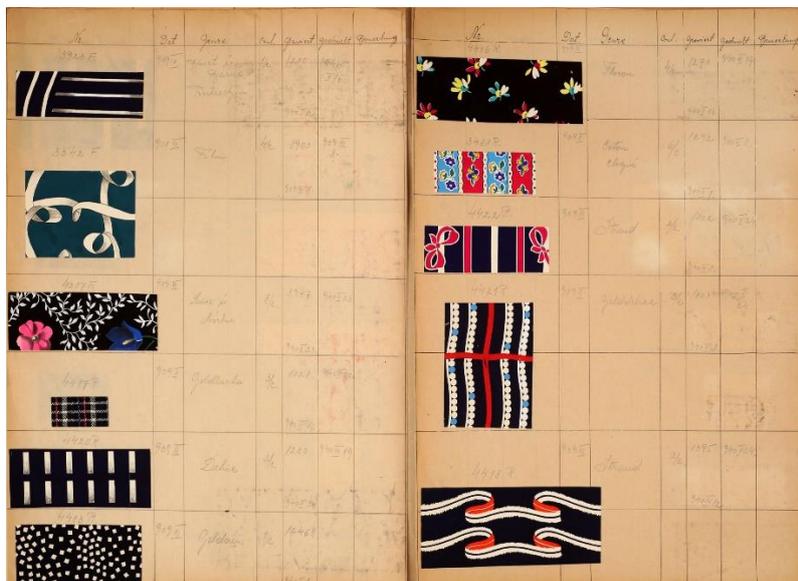


Figure 2: Pattern Book of the Goldberger Textile Factory, Budapest History Museum - Kiscell Museum

They sold patterned textiles exclusively to famous Hungarian textile shops, like Brammer, Szűcs and Márkus, Binét and Barna, Katz and Pfeffer, or Gyula Szénássy. Later, the factory used lot of trademark names for the different types of textiles, derived from their own name, like Goldani, Goldmatt, Goldsol, Golddelice.

Fashion design competition in 1929

The firm wanted to promote their new product, and found an interesting way to do this: competitions. They invited entries for writing slogans and designing posters, but the most exciting competition was designing dresses from Parisette silk. The advertisement appeared in the popular Theatre Life magazine, and the National Association of Women Dressmakers helped with the professional organization. Application to the competition was unrestricted. There were textile shops where the applicants could choose fabrics after paying a small amount of application fee and photographer's studios where the dress could be photographed at no expense. This picture had to be sent to the organizing committee. Not only the designers, but also the beautiful young girls used as models could win an award of the same amount.

The whole country was interested. The famous tailors, leaders of the National Association of Women Dressmakers, were in the jury. Among the applicants were amateurs and professionals, but also less known tailors, who considered this a good marketing opportunity. Over 500 participants passed the preliminary stage, which was followed by the final in the Redout, an elegant historical building in Budapest. Many articles reported on it, first of all the fashion column of Theatre Life (figure 4). The competitions were repeated in the next 2 years, with participation of the Corvin warehouse. This shows very well that artificial silk was used mostly by the middle class who couldn't or didn't want to afford made-to-measure clothes.



Figure 3: Vera Spieler, the winner of the competition, Theatre Life Magazine 1929

First steps towards Hungarian fashion design

The success of the competition was based on several factors. In my opinion, the most important factor was that the artificial silk of the Goldberger factory and 'home-made' fashion design matched each other. The elite of the society knew the names and ordered the designs of famous Parisian fashion houses, like Lanvin, Patou, Vionnet, Jenny etc., imported by the biggest fashion tailor firms of Budapest through the haute couture system. They bought real silk of course, possibly originals from Paris, too. The cheap artificial silk was an option for the less wealthy part of the society, who couldn't afford Parisian designs anyway. As fashion design wasn't taught and pursued in Hungary, and 'elegant fashion' meant 'Parisian', home-designed clothes couldn't be appealing for wealthy women. But the big number of the participants showed that many felt the talent for fashion design, and there was a need for it.

Although Parisette silk was a really nice and fashionable product, it had some weaknesses: it was puckery and very shiny. Therefore a professional eye could distinguish it from real silk, which the factory tried to correct continually. A dress from the Textile collection of the Kiscell Museum from the middle of the 1930s proves this quality problem (figure 5).



Figure 4: Burgundy artificial silk dress, Budapest History Museum - Kiscell Museum, photo: Judit Fáy Szalatnyay



Figure 5: "Resista" advertisement, Theatre Life Magazine 1935

In 1935 they succeeded to develop Resista, an artificial silk that was non-crushable anymore. The material became thicker and it was not as smooth, but the need for constant ironing ended.



Figure 6: White-blue-rose-gold evening dress, Budapest History Museum - Kiscell Museum, photo: Judit Fáy Szalatnyay

Before WWII these were the first and only examples of design that didn't follow a national or Hungarian style, and wasn't influenced by politics or aristocrats for an 'important national cause', such as protecting the Hungarian industry. It was a very modern advertising method by a successful businessman, who felt the spirit of the era. In 1933 a new competition was organized by a politician, Ferenc Ferenczy, and the Hungarian Dressing Movement begun. Folk motifs were used as inspiration for female dresses. Without the talented costume designer Klára Tüdős (figure 7) this movement would have been rather about politics, but she really reached world standard.



Figure 7: Afternoon dress by Clara Tüdős, Budapest History Museum - Kiscell Museum, photo: Judit Fáy Szalatnyay

The Movement reached its peak in 1938 with the Eucharistic Congress held in Budapest. Later, political influence became stronger, but designers like Terez Nagyajtay or Ilonka Farnadi appeared beside Tüdős. The Goldberger factory was very successful until WWII and they had many commercial connections abroad. The Budapest History Museum (Kiscell Museum) has an 'inspiration book' from 1939-40 with fabric samples from the biggest

Parisian houses: Chanel, Schiaparelli, Balenciaga, Vionnet (figure 8). The target of Leo Goldberger was high fashion, for sure.



Figure 8: Sample Book with textiles of the Parisian fashion houses used as inspiration in the Goldberger Textile Factory, Budapest History Museum - Kiscell Museum

References

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