

## ligfädlet – Fabrikanten & Manipulanten

Exhibition in the St.Gallen Textile Museum

(from 29 April 2017)

**On 29 April 2017, the St.Gallen Textile Museum inaugurated the exhibition entitled *Fabrikanten & Manipulanten*, which is devoted to the history of Eastern Switzerland's textile industry and its protagonists. The show is part of *ügfädlet – Ostschweizer Textilgeschichte*, a project run jointly by eight museums in the region.**

For English-speaking people, part of the title of the exhibition may strike a chord. Not the first word, which is local dialect and means as much as “threaded” (as in needle), but the second and third words: *Fabrikanten* will easily be decoded as “manufacturers”, which makes sense, and *Manipulanten* as “manipulators” – but then who would manipulate what in the textile industry, and quite officially into the bargain? The question is soon answered, for the term – which actually even sounds curious in modern German – used to denote the contractors, without whom the other protagonists of the exhibition, namely the workers, designers, inventors and entrepreneurs, would have found it difficult to operate at all. These protagonists' eventful and often also difficult history is illustrated by embroideries and fabrics from the 16th century to the present day, complemented by machines, photographs, archive materials and media. A gallery of clothes from the Biedermeier epoch until the present day concludes the exhibition.

“The embroideries – and the famous ‘St.Gallen lace’ in particular – still look incredibly luxurious even now,” thinks Michaela Reichel, Director of the St.Gallen Textile Museum. It is too easy to forget what quantities of textiles have been produced here and exported since the Middle Ages in a way that has always been highly professional and characterised by a division of labour. The success of the Eastern Swiss textile industry is due to the smooth interaction between the people involved in its production.

Each group played a precisely defined role in textile production: the entrepreneurs made available the means of production, made decisions concerning strategic direction and were responsible for the marketing and sales of textiles. Designers and their designs made a crucial contribution to the competitiveness and the commercial success of the products, which had to hold their ground in the fast-paced and capricious fashion market. The ingenuity and innovative power of craftsmen, inventors and engineers, who continually developed new machinery, paved the way for the mechanical production of elegant embroideries. Ultimately, however, it was the hosts of nameless workers in the factories or at home who produced the highly sought-after St.Gallen embroideries in bulk.

In the course of the centuries, the industry was repeatedly confronted with challenges in the form of social and political upheavals, economic downturns or international conflicts. In the long run, only those companies which managed to survive who developed appropriate reactions to market requirements and suitable strategies for crisis management. The relationships between the groupings involved in the production process were not always without conflict. Cooperation was subject to societal change and was characterised by inequality and dependences for a long time. Sales crises hit the workers, particularly those working at home, far more severely than affluent entrepreneurs. Despite all this, the system that had been established in the course of the centuries, as well as its traditions, safeguarded the success of Eastern Switzerland's textile industry until the global mechanisms of the 20th and 21st centuries began to bite here, too.

“Please touch” is actually an encouragement in this exhibition staged by the Textile Museum: “We consider it important that visitors are not merely provided with facts but are also encouraged to sample sensual experiences and to get a feel for the quality of the textiles,” says Annina Weber, the cultural mediator at the Textile Museum. This means that they are allowed to examine swatches and embroidery samples to their heart's content. Weber knows

from experience that these “tangible” hands-on objects are particularly popular among children and young people. But adults, too, find them hard to resist.

The *Fabrikanten & Manipulanten* exhibition is part of *iigfädlet – Ostschweizer Textilgeschichte*, a project run jointly by eight museums in the region of Eastern Switzerland. Whereas the other exhibitions that constitute the project will close in autumn 2017, *Fabrikanten & Manipulanten* will continue to be open to the public in the Textile Museum thereafter. The exhibition was conceptualised by Ursula Karbacher and Michaela Reichel.

### **iigfädlet – Fabrikanten & Manipulanten**

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Concept: Michaela Reichel, Ursula Karbacher

Scenography: Bernhard Duss, Andrea Vogel

Graphics: Büro Sequenz

### **Catalogue**

To accompany the project, a catalogue entitled *iigfädlet* was published, which contains information about all eight exhibitions and is available from the Appenzeller Verlag publishing house.

### **Events**

*Fabrikanten & Manipulanten*, as well as the other exhibitions of *iigfädlet*, are complemented by lectures, guided tours, workshops, readings and other events. The programme is available online through the following links:

[www.textilmuseum.ch/category/veranstaltungen/](http://www.textilmuseum.ch/category/veranstaltungen/)

[www.iigfaedlet.ch/home/#veranstaltungen](http://www.iigfaedlet.ch/home/#veranstaltungen)

### **Press contacts**

Image materials about the *Fabrikanten & Manipulanten* can be found in the Press section of our [www.textilmuseum.ch/presse/](http://www.textilmuseum.ch/presse/). For any questions please contact

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Information about the *iigfädlet* project and the participating museums is available from:

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