

Lace and Status

The collection of historical lace in the Textilmuseum St. Gallen

An exhibition in the Textilmuseum St. Gallen, 26 October 2018 – 10 February 2019

The exhibition Lace and Status is devoted to historical lace from the period 1500 to 1800. These exquisite textiles, for many centuries reserved purely for the top classes of society such as the aristocracy and the clergy, originally came into the ownership of the Textilmuseum as models for the booming East Swiss textile industry. Today the museum can boast a lace collection of international standing. The exhibition will be on display from 26 October 2018 to and including 10 February 2019.

Lace is fascinating: filigree works of art, elaborately fashioned out of the finest threads. Already in the mid-sixteenth century the fashion for lace gripped the whole of Europe, where, in the coming epochs, it would embellish the magnificent robes of secular and ecclesiastical rulers. A whiff of luxury has never ceased even now to cling to these alluring openwork fabrics. This is demonstrated in the sensational creations of the couturiers, who celebrate their ingenuity in fashion by playing on the delicate transparency and/or opacity of the material.

The exhibition "Lace and Status" focuses on the fashion in lace as worn at the courts of Spain and France, which in their time called the tune in politics, culture and fashion in Europe. The show includes more than 160 historical textiles from different epochs and styles, which illustrate the development of lace from its beginnings in the sixteenth until the end of the eighteenth century and place them in the context of contemporary trends in fashion. Among the exhibits are the rarely shown seventeenth-century chasuble and a resplendent cover originally owned by the Spanish court.

The Textilmuseum St. Gallen owes its exquisite lace collection to the flourishing East Swiss textile industry, which in the late nineteenth century exported its embroidery across the world. The famous "St Gallen lace" was fashioned imitating types of historical lace that had been specifically collected by manufacturers in order to imitate them on the machine. These and other types of historical lace are now kept in the Textilmuseum St. Gallen, which with its inventory of more than 5000 lace items has at its disposal a collection of international standing.

From high end to mass production

The complex manufacture of lace lay for centuries in the hands of women, who practised their skills as a cottage industry in various techniques including sewing, bobbin lace-making, crocheting and macramé. Important centres of lace production were located in Italy, France and the Netherlands, whence the costly wares were traded throughout Europe. For a long time the wearing of lace was reserved for the élite – the aristocracy and the clergy, which gave rise to its high price as well as the dress codes, which regulated fashion and not only at court. This first changed in the eighteenth century with the French Revolution and increasing industrialisation, which gave impetus to momentous political, social and economic upheavals throughout Europe. The change from manual to mechanised processing turned the rare luxury commodity of lace into an affordable mass product.

Accompanying the exhibition “Lace and Status” there will be museum talks, guided tours and workshops and also an educational programme for schools organised by the museum. Furthermore, Arnoldsche Art Publishers will be bringing out the illustrated volume “Historische Spitzen. Die Leopold-Iklé-Sammlung im Textilmuseum St. Gallen” (Historical Laces. The Leopold Iklé Collection in the Textilmuseum St. Gallen). The publication will be on sale as of mid-October in the Textilmuseum St. Gallen either from the publishers or in retail outlets, priced CHF 78/ EUR 58. During the exhibition it can be purchased in the Textilmuseum shop for a special price of CHF 48.

Exhibition Curator: Barbara Karl

Scenography + Graphics: meierkolb Luzern

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26 October 2018 – 10 February 2019

Opening: 25 October 2018, 6.30 pm

Textilmuseum St. Gallen, Vadianstrasse 2, CH-9000 St. Gallen

Open daily from 10 am – 5 pm

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Press Images

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Shoulder cape or fontange, Italy, c. 1700 / Exhibition “Lace and Status”, Textilmuseum St. Gallen.
Photo: Michael Rast, 2018



Barbes, Brussels, c. 1720, on silk fabric, France, 1720–30 / Exhibition “Lace and Status”, Textilmuseum St. Gallen.
Photo: Michael Rast, 2018



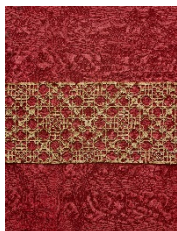
Antependium, France, Italy, Spain or Flanders, 1695–1710 / Exhibition “Lace and Status”, Textilmuseum St. Gallen.
Photo: Michael Rast, 2018



Cap decoration or fontange, Brussels or Alençon, c. 1735 / Exhibition “Lace and Status”, Textilmuseum St. Gallen.
Photo: Michael Rast, 2018



Collar, Italy, 1690–1715, remounted in 19th C. / Exhibition “Lace and Status”, Textilmuseum St. Gallen.
Photo: Michael Rast, 2018



Insert, Italy, 1580–1620, on silk fabric, Italy, 2nd half 16th C. / Exhibition “Lace and Status”, Textilmuseum St. Gallen.
Photo: Michael Rast, 2018



Tie end, France or Venice, c. 1690 / Exhibition “Lace and Status”, Textilmuseum St. Gallen.
Photo: Michael Rast, 2018



Altar cloth, probably England, first quarter 17th C. / Exhibition "Lace and Status", Textilmuseum St. Gallen.
Photo: Michael Rast, 2018



Border, Orne (France), first quarter 18th C. / Exhibition "Lace and Status", Textilmuseum St. Gallen.
Photo: Michael Rast, 2018



Engageantes, Alençon or Argentan, c. 1730, on silk fabric, France, 1700–20 / Exhibition "Lace and Status", Textilmuseum St. Gallen.
Photo: Michael Rast, 2018



Border, Northern Europe, 1580–1620 / Exhibition "Lace and Status", Ausstellung Textilmuseum St. Gallen.
Photo: Michael Rast, 2018