

The Unusual Print Fabric's Elegance During the Fifties.

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Since Margherita Rosina took on the management of the MuST (Museo Studio del Tessuto della Fondazione Antonio Ratti), the museum's regard towards historical research focused on the modes of production of silk in the Como (Italy) area. As a matter of fact, after the interesting and well-documented retrospectives dedicated to Carla Badioli ("*Carla Badioli - Designing Textiles*", *Textere News & Info*, October 2007) and Guido Ravasi, this year in Villa Grumello (Como) has been unveiled the beautiful exhibition dedicated to "Filande e Tessitura Costa." A very important Italian silk manufacturer of the fifties in which the exhibition displays the textile designs created by Andrée Brossin de Méré.

Margherita Rosina and Francina Chiara, together with the "Archivio di Stato di Como" (Como's Information Centre) and the Insubria University, managed to classify, thanks to a deep and lengthy research, all the researched material. They succeeded to put in order: the accounting and the correspondence; over a thousand of the compositions recorded and grouped together according to consistent themes; the samples; the drawings and the news item. Whilst the transparencies and the text sheets are still due to be classified yet.

The great success of Filande e Tessitura Costa for their spinning and weaving factories arose in the fifties, at the time of the Italian high fashion birth. This achievement has been due to their collaboration with the Swiss creator Andrée Brossin de Méré, a peculiar professional who managed to be, at the same time, a fashion designer and a skillful manager. The ten-year working relationship between the creator and the firm helped to promote the Filande e Tessitura Costa production and to introduce it to the Haute Couture's foreign markets.

Andrée Brossin de Méré employed a peculiar working method by working together with some illustrators, who put her ideas into practice and juxtaposed her sketches, achieving



unusual and impressive results. Méré showed her originality with the choice of the subjects: not only the classic flowers, but also architectural elements, fruit and vegetables, chinoiserie, reproductions of porcelain items, chandeliers, glasses, photographic wooden paneling, etcetera... She was very peculiar also in her choice of arranging those subjects with thick and continuous patterns, which left no space for the background, and in the choice of a colouring that was at the same time elegant and dauntless. This distinctive and peculiar style helped Méré to establish herself as a worldwide acknowledged creative artist and achieved international success, possibly to the detriment of that of the firm's.

Open-minded towards the avant-garde, Méré hit it off very well with photographers. She used to commission black and white pictures of subjects of her choice by the most prominent professionals of the time, then, she would cut those images in order to rewrite them in collages according to her inspiration. These collages were juxtaposed and translated into drawings by Méré's co-workers, and then she would choose the colouring. The most eminent among these collaborators was beyond any doubt the abstractionist painter Manlio Rho from Como. In the exhibition it is possible to admire two of his textiles: one composed of various Persian cats' heads brought closer to each other in order to constitute a single hard-

coated fur coat; the other one is composed of mink skins set in a herringbone composition, an idea of the Swiss creator. It may be of a certain interest to remember that, in the very same years, the abstractionist painter Luigi Veronesi was at work. Since the thirties Veronesi worked also as a textile designer and as an experimenter for the off camera techniques. He forged abstract compositions by means of the contact technique, which is done by means of arranging various objects on the photosensitive papers before printing them.

She was drawn to the attention of the international press thanks to Dior, who presented seven Costa textiles printed in seven exclusive colour ways chosen by Méré in the S/S collection in 1951. Later on the Swiss creative stunned the world by conceiving a set of prints representing vegetable garden products, exclusively designed for Hubert de Givenchy, the rising star of Haute Couture. Méré proposed various patterns of melons, peaches, lemons, berries, peppers and peas, all with an explosion of sunny colors. It may be worthwhile to recall the funny lemons



with the spiral cut peel arranged in diagonal lines and the remarkable thick waterfall of open green pea pods. And how could we forget the red peppers carpet spaced out by their price tags?

Scrolls, jade sculptures, Japanese prints and architectonical ruins a la French Arcadia open up the space for one of the most unusual subjects in the textile design: the huge Murano or Baccarat crystal chandeliers portrayed almost at their natural size (S/S 1954). The research also managed to recover and classify the photographic preparatory collages, the textiles and an article from the fashion magazine "Novità" which illustrates two Givenchy dresses: a pink and a light blue one.

Another set of prints, which has been thereafter imitated by many stylists, is that dedicated to the Bijoux (1955). Here are mixed together different elements such as jewellery, gem stones, strings of pearls, perfect flowers, big chains, hats and golden jersey skeleton of corals. Sets of fruit baskets, framed in an oval garland and with the colours of the gem stones inlaid, set against a black background, reminds one of certain previous prints of Versace, whilst the brushstroke big roses and

their long stalks reminds one of the subsequent works of Ken Scott. Between a flower and a bouquet, Méré managed to go beyond any expectations drawing her inspiration from the page of cookbooks dedicated to the art of introducing the food. In the S/S 1959 she submitted: themes of fruits and jellies; triumphs of lobsters and sea elements; a semi abstract design of several layers of chips all over it!

After this magical decade, the "Filande e Tessitura Costa" chose not to renew the collaboration with the Swiss creator and their productions gradually lost their originality and changed to plain and self-colored textiles. It was the end for a unique and unusually creative period.



Museo Studio del Tessuto/MuST
www.fondazioneratti.org

Catalogue:
L'età dell'eleganza. Le Filande e Tessitura Costa nella Como degli anni Cinquanta.
 A cura di Margherita Rosina e Francina Chiara
 Nodo libri, Como, 2010-07-05
www.nodolibri.it