

The Project *Archivi della moda del '900* (*Fashion Archives of the 20th-Century-*) *by Alessandra Vesco*

The national project *Archivi della Moda del '900* was officially presented to journalists, professionals and experts in the field on January 12, 2009 in the Sala Bianca of the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. This three-year project has been promoted by the Italian National Archival Association (Anai), in cooperation with the General Archival Management, the General Management for bibliographic heritage, cultural institutions and copyright. The initiative's aim is to begin the recovery and promotion of archives and sources linked to fashion history, a distinct class of records that bears witness to Italy's worldwide leadership in fashion.

Anai currently acts as the national coordinator since this association has always been active in communication, training and promotion on behalf of the archival patrimony. The main goal of the project is to create a user-friendly portal to access the varied sources concerning fashion—archival, bibliographical, iconographical and audiovisual, preserved in diverse organizations and institutions: companies, training schools and academies, private foundations, agencies and field journals. Up to now, these sources have not yet been systematically explored.

Indeed, fashion archives are private resources frequently at risk of loss or oblivion. Therefore, this project makes it possible to safeguard and gain knowledge of this patrimony, whose location and substance is still partially unknown, in response to a need felt by field historians and scholars as well as interested laypersons.

Fashion archives' records range from collections of traditional paper records (administrative, accounting and corporate records), sketches, photographs, films, audiovisual records, samples of material produced such as textile swatches, and original artifacts including clothes, shoes and accessories.

A key factor in the success of this project was the close cooperation among private institutions, professional associations and public institutions in promoting quality training and study activities throughout the entire Italian territory. The pilot cities of the various initiatives were Milan, Florence and Rome, traditionally close to fashion; following this initial phase, several scientific committees, consisting of experts and archivists, were created in various regions such as Piedmont, Campania, Liguria, Sicilia, Emilia Romagna, Veneto, Abruzzi and Puglia.

The work started with a survey of the sources, carried out in collaboration with various Archival Superintendence Offices, thus creating a comprehensive map of the existing archives and sources including paper records, photographs and films, and a historical catalogue of the Italian fashion. At the same time, a portal within the Archival National System (SAN) is being created,

with the idea of putting together all the data collected by the different working groups. This portal will prove useful in spreading knowledge of the archives and the companies working in this field. Following the survey, several conferences were organized to present all the collected and catalogued data. Among the initiatives carried out was the conference organized in Florence in June 2009 *Archivi della Moda del '900: primi risultati del progetto a Firenze e in Toscana*, (20th Century Fashion Archives: First Results of the Project in Florence and Tuscany), held at the beautiful Palazzo Spini Feroni hosted by Maison Salvatore Ferragamo, a synonym of excellence in the synergy between museum and industry. Other conferences included one in Rome: *La memoria della moda e del costume a Roma e nel Lazio* (The Memory of Fashion and Habits in Rome and Lazio) held in February 2010 and *Gli archivi raccontano la moda. Testimonianze immagini suggestioni*, (Telling the Story of Fashion through Archives: Testimonies, Images, Influence) held within the 12th Week of Business Culture organized by the Mibac (Ministry for Cultural Assets and Activities). Moreover, the conferences organized in Vittoria (Ragusa) on Fashion Archives in Sicily (February 2010) and in Penne with the title *Abruzzo: le vie dell'eccellenza. Artigiani e aziende abruzzesi nella storia della moda italiana*, (*Abruzzo: the Ways of Excellence. Regional Manufacturers and Companies in Italian Fashion History*) were extremely successful.

This project was discussed also during the National Conference on Archives, held in Bologna in November 2009, where a full schedule of events included a workshop dedicated to Archives and Fashion.

New initiatives are being planned also in other Italian regions; for example in Como - Lombardy, with the exhibition *L'età dell'eleganza. Le filande e tessiture Costa nella Como degli anni cinquanta* (The Age of Elegance. Costa's Spinning and Weaving Mills in Como in the 1950s) recently opened at Antonio Ratti Foundation; Ischia and Capri - Campania, with a conference entitled *La creatività sartoriale campana. Abbigliamento maschile e moda mare* (Campanian Dressmaking Creativity. Menswear and Beachwear) (September 2010); Biella - Piedmont, with an event to study the wool industry district (October 2010) and finally Milan - Lombardy, where in November 2010 there will be a study day on the theme of publishing and fashion in cooperation with the Mic - Moda Immagine Consumi (Fashion Image and Habits) and the University of Milan. Finally, in 2011, at the conclusion of the project, the survey will be completed and the collected data will be published on the portal and the results will be presented during a final conference.

It is important to reiterate that the project dedicated to Fashion Archives is helping to promote knowledge and to valorize Corporate Memory by highlighting various aspects such as: creativity, manufacturing and production. These have been decisive factors in the growth of an essential Italian entrepreneurial activity, which has grown steadily since WWII up to its current worldwide success. Such an important project is a confirmation of the fundamental role of corporate archives, where the memory of the company is collected and preserved. Archives, in fact, tell the story of the objects, the products and the people in this field.