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Fashion Archives in the Digital Era: the PuntoArt srl Case History

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A first report of the activity at the PuntoArt company inside the project Cultural heritage in Rimini and Romagna: archives for fashion between nineteenth and twentieth century *

A few years after my presentation at this journal of the project *Cultural heritage in Rimini and Romagna: archives for fashion between nineteenth and twentieth century* (Ravara Montebelli, 2012), both in the function of an operational manager and a member of the Scientific Committee, it seems to me that it is necessary to report an important part of this Project carried out at the Punto Art Company.

This Italian company of San Mauro (FC), a luxury embroidery and creative lab, has been the benchmark for a significant experience in re-ordering, inventorying and cataloging a contemporary sample archive, adapting the criteria and good practices used for historical documents.

First, however, to expose the methods and results, we look at the main stages of the Project, conceived by myself and coordinator Daniela Calanca and promoted by the Archivio di Stato di Rimini and the Department for Life Quality Studies (University of Bologna), involving the Confartigianato, Confindustria of Rimini, Archivio di Stato Forlì-

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The Project was presented at the Archivio di Stato di Rimini on September 21, 2012, under the "Settimana della Cultura 2012" with the reports of various scientific leaders and aimed at creating an internet platform, giving voice not only in documents stored in archives or libraries, but also in private archives of companies and business activities in the fashion sector, or in a wider fashion, well attested in the territory of the Rimini.

Given these premises, in February 2013 an international workshop was held in Rimini by Daniela Calanca entitled "Archivi Digitali per la Storia sociale della moda", in which the topic of digitalization of documents was dealt with at various levels.

After these initiatives in March 2013, the owner of the PuntoArt company Paolo Raggini, invited Daniela Calanca and me to a meeting, during which he expressed the need to reorder the sample archive of his company. We have accepted the completely innovative challenge, supported by Angelo Turchini, Ordinario di Archivistica (University of Bologna) and member of the Scientific Committee of the Project and Stefano Vitali, during that time Soprintendente della Soprintendenza Archivistica dell'Emilia Romagna.

At the time of the first inspection, the archive content was very diverse in the types of materials: no. 57 braided books, made up of sheets on which non-sorted, but only identifiable for season, multiple copies and, in some cases, missing sheets extracted at fairs; larger trimming specimens on special clothes hangers, including the code number, as well as sheets or panels bearing technical and processing proposals; clothing; numerous books of figurines and various material made by fashion designers. The methodological approach was that of "classical", that is, the one with which to deal with any reordering or inventory of archives: to safeguard as much as possible the state of preservation of the material, adding where necessary new numbering to the previous, but always leaving traces of Product codes where they are present. There was, however, not always a product code, especially in dresses, created by gathering several elements of the sample (trimmings, techniques or sheets) or a progressive identifying number, for example, of the books and papers contained therein.

In order to proceed more quickly, two groups were formed: one with Daniela Calanca and her university assistant, Gianluigi Di Giangirolamo, for the inventory of the clothing collection and another with me and Samanta Bruschi, graduated in archival computer science that then worked on the thesis, for the inventory of trimmings books and the papers contained therein.

For the first group, the lack of code on the heads has imposed a new number (AM001, or Alma Mater and a progressive number), first on labels, then with sewn labels to avoid being lost, accompanied by a photographic campaign.

For the second group, the lack of a progressive numbering of books has led to the introduction of one, taking into account any copies, as well as the numbering of the individual cards, in order to avoid losing the order after the removal for the fairs.

After the inventory of the leaders, a typology was created for the creation of the digital catalogue, which was subsequently completed by Samanta Bruschi, who I identified while she doing the thesis in archival computer science at the Archivio di Stato di Rimini and she is a precious company resource now.

In the course of the job, Samanta Bruschi was first employed as a trainee and hired, completing the inventory of figurine books, the reorder of numerous copies of books in the stores, the drafting of a database and a digital catalogue.

Given the need to protect and enhance not only the material itself, but also the work done by the group, which in the normal course of the company was at risk of being compromised, I accepted the request of the owners to reorganize and order the sample in the spaces.

I then studied a new logistic organization of the sampling archive in order to propose an appropriate placement in the spaces of the showroom intended, not only for conservation, but also for its enjoyment by the customer or any visitors, specifically intended for warehousing and storage of archival materials, mainly for the use of internal staff. To find the best solutions to these aspects, I have been working with a well-known designer in the Rimini. The ideas emerged were then shared with the owner and made available by the architect in charge of the realization of the current showroom.

This experience has allowed me to offer my advice to other companies with the Company I manage (YourBoost srls) and I am currently starting to begin a digital optimization of the sample archive, already sorted and invented, of a well-known embroidery factory in Forli, within an approved job training program.

The story of a company told through its products: PuntoArt srl

PuntoArt is a creative embroidery laboratory which has worked for over thirty years with the most prestigious italian and international fashion brands. It was 1981 when Franca Pironi, now co-owner with Paolo Raggini, founded the company to give artistic expression to her greatest passion, embroidery. PuntoArt's development has always been accompanied by the combination of craftsmanship and technology applied to the various manufacturing techniques: macramé, crochet and cornely are revisited in a modern and innovative way to integrate needle-punching, laser, thermowelding, bond-in and multiformat sequins, always realized starting from tradition to come up with

new and amazing interpretations, which allowed the company to face new markets such as sportswear and fashion for men, in addition to the historical feminine one. The years between 2000 and 2005 were fundamental for the technical and stylistic development, automation in decorations began and embroidery became the very structure of the garment.

Confronted with the importance of proper management and the opportunities offered by new IT technologies, in 2013 PuntoArt committed itself to organizing its business archive and creating an online catalogue of products, intended as an indispensable source to concretely demonstrate the company's identity.

Prior to the structuring of the catalogue, various work phases were needed, first of all the inventory of the materials present in the showroom and of those found in the warehouses, from embroidered trimmings to accessories, applications, jewellery for textiles, technical proposal panels and finished garments: an inventory number was given and, if not present, a model code that the company still uses for their management.

Taking as an example the garments, all of which belong to the *prêt-à-porter* category, “a type of garment produced in series, industrially, but with a particular care for detail, in a wide range of sizes and patterns” (Donnanno, 2001), along with the labelling, it was necessary to draw up an inventory, complete with photographs, listing the number of items stored for each model. When the inventory was completed, the best preserved or unique sample for each model was placed in showroom and photographed again for the company's database, the other items were moved to a warehouse to optimize their preservation. Subsequently, the inventory continued with «model booklets», folders where the owner and the designers who have come over the years have kept sketches, technical drawing manuals, inspirations and some little samples that were needed not only for the finished garments, but for all the company's products such as embroidered trimmings, ornaments used to embellish the garments and sold by meters, up to the technical panels, which constitute today the company's most important collection. Starting from the preserved garments, to be able to reconstruct their genesis, once found the related documentation it was decided to encode each folder containing it with the model code to which the documents were referring.

To facilitate consultation and linkage between these different types of materials, part of this documentation was scanned and uploaded to the company's server, a task carried out simultaneously with the reorganization of the «book programs», where the company retains the vectorial drawings needed for the creation of each piece.

Considering that the archive is currently in use and in continuous growth, in order to make it easier the research both for corporate users and for visitors and outside researchers, responding so to more commercial and marketing needs, it was important to decide which structure to give the entire archive: the next step was the organization of all the material in a new online catalogue, accessible through direct login from the www.ricamipuntoart.it website.

The multilingual catalogue, managed in admin through the site's content management system, was created with a reduced display, based on four levels:

- administrator: creates and manages the visibility of catalogue pages
- PuntoArt user/company user: navigates through all the cards and views all the documentation uploaded within the catalogue
- advanced user/registered to the site: accesses the PuntoArt catalogue with limited display regarding both quantity of data and documentation
- simple/unregistered user: accesses the catalogue preview, the cards freely visible on the site.

Once logged in, the registered user can then choose to freely navigate between the cards that the company has structured and uses for the purpose of managing, protecting and promoting its products, choosing one of the four typologies proposed, namely *Garments; Technical Panels; Trimmings, Accessories and Applications; Study and Research: Suspended Projects*; or to proceed via filters, indicating the preference of the research for category, technique, material, colour, etc.

When the product of interest is defined, the general structure of the card, freely adapted from *Scheda VeAC – Vestimenti Antichi e Contemporanei* (Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, 2010), includes:

- the main image of the product with watermark
- title or model name
- list of technical data: article code, date, object definition, description, technique, material, decorative pattern, etc.
- the documentation area, such as technical drawings attached in PDF format, which represents the real technical and stylistic company know-how and it's therefore only visible to PuntoArt users
- photo gallery, with detailed images in JPG format
- report area, where the user can preview the pages the administrator decided to link to that of the selected product.

The fields that make up the catalogue record may be common to the four types, free or reserved, based on the level of accessibility, can have multiple values and be managed by the admin through check boxes or free texts.

Of great importance, especially for the study and definition of the garments models, was the consultation of the thesaurus drawn up in parallel with the ministerial paper,

the *Lemmario*: to date, with the catalogue cards, there is even a brief *Glossary* which can be consulted directly on the company website.

For the category *Trimmings, Accessories and Applications*, and for purely commercial purposes, in December 2016 PuntoArt has also put online a new free and standalone multilingual catalogue, structured through an open source e-commerce platform, accessible at www.puntoartdetails.com.

For internal and external collaborators, for designers and fashion companies, it is now possible to consult the catalogue and physically retrieve samples and drawings: the company archive has become an opportunity to give new expression to ideas and inspirations that alternate minimal geometries to more colourful baroque designs, always developing new styles and decorations which often are the result of reinterpreted techniques and graphics that together guarantee the enhancement of Made in Italy decor.

Through the evolution of techniques, graphics, technologies and materials, inventories and catalogues have made possible to reconstruct and share the behind the scenes of an item creating process: the history of each product is frame within that of the collection and the company itself, starting from inspiration and sketching, passing from manual and vectorial drawing, to finally reach the finished garment.

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* Cristina Ravara Montebelli wrote this first part the second part titled “The story of a company told through its products: PuntoArt srl” is written by Samanta Bruschi