

## ROMANIAN FOLKLORE MOTIFS IN FASHION DESIGN

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**Abstract:** *The traditional Romanian costume such as the entire popular art (architecture, woodcarvins, pottery etc.) was born and lasted in our country since ancient times. Closely related to human existence, the traditional costume reflected over the years as reflected nowadays, the mentality and artistic conception of the people. Today the traditional Romanian costume became an inspiration source to the wholesale fashion production industry designers, both Romanian and international.*

*Although the contemporary designers are working in accordance with a vision, using a wide area of styles, methods and current technology, they usually return to traditional techniques and ethnic folklore motifs, which converts and resize them, integrating them in their contemporary space.*

*Adrian Oianu is a very appreciated Romanian designer who launched two collections inspired by his native's country traditional costumes: "Suflecata pan' la brau" ("Turned up 'til the belt") and "Bucurie" ("Joy"). Dorin Negrau had as inspiration for his "Lost" collection the traditional costume from the Bihor region.*

*Yves Saint Laurent had a collection inspired by the Romanian traditional flax blouses called "La blouse roumaine".*

*The paper presents the traditional Romanian values throw fashion collections. The research activity will create innovative concepts to support the garment industry in order to develop their own brand and to bring the design activities in Romania at an international level.*

*The research was conducted during the initial stage of a project, financed through national funds, consisting in a documentary study on ethnographic characteristics of the popular costume from different regions of the country.*

**Key words:** *Fashion, Traditional Romanian costume, inspiration, designers*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The traditional Romanian costume such as the entire popular art (architecture, woodcarvins, pottery etc.) was born and lasted in our country since ancient times. Closely related to human existence, the traditional costume reflected over the years as reflected nowadays, the mentality and artistic conception of the people. [1]

The various pieces of costume have gone out of use at different times during the 20th century. The first item to disappear in many areas was leather peasant sandals (*opinci*), although these could be seen in poorer villages again in the years just after the communist regime fell. In most rural areas men's traditional trousers were replaced by modern factory made trousers by mid century and in the post communism years jeans has become universally common. Traditional over garments became an expensive luxury, new garments only being purchased by people living in the very wealthy villages. More recently the traditional jacket makers in many areas have died with few new artisans being trainer to carry on their craft. [2]

Romanian folklore is the best preserved, most varied and traditional in Europe. The tasteful beauty of the regional costumes can be seen throughout Romania. The costumes reflect ethnic identity and document the historical and artistic values of the Romanian people. [3]

## 2. ROMANIAN FOLKLORE IN FASHION DESIGN

Nowday the traditional Romanian costume became an inspiration source to the wholesale fashion production industry designers, both Romanian and international. [4]

Although the contemporary designers are working in accordance with a vision, using a wide area of styles, methods and current technology, they usually return to traditional techniques and ethnic folklore motifs, which they convert and resize, integrating them in their contemporary space. The analysis of these forms of cultural expression supports the conclusion, according to which the reuse of these decorative motifs can create products with a great effect in contemporary fashion.[1]

### 2.1 Foreign designers

Philippe Guillet, a French fashion designer who has worked under the likes of Karl Lagerfeld and Jean-Paul Gaultier made headlines with his collection “Prejudice” which borrowed heavily from the traditional clothing and symbols associated with eastern-European peasants and also focused on the traditional uniforms of the “Callus” (Calusarii), folk dancers from the south western part of Romania. By titling his collection “Prejudice” (Figure 1), Guillet proclaims that it is possible to affect long-lasting social change through fashion. However, Guillet approached the collection and his investment in the Romanian culture quite seriously. [5]



*Fig. 1: Philippe Guillet- Collection  
Prejudices 100% ro*



*Fig. 2: Anthropologie*

Source: <http://www.cotidianul.ro/o-colectie-de-moda-inspirata-de-artizanatul-romanesc-face-furori-in-presa-straina-164282/> and <http://artboom.info/design/anthropologie-romanian-folk-inspired-collection.html>

American brand Anthropologie (Figure 2) created an entire autumn-winter collection inspired from Maramures, selling in the US, Great Britain and Canada, but also online in over 30 different countries. The photo-shoot for the presentation catalogue was taken in scenery identical to the traditional villages in Maramures, and the clothes manage to transform the traditional pieces into super-fashionable ready-to-wear must-haves. [6]

Yves Saint Laurent had a collection inspired by the Romanian traditional flax blouses called “La blouse roumaine”. Other international designers that included Romanian folk costume elements in their collections were: Tom Ford, Camelia Skikos (Figure 3) and Joseph Altuzzara. [7]



*Fig. 3: Camelia Skikos*

Source: <http://cameliaskikos.com/blog-2/>

## 2.2 Romanian designers

The variety of the traditional clothing pieces and the complexity of the decorative motifs became very fast inspirational sources for fashion designers. The interest for Romanian tradition and craftsmanship is found also in the Romanian designers collections. They created fashion collections having as an inspiration source the traditional Romanian costume.

Adrian Oianu is a very appreciated Romanian designer who launched two collections inspired by his native's country traditional costumes: "Suflecata pan' la brau" ("Turned up 'til the belt") and "Bucurie" ("Joy"). Both collection conquered fashion enthusiasts around the world. [4]

Dorin Negrau had as inspiration for his "Lost" collection the traditional costume from the Bihor region. He was the first Romanian designer who created an entire fashion collection based on Romanian folklore motifs. The main element of the collection was the Traditional Romanian costume that was made by his grandmother fifty years ago.

Andra Clitan believes that the national costumes are "a living document which lasted for centuries, sending to the new generation the message of authentic and artistic creations". She created a collection of 25 outfits which represents modern reinterpretations of the Traditional costumes from Trasylvania area, intitled "Mara Mi" (Figure 4).

Ingrid Vlaslov, the Romanian designer present repeatedly at Paris Fashion Week, wowed the audience with the spring-summer 2011 collection "I feel love.." (Figure 5). The collection represents a bridge between past and present, traditional and modern, a concept dedicated by the designer to the great master Constantin Brancusi. The main inspirational source was Romanian traditional art.

Other designers influenced by the Romanian folk costume were Valentina Vidrascu and Corina Vladescu. [1]



Fig. 4: Andra Clitan – "Mara Mi"

Fig. 5: Ingrid Vlaslov - "I feel love"

Source: <http://www.alo-moda.ro/pasarela-2009-mara-mi-by-andra-clitan.html>  
and <http://www.one.ro/fashion/designeri/colectia-i-feel-love-by-ingrid-vlasov-la-paris-fashion-week-7450571-foto?p=7>

## 3. CURRENT RESEARCH IN FASHION RELATED TO NATIONAL FOLKLORE MOTIFS

Being recognized as an active and dynamic operator on the national and European research market, The National Research&Development Institute for Textiles and Leather promotes and develops multidisciplinary applied research in the field of textile & clothing and leather – footwear – rubber goods industry, targeting textile enterprises and other connected fields.

INCDTP defines its identity as a link between research and technology transfer by fostering partnerships with national and European enterprises in the field in order to help them increase their competitiveness and technological innovation capacity, through multifunctional products, advanced technologies and services.

Representing the research sector, the Institute is a part of all 4 textile clusters from Romania: ASTRICO NE (NE Region), Romanian Textile Concept (Bucharest-Ilfov Region), Tradiții

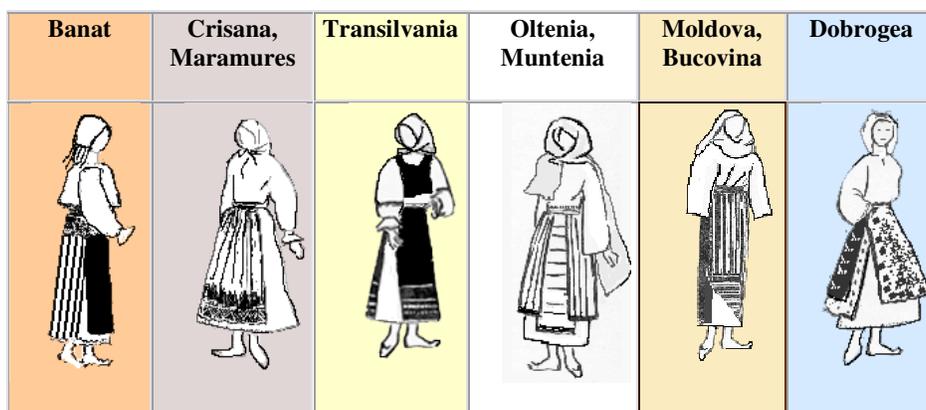
*Manufactura Viitor* (SE Region) and *Transilvania” Textile & Fashion* (Central Region). Through these clusters, the institute is a member of the Association of Romanian Clusters - CLUSTERO.

Representing the textile-clothing industry, an industry that promotes the cultural tradition and Romanian creativity, the Institute contributes with its activity to the promotion of Romanian spiritual and cultural values, by clothing design.

The current research in fashion related to national folklore motifs developed by INCDTP is to define the anthropometric characteristics of the population and the ethnographic features of the folk costumes from different regions of the country and use it as a source of inspiration for the fashion collections.

In the initial stage of one project, financed through national funds, a documentary study on ethnographic characteristics of the popular costume from different regions of the country was elaborated. The Traditional Romanian costume varies by region: Banat, Transylvania, Bucovina, Moldova, Crisana, Maramures, Dobrogea, Oltenia and Muntenia (Figure 6). The embroidery patterns have a certain meaning that differs from one region to another. In each of the country regions the combination of colors imposed by tradition are strictly respected.

The villages from Gorj are known for the most beautiful decorated popular costumes. The predominant colors of the traditional costumes from Arad are red and black. In Maramures the popular art is preserved in its original form and the predominant color of the folk costumes is green. The traditional costume from Moldavia is characterized by simplicity and sobriety, the color palette is often reduced to three colors: black, red and white, later associating other colors (blue and orange in Northern Moldavia), but in a limited extent. From the structural and ornamental point of view, the folk costume created in the mountain and plain areas of Oltenia (Figure 7) belongs to the category of Romanian folk costumes with two catrinte and finely pleated valnic having morphological similarities - of fabric, working techniques and cut – with the traditional garments of the inhabitants living in the Walachian Plain, Transylvania and the Banat. Specific for Oltenia are the bright cheerful colours of the embroideries and alesaturi, the splendour and sumptuousness of the decorative compositions made with precious materials- gold and silver metal threads, tinsels, silk, arnica, spangles, beads, twisted wool dyed in spinning mills – and an inexhaustible creativity, which allowed each woman an original suggestive interpretation of the traditional motifs repertoire. [1]



**Fig. 6:** Romanian folk costumes from different regions of the country

Source: <http://www.romanianmuseum.com/Romania/aboutRomania.html#three>

A clothing outfit of exquisite craftsmanship, the traditional costume from Muntenia (Figure 7), irrespective of ethnographic area, contributed significantly to the assertion of the folk costume as an important form of folk creation and to the development of the Romanian ethnographic heritage. The variety of the ornamental solutions, the refined colour harmonies and the original interpretation of various categories of motifs have led to an unmistakable aesthetic expression for each garment type.

The popular costume from Dobrudja (Figure 7) reflect the historical changes from this area, conferring them a unique artistic expression. The first form dates from the end of the last century and it's considered original due to the cutting and traditional decorations. It is the shirt (camasa dreapta) with two aprons with “peak” for women and a shirt with wide trousers, wrinkled (in dark colours) and red belt for men. This costume completed with a contemporary headband it's considered the prototype of the traditional Romanian costume from northern Dobrudja.



*Fig. 7: Folk costumes from Oltenia, Muscel (Muntenia) and Dobruđja*

Source: D. Isfanoni, P. Popoiu, Patrimony Romanian costume from the collections of „Dimitrie Gusti” National Village Museum, Ed. Alcor Edimpex, București, 2007

The traditional costume from Moldavia (Figure 8) represents a certificate of high abilities and understanding, a standard of beauty that has a communication language of ancient traditions, a living testimony of a mass creation process. The traditional costume from Moldavia for women includes in its structure such components as: the covering of the head, shoes, jewelry and accessories. [8]

In Bucovina the folk costume reflects the skills and refinement of the women that manufacture the clothing pieces (Figure 8). A basic piece of the female costume is the flax blouse (ia) with hems (“sorocica”). The chromatic composition is dominated by red, yellow and orange, different from the shirts from the other regions that are black and white. Unlike the most ornaments on the shirts that seem drawn or painted, the decorations from the flax blouses from Bucovina seem carved. [1]

The traditional costume from Maramures (Figure 8) has numerous notes of sobriety, beauty and kept well its undeniable ancient value in front of modernism. The folk costume of the old country of Maramures preserves the vigour of some ancient clothing pieces: women’s zarii (rectangular woollen skirts) with broad stripes in red with black or yellow with blue and guba (a long white coat, woven with long wollen treads introduced into the filling to obtain afur effect) worn by both men and women.



*Fig. 8: Folk costume from Bucovina, Moldavia and Maramures*

Source: D. Isfanoni, P. Popoiu, Patrimony Romanian costume from the collections of „Dimitrie Gusti” National Village Museum, Ed. Alcor Edimpex, București, 2007

The folk costume of Transylvania (Figure 9) is characterized by a unitary morphological structure of the basic clothing pieces. The geographical characteristics of the relief, the occupational

profile and social status of the villagers as well as some influence due to the cohabitation with other ethnic groups (Saxons, Hungarians, Slovaks and Ukrainians) were the sources of a spectacular area diversity.



**Fig. 9:** Folk costumes from Transylvania and Banat

Source: D. Isfanoni, P. Popoiu, Patrimony

Romanian costume from the collections of „Dimitrie Gusti” National Village Museum,

Ed. Alcor Edimpex. Bucuresti. 2007

The features characterizing the traditional costume of the Banat (Figure 9) as part of the Romanian folk wear, refer, on the one hand, to the existence of some unique pieces, to be found only in this historical province –opregul cu franjuri lungi (catrinta) and the conci (bonnet) worn by women-, and on the other hand, to the sumptuous embroideries and alesaturi made in gold and silver threads. [8]

This research leads to the revaluation of the Romanian cultural heritage and the promotion of traditional motifs specific to each region in the fashion collections both national and international. Also, it will create innovative concepts to support the garment industry in order to develop their own brand and to bring the design activities in Romania at an international level.

Estimated effects of this research leads to new information, specialized in fashion, available to SMEs in this field, increasing the availability of the Romanian clothing products on the external market and to maintain it on the internal market. At the same time it encourages the creation and development of Romanian fashion brands and the reduction of lohn production, supporting the SMEs from the clothing industry in Romania in order to achieve their specific ethnographic collections. [1]

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The traditional Romanian costume has a great artistic value because of its spectacular cut and decorations In Romania there are 112 traditional costumes, from Banat are twelve costumes and in Caras five costumes. The folk costume is an emblem of recognition, a mark of ethnic identity, a document with certain historical and artistic value.

In conclusion, we can say that the sobriety of the cuts and the austere simplicity of the fabrics (wool, hemp) from the traditional Romanian costumes, is compensated by the refinement of the embroideries and its exuberance of color, which gives to every piece of clothing the precious value of a jewelry polished by the skilled hands of women.

The interest of the international designers for our traditional costume is a good way of promoting the traditional Romanian values.

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