

# FASHION IN BLUE, BLUEPRINT IN DESIGN



platform  
culture central europe

— HEAD  
Genève







# Blueprintcraft and fashion design

## The Platform Culture Central Europe (PCCE)



**Jana Tomková**  
Director of the Department of Cultural  
Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign and  
European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

The Platform Culture Central Europe (PCCE) was launched in Vienna in 2001 by six Central European countries – Austria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The main objective of PCCE is up-keeping mutual cultural dialogue and providing/supporting bilateral and multilateral projects focused on common Central European cultural interests and values. Each PCCE country holds a regular semi-annual Presidency and prepares one shared project (outside of PCCE countries) with the help of other Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Embassies in Switzerland from all PCCE partners. The PCCE platform is consistently looking for new ideas to showcase Central Europe's heritage in host countries.

Slovakia holds the PCCE Presidency from January 2020 (which was extended due to COVID-19 restrictions) and has chosen Blueprint as its project, because the Blueprint technique was added to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2018 by the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Blueprint has been known since the 18th century when it came to Central Europe from Germany and the Netherlands. This dyeing technique is still used and very popular in PCCE countries and therefore we present it to the younger generation – students working in the field of textile and clothing.

The word Blueprint refers to the practice of dyeing fabrics blue with indigo, decorating it with wax resisting print, and using a dye-resisting mix to prevent the dye from coloring the places of ornamentation. Blueprint has been an important technique in Slovak, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Austrian textile decoration, which comes to show how truly connected we all are through our craft.

The practice of Blueprint (EN) – Blaudruck (DE) – Modrotisk (CZ) – Kékfestés (HU) – Modrotlač (SK) directly translates as a Blueprint (from German, Czech, and Slovak) and as blue dyeing (from Hungarian). Both terms are used to describe the technique.

Our local partner is the prestigious Geneva University of Arts and Design (HEAD – Genève), which approached our project constructively and flexibly. The HEAD

includes Visual Arts, Space Design, Film, Visual Communication, Media Design, Fashion, Jewelry and Accessory Design. HEAD – Geneva welcomes 700 students from 40 different nationalities. The school is bilingual French/English. We are delighted that this project is conducted in partnership with such a world-renowned school and its talented students.

The platform countries provided the university students with 60 meters of Blueprint fabrics from local producers in member countries. The students were tasked with preparing utility clothes or Blueprint products, which should have been presented on the school grounds at the main PCCE event in May 2020.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, this event could not be realized, even after it was postponed to November 2020. As such, the PCCE countries and the University decided to create a Blueprint brochure, as we couldn't carry out the project as planned.

Herewith we present to you the result of our joint cooperation, *Fashion in blue, Blueprint in design*. We hope you enjoy reading our brochure and learn more about our joint cultural heritage.

I wish you many pleasant moments with it.

**Jana Tomková**

Director Department of Cultural Diplomacy of Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs

**Alexander Micovčín**

Ambassador, Slovak Embassy in Bern

**Andrea Elscheková Matisová**

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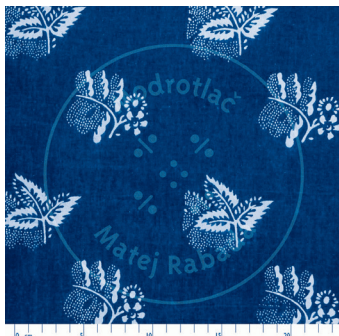
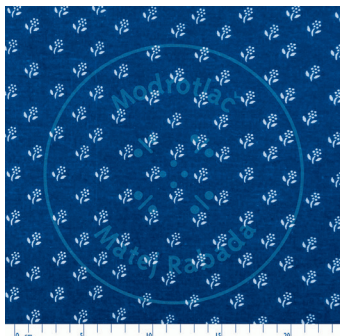
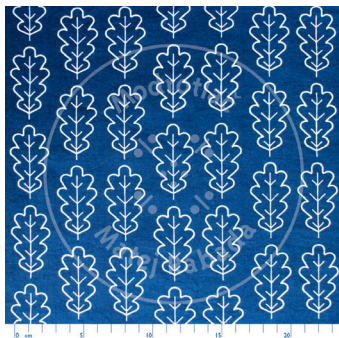
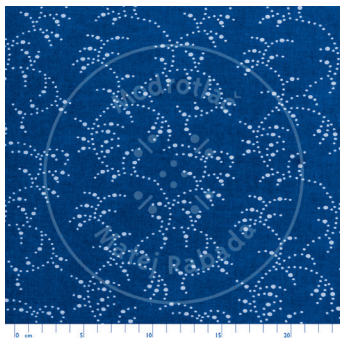
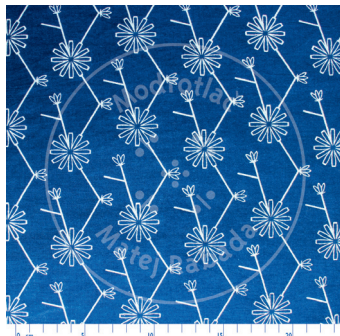
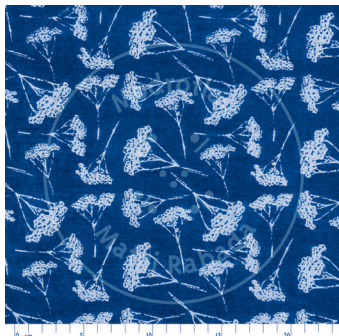
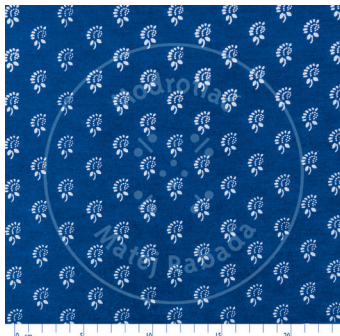
Department of Cultural Diplomacy of Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs

**Linda Kapustová Helbichová**

First Secretary, Slovak Embassy in Bern

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Matej Rabada is the official producer of Blueprints in Slovakia and the fabrics from his studio were provided to the students of the HEAD - Genève



# Threads of Blue

**Jean-Pierre Greff**  
Director HEAD – Genève

**Elizabeth Fischer**  
Dean of Fashion, Jewellery  
and Accessory Design

In 2019-2020, at the invitation of the Slovak presidency of the PCCE, the University of Art and Design HEAD – Genève was honoured as the guest partner of the five countries of the platform to set up a project combining the traditional craft of Blueprinting with contemporary fashion design. *The Fashion in blue, Blueprint in design* workshop provided a unique opportunity to focus on craft and materiality as a common fabric, which crosses cultural and language barriers while fusing the past with the present.

After a demonstration of blue dying by master dyers and an initiation to indigo dye techniques, the Bachelor Fashion design students received several lengths of eastern European Blueprint fabric. Threads of blue acquired a new twist in the hands of the eager young fashion designers, who created outfits that explored their own cultural roots all the while reinterpreting the traditions, craft and folklore of the PCCE countries. Skirting the sterile oppositions between craft and industry, artisan and designer, as well as the vexed issue of cultural appropriation, *the Fashion in blue, Blueprint in design* workshop encouraged the re-appropriation of both a personal history and national heritage, with the intent of furthering textile and fashion creative expertise. Recent fashion collections, from sportswear to couture, have proved that traditional crafts and contemporary design work hand in hand to renew the language of apparel. In tune with the major shift of values brought about by a world sanitary crisis, *Fashion in blue, Blueprint in design* is a tribute to a more human centred and sustainable practice of fashion design upheld by HEAD – Genève's Fashion design department.

HEAD – Genève warmly thanks the Slovak Presidency and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the five PCCE countries for their support, as well as the experts who provided valuable contributions on the history and craft of Blueprinting. Our gratitude also goes to the Blueprint manufactures, which generously provided the textiles: Original Blaudruck and Wagner family Blaudruck (Austria), Joch family manufacture Straznický modrotisk (Czech Republic), Kékfestő Kovács (Hungary) and Matej Rabada of Modrotlač Rabada (Slovak Republic) and to the pedagogical team and students of the Fashion design department who welcomed *Fashion in blue, Blueprint in design* with great enthusiasm.

The French poet Paul Eluard's verse *La terre est bleue comme une orange* – "The earth is blue as an orange" could be the motto of the workshop *Fashion in blue, Blueprint in design*. The fascinating colour blue, which has bound communities together for centuries in the creation of fabric, has inspired multiple and variegated fashion designs created by students from around the world who gather at HEAD – Genève to open new avenues for craft and design through the poetics of dress and the rewriting of its fundamental materials.



# Indigo, a blue beyond

**Lisa Niedermayr**

Artist and Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Textile Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, member of the expert panel for Intangible Cultural Heritage, Austrian Commission for UNESCO.

Indigo has always fascinated artists and craftspeople. The deep indigo blue has something mystical and ignites the passion for its cultural history. Working with this special colour of nature, with this deep, rich hue made from plants is an overwhelming experience.

For centuries, indigo has been a source of inspiration and a symbol for human creativity, as displayed by the wide range of products made with indigo. The Blueprint artisans cooperate and work together with artists and designers from various fields including fashion, interior textiles, furniture as well as art. This demands that practitioners embrace new challenges and creatively apply and thus develop their skills and knowledge as craftsmen and craftswomen accordingly [1] [2].

As an artist, I am fascinated with indigo. The deep blue colour is a unique bridge between sea and sky. This artwork focuses on the interplay between man and his environment. Indigo is the most common and most powerful natural dye, used all over the world for thousands of years. With indigo, I can create endless shades of blue. This natural material, deeply hidden in my subconscious, has taken me to new worlds and faraway horizons for many years now.

Each indigo dyed fabric is individual and unique in its shades of blue. The blue of the fabrics and the shaping language of the patterns and forms vary and lead in their diversity through cultures, traditions, times and ways of thinking. Working with indigo continued and continues to this day as it exerts a unique appeal, fascinating new generations of artists and craftsmen.

## **Blue dye, an international, national and regional phenomenon**

Whereas indigo resist print and blue-dyeing techniques can be found worldwide each region has adapted the craft to local circumstances. This has led to a distinct tradition in Europe also known as "Blueprint".

Today, the European artisans use thousands of different patterns and offer products in various shades of blue. Depending on the fabric (whether it is linen, silk or cotton), the weaving techniques as well as the number of indigo baths, printers create individual colourings. The patterns exhibit regional flora and fauna as well as abstract graphic symbols, such as stripes and

points (or dots). Very likely due to the high level of exchange among the first generation of dyers travelling in Europe, the patterns show similarities; however they also contain individual features. In other words, Blueprint represents a "unity in diversity" and a wealth of expression. In addition to the century-old patterns that have been passed on for generations, the artisans have also started to experiment with (3D print) technology in order to create new designs, which underlines the potentials of human creativity.

## **Indigo Revival**

For many years textile craftsmanship, textile education and the textile industry have seen a decline throughout Europe. Today however, crafting, design, quality and individuality are regaining importance. DIY is omnipresent today and has become a movement in its own right in various design areas. Even in the present era of digital modernity and technical intelligence, this design phenomenon occupies a field at the crossroads of mainstream, alternative culture and tradition.

## **Blueprint in Austria**

The two remaining blueprinting workshops in Austria are family-run businesses. The craftspersons who still practice hand-block printing with the use of indigo-dye in Austria are: Original Blaudruck Koó (in the province of Burgenland close to the Hungarian border, [www.originalblaudruck.at](http://www.originalblaudruck.at)) and Blaudruckerei Wagner (Mühlviertel Region of Upper Austria at the border with the Czech Republic, [www.blaudruck.at](http://www.blaudruck.at)).

## **From poor man's clothes to a luxury product**

Josef Koó grew up in the environment of the Blueprint craft right from his childhood. His grandfather had opened the workshop in the 1920's. After the Blueprint was considered "dead" in the 1980s, the perception of its value and use changed in Austria since the 1990s. Blueprint cloths have evidently transformed from a commonplace material for working clothes into valuable and refined textiles. In connection with blueprint, one could mention the exceptionally popular, frequently printed and sold patterns called "streng Gstroafte" (strictly striped) as a classic, or bestseller, in central Burgenland. Their characteristics are the simple, undisrupted, straight and strict lines, in approximately one centimetre intervals and the "zwoara Bleaml" (double bloom)



in the form of reversible printing. Koó's particular specialty is "Doppeldrucke", resist block printing on both sides of the cloth – one side for use on workday, the other for Sunday best [3].

Another specific feature are the „Lutheran materials“. The white and blue patterns were thought to be too striking therefore the already printed cloths were dyed anew. This creates motifs with slight colour shades that look moderate, decent yet very elegant [4].

**Each centre of textile production has its own repertoire of patterns and is associated with a particular style and set of colours**

Another Blueprinters' family, the Wagners, has managed a Blueprint operation for 130 years in Bad Leonfelden, Upper Austria. Maria and Karl Wagner, who run the blueprinting shop today, not only preserve the tradition of previous generations, they also set impulses to further develop the craft in a contemporary direction: cooperation with textile artists, fashion designers, fashion producers and educational institutions are constantly exploring new fields of application for blueprinting and bringing the traditional craft into a new context. Participation in international conferences and presentations, factory tours and cooperation with museums contribute to the networking and permanent further development of the blueprinting craft and promote the passing on of this special knowledge.

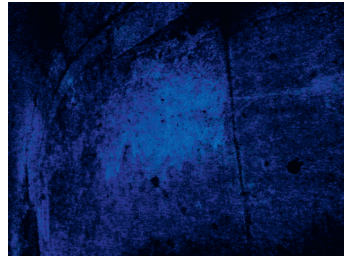
A bestseller of this Blueprint workshop from the Upper Austrian Bad Leonfelden is refined linen cloth with the patterns of hops, blue cornflower and cereal spikelets. One of the Wagner's specialties is the revival of complex two-color blueprinting, in which several models are overlaid [5].

Traditional crafts such as indigo blueprinting are important cultural factors. For me as an artist, designer and lecturer it is important to pass on the knowledge and skills associated with craftsmanship, also because I am convinced that this is an essential keystone for innovation.

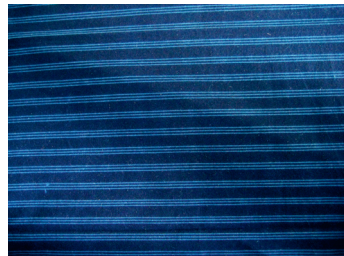
"The colour blue represents something magical for most people and is often associated with the blue of the sky and the ocean. The culture and the practice that revolve around this form of craftsmanship, including production of the dye itself and the various techniques used to create the textiles, make the colour indigo into something spectacular." ■



[1] Indigo work process, 2nd dyeing in the workshop of Josef Koó, 2016



[2] Blue space 2018



[3] Blueprint by Josef Koó, "streng Gstroafte" or "strictly striped"



### List of recent Indigo / Blueprint activities initiated in Austria

→ Blueprint has been listed in the Austrian inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage since 2010.  
[bit.ly/3ru2urn](https://bit.ly/3ru2urn)

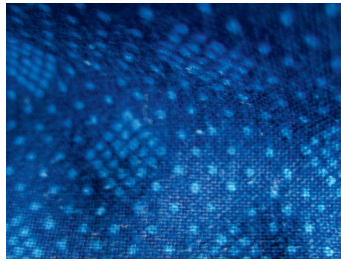
→ Blueprint was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2018, a joint inscription submitted by Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary and Slovakia.  
[bit.ly/3syqJ8M](https://bit.ly/3syqJ8M)

→ **Indigo / Blueprint Art Interventions** curated by Gabriele Detschmann and Lisa Niedermayr. Michaelertor Vienna, May 2018 and UNESCO Paris, November 2019

→ **i.m.m.a.t.e.r.i.a.l** May 2018, Michaelertor Hofburg Wien. A project realised by the Austrian UNESCO Commission in cooperation with the Burghauptmannschaft Austria within the framework of the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage. Curated by Lisa Niedermayr and Gabriele Detschmann. **i.m.m.a.t.e.r.i.a.l** offers a temporary platform for intervention and exhibition for indigo dyeing to expand beyond a textile craft into a blue space for the sensory engagement with natural indigo dyes at Vienna's central meeting area, the Michaelertor.

From 9 - 13 May 2018, **i.m.m.a.t.e.r.i.a.l** presented the personal, creative responses to indigo-dyeing by artists Linda Brassington, James Muriuki and Lisa Niedermayr. The artwork was created in cooperation with the artisanal workshops Blaudruckerei Koó and Blaudruck Wagner and the agricultural vocational school Andorf. It demonstrates fresh possibilities for the reinterpretation of a traditional craft in the context of contemporary art and arts education. **i.m.m.a.t.e.r.i.a.l** continues at the Weltmuseum Wien where selected indigo exhibits of the museum's collections draw attention to the global and timeless presence and use of this natural dye.  
[bit.ly/3ciDJK4](https://bit.ly/3ciDJK4)

→ **Walking the Indigo Walk** November 2019, Paris, exhibiting the work of indigo dyers from 18 different countries, from Europe to Colombia and sub-Saharan Africa. The exhibition showed the huge range and variety of effects and interpretations achieved through indigo dyeing. Thirty-four indigo-dyed textiles from 18 UNESCO Member States were displayed on the fence around UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, 18-20 November 2019. The exhibition catalogue presents the indigo textile designs from around the world and introduces the craftspeople and artists. Walking the indigo walk - Katalog zur Ausstellung 3 MB (pdf)  
[bit.ly/3d2wnK1](https://bit.ly/3d2wnK1)



4 Blueprint by Josef Koó, „Lutheran Blueprint“



5 Blueprint by Wagner, pattern of cornflower, two-color blue-printing on linen



"In mixing Swiss and Austrian folkloric dress from Burgenland and Valais, I wish to highlight what they share in common. They both stem from a common language, rural life and its relationship with nature, throwing bridges between people."



# History and the present of Czech Blueprint

**Klára Jurková**  
Ethnologist and independent  
researcher

The craft of Blueprint appeared in the Czech lands in the second half of the 18th century. As in other parts of Central Europe, it was initially used as interior design textile in the urban environment. It was characterized by fine wood block patterns in tune with contemporary fashions [1]. At the end of the century, Blueprint spread to the rural communities where it became widely popular. In the process, the patterns as well as the use of Blueprint changed. Blueprint workshops applied patterns from different periods alongside the creation of new variations, based on the aesthetic sense and needs of the rural people. They used Blueprint fabrics mainly for their traditional clothes, less commonly for bed linen. Within a relatively short span of 200 years, a myriad of Blueprint patterns was created in our territory, some became widespread, others remained region specific. The diversity of Blueprints increased by using a variety of colours and other local treatments (such as waxing or polishing).

In comparison with other European countries, Czech Blueprint has been most strongly influenced by modern developments. In the second half of the 19th century, handmade Blueprint was gradually pushed out by industrial textile production, with many workshops closing down. In response to the situation, Czech intellectuals became aware of the need to protect traditional crafts as part of the cultural heritage. In 1945, long-term yet irregular efforts finally resulted in the establishment of a central state institution, the Centre for Folk and Art Production, with the aim of providing comprehensive support and development of traditional and art production. Reorganized in 1957 as the Centre for Folk Art Production (ÚLUV) it significantly influenced the subsequent development of folk handicraft production.

The Centre for Folk Art Production employed traditional craftspeople, thus often saving their crafts from extinction. This was also the case of the last two Blueprint workshops in our country – that of the Joch family in Strážnice and the Danzinger family workshop in Olešnice, both located in Moravia. An organised group of fabric designers worked together with the craftspeople to innovate and update the Blueprint technique, and thus create timeless and usable

products while respecting the tradition. Ethnographers supervised the process to ensure that the designers had enough material for study and inspiration, and that their designs would remain within the set limits and integrate the traditional element with sensitivity. Thanks to this cooperation, Blueprint did not become a marginal souvenir item but developed into a high-quality modern product. In addition to traditional printing by means of wooden blocks [1][2], the patterns were also created by other techniques, for instance using a brush, sponge, stencil printing or screen printing. Multicoloured patterns and various natural materials were used. The fabric designers from the Centre for Folk Art Production preferred more distinct wood block patterns where the imperfections of handwork could be traced. In doing so, they made the authentic Blueprint easy to distinguish from its industrial imitations. They used both traditional and newly designed patterns which were inspired by folk ornamentation as well as modern artistic trends. The finished Blueprint fabric was used mainly to make tablecloths and placemats, decorative items and limited-edition clothing. The products were sold through the Krásná Jizba (Beautiful Household) retail chain.

During the second half of the 20th century, thanks to the Centre for Folk Art Production and with the contribution of external fabric designers, the Blueprint, which was originally a common utility textile, became a select material with added cultural and aesthetic value. Blueprint craftspeople began to be perceived as experts, skilled masters unique in their field.

In the wake of the political events after 1989, the Centre for Folk Art Production was closed down in the first half of the 1990s; however, its system had proved effective and remains valid to date. Currently, the Strážnický Modrotisk [3] and Modrotisk Danzinger workshops operate independently and produce Blueprint fabrics and other products designed for general users as well as for folklore ensembles. The globalization and technology overload of contemporary society has sparked a world trend of increased attraction for crafts such as Blueprint over the last eight years.

The general public has become aware of the importance of local traditions, found renewed interest in domestic handicrafts, natural materials and products [1].

The continuous development of Blueprint in modern conditions, however, depends on the work of professional textile and clothing designers. The cooperation of Czech and Slovak fabric designers with craftspeople takes place both on a short and long-term basis, which is the most valuable approach. The designers involved in long-term innovative projects adhere to the principles of slow fashion. They emphasise slow, high-quality, environment-friendly handwork, equal relationships, and empathy towards Blueprint craftspeople. Their goal is not only to create successful design collections but also to support traditional crafts whose existence is disadvantaged in a market-driven society.

The general interest in Blueprint triggered by the aforementioned context intensified in 2018 with the inclusion of Blueprint on UNESCO's intangible heritage list. This has raised an issue that needs to be discussed and addressed in the future. The vision of commercial success leads many companies to produce factory fabrics and other goods (such as knitted socks, plastic mobile phone cases, mugs), which are falsely promoted as "Blueprint". Blueprint is popularly incorrectly perceived as a type of fine plant or geometric pattern, most commonly in blue and white but also in other colours, applied by various techniques onto assorted objects.

Blueprint, however, is not a type of pattern, but a technique for decorating fabrics where a reserve is applied onto a woven fabric to provide a chemical and mechanical protection in the patterned areas during the subsequent dyeing [4] [5]. The reserve is traditionally applied with printing blocks, but other means (brush, stencil) can also be used. The printed fabric is then immersed into the cold indigo dyeing solution. A final wash in weak acid removes the reserve and reveals a hidden pattern [6]. Products manufactured differently cannot be labelled as Blueprint. Any such practice means deceiving unaware customers and demeaning the highly skilled and demanding work of Blueprint craftspeople.

However, the problem of confusing Blueprint with its imitations is currently not being addressed legally, and the production of counterfeits is not punishable. This situation needs to be solved by registering a trademark, which will not be easy due to the specificity of the matter and will require international participation. Nevertheless, I believe that the efforts made will contribute to more efficient protection of Blueprint as an important cultural asset which has the potential for further developments in contemporary European society. ■



[1] A traditional printing block from the Strážnický modrotisk workshop with the so-called rýchlářský pattern  
Photo by Klára Jurková



[2] Upper side of the same printing block with visible notches  
Photo by K. Jurková



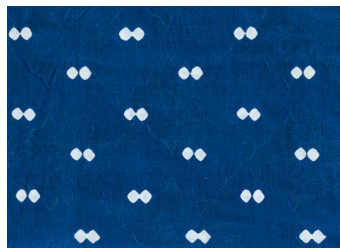
[3] Glove used by Jan Mička when dyeing the blueprint in the Strážnický Modrotisk workshop



[4] Fabric printed with the protective substance called pop



[5] Cotton fabric suitable for Blueprint fabrication. Made by the Czech company Mleita from Horlice



[6] Finished Blueprint printed on damask fabric







“Blueprint acts as an anchor to reality. Applying an ancestral knowledge enables us to build something authentic in an increasingly virtual world.”



# Blueprint in Slovakia

Radoslava Janáčková

The Center for Folk Art and Production

Blueprint is a remarkable chapter in the long and rich history of European textiles. At first, Blueprint fabrics were a cheaper and more available substitute for expensive woolen materials, brocade, and other elaborate homemade textiles. Since the middle of the 19th century, they have been widely adopted and well established in Slovakia. They became an essential part of dress culture and home decor.

Consumer's tastes and demands have significantly influenced the development and aesthetics of Blueprint design. Blueprint began to differentiate and adapt to local customs and aesthetic habits; this process resulted in a rich diversity of local and regional variations in the choices of patterns and their arrangement on fabrics, in color combinations, the shades of blue, and the degree of shine. Further differences were apparent in dress cuts, folds on skirts and aprons, as in embroidered and appliqué decorations.

In the first half of the 20th century, the distribution of Blueprint fabrics corresponded to the location of the Blueprint workshops, as they were mutually linked. In some areas, Blueprint fabrics played the role of unobtrusive accessory elements. Elsewhere, for instance, in the neighborhoods of Stará Lubovňa, Ružomberok, Liptovský Mikuláš, Brezno, Banská Bystrica, Krupina, and Modrý Kameň, Blueprint dominated the appearance of clothes and interior textiles. Clothes and accessories made from Blueprint fabrics were essential for women [1]. They were elements of work clothes as well as ceremonial dress chosen according to the symbolic meaning of each particular event. When the ceremonial Blueprint pieces were too worn out, they would be used for everyday wear.

An investigation into the distribution of Blueprint fabrics indicates interesting research issues. One of them is the concentration of the most remarkable patterns and their use in the decoration of dresses. The other is the local difference manifested in preferences for certain ornaments and compositions, various adjustments of fabrics, and the effects of combining Blueprint ornaments with other decorative techniques – frilling, embroidery and lace.

Blueprint fabrics were used mainly for women's and girl's attire [2]: aprons, skirts, headscarves, and handkerchiefs, but also camisoles and blouses.

Blueprint almost never appeared in men's clothes. Occasionally men's working aprons were made out of blue-dyed fabric (but without any ornaments). An exception to the rule was a black apron with puckers that was a part of the attire traditionally worn by men in the villages of the Tekov region, with wide pants made from canvas.

In the second half of the 20th century, the prohibition of private enterprise in Slovakia caused a reduction and near extinction of the dye-workshops. Some workshops have been transformed into cooperative production, incorporated into the cooperative Kroj established in 1948 by the Centre for Folk Art Production (CFAP) in Bratislava.

The atmosphere of the 1950s was favorable for the use of Blueprint textiles in women's dressmaking. Textile designers began to pay attention to Blueprint patterns. They refreshed them with new motives and replaced the laborious handcraft with the easier technology of screen printing. Blueprint fabrics then returned to the cities and became a part of both fashion and interior decor.

The CFAP offices in Bratislava and Uherské Hradiště have paid close attention to the use of Blueprint in Czechoslovakia since the 1950s. The Centre has tried to revive the Blueprint craft to avoid its disappearance. Since the 1970s, the CFAP cooperated with Stanislav Trnka – an internationally renowned master Blueprinter who worked in a workshop in Púchov. In the 1970s and 1980s, in a major cooperation with Stanislav Trnka's workshop in Púchov, the Bratislava CFAP office produced about 20-22 thousand meters of Blueprint fabrics each year.

The CFAP cooperated with many designers and artists who designed new patterns, clothes, and interior textiles. The most significant designers were Eva Kováčová, Klára Brunovská [3], Janka Menkynová, and Jozef Bajus. Besides the designers working with CFAP, Lea Fekete made a significant contribution to Blueprint fashion design. Her collection of dresses represented Slovakia at the international fashion trade fair IGEDO in Dusseldorf, Germany, and garnered great success. The fabrics were printed by Stanislav Trnka. <sup>1</sup>

Currently there are two Blueprint workshops in Slovakia – Peter Trnka’s workshop and Matej Rabada’s workshop. Both produce fabrics with their own unique designs, as well as textiles with historic patterns [4]. Recently Blueprint has found the favor of the graduates of the Atelier of textile design of the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava.

In November 2018, the Centre for Folk Art Production participated in the inclusion of the Blueprint into the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritages. The Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO approved the registration of the multinational nomination, “Blueprint”, which was submitted by the Slovak Republic together with Germany, Austria, Czechia, and Hungary. <sup>2</sup> ■



1 Women's ceremony costume, Čierny Balog, beginning of the 20th century



2 A woman's apron, Dačov Lom, 1920



3 Women's dress designed by Klára Brunovská, 1974



4 The wood printing form combining woodcut with brass nails, Hranovnica, 1960

<sup>1</sup> DANGLOVÁ, Oľga, 2014. Modrotlač na Slovensku. 1. vyd. Bratislava: ÚĽUV. ISBN 978-80-89639-12-0.

<sup>2</sup> [12.10. 2020] bit.ly/3clelDK







“Travels shaped my childhood and my vision of the world. As with Blueprint, the mix of cultures and traditions has forged my identity.”

Magdalena Kwiecińska

Curator at the Tatra Museum in Zakopane

# The Blueprinting tradition in the Podhale region

## as retraced by items in the Tatra Museum in Zakopane

The Tatra Museum, founded in 1888 in Zakopane, is one of the oldest regional museums in Poland. From the very beginning, the most eminent people of Polish culture and science were associated with this institution. They saw it as a museum dealing with the cultural heritage of Podhale and the neighbouring cross-border regions of Spiš (Polish Spisz) and Orava. The end of the 19th and early 20th century was a breakthrough period for the collecting of folk art and developing interest in Podhale. It was mainly animated by wealthy patients receiving treatment in the health resort of Zakopane. The idea was to preserve the region's heritage for future generations. Many items obtained by the Tatra Museum, either as gifts or purchases, mostly originate from private collections built up at that time. The first elected director Juliusz Zborowski ran the museum from 1922 to 1965. He led efforts to expand the ethnographic collection, contributing to the institution's significant development as a regional centre for collecting, teaching and research activities.

In 2008, the exhibition *Blueprinting at the Foot of the Tatras* was held at the Tatra Museum. The accompanying publication by Zofia Rak recalled the 19th century dye-houses of Podhale, the cloth dyed and printed in them, and their use in folk costumes and home furnishings. Roman Reinfuss's 1953 book *Polish Folk Prints on Cloth*, described the traditions of blueprinting in the whole of Poland and its broad geographical and historical context. These two publications are an important source of knowledge about blueprinting in Poland. The exhibition at the Tatra Museum aroused great interest in the craft of folk dyeing. It spurred some individuals to transform blueprinting into a textile art and create new designs inspired by the old craftsmanship.

### Dyers in Podhale

Although divided by national borders, the people living to the immediate north and south of the Tatra mountain range (which forms a natural border between Poland and Slovakia) were often in close contact with each other and thus established cultural ties. In the

mid 19th century, dyeing and printing houses operated in many towns on the Slovak side of the Tatra mountains. Printed cloth was sold at fairs, including in Levoča, which was frequently visited by highlanders from the Podhale region. There, and elsewhere in Slovakia, they could buy printed cloth before such items appeared in the 1840s with dyers on the Polish side of the Tatras. The booming development of dyeing in Podhale took place in the 1870s and 1880s. At that time, dye and textile printing houses were already operating in Podhale villages – Poronin and Chochołów as well as in the town of Nowy Targ.

The first dyers working in Podhale came mainly from the neighbouring Orava and Spiš regions, which until 1918 were under the Hungarian rule of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. One of them was Matej Grenčík from Bobrov, who ran a dye-works in Chochołów as from 1848. That same year he married Marianna - daughter of Jan and Rozalia Kois from Witów. They lived in Chochołów in house no. 208. His dyeing practice there is traceable until October 1877, after which he returned to the Slovak side of the Tatras. In the same year, Martin Pekarčík (born in 1817 in Vydrník) settled in Chochołów, after having operated a dye-house in Poronin from 1859 to 1877. It is not known how long Pekarčík ran the dye-works in Chochołów. The last dyer in Chochołów was Nowy Targ-born Ferdynand König (1823-1894), who was the son of Bernard and Zofia, née Winkler. He probably came to Podhale from Kęty and brought printing woodblocks with him. In 1858 he married Katarzyna Krzeptowska, a woman from Zakopane, and they lived in house no. 178, where they ran a dye-house. It closed down shortly after the death of F. König, probably at the end of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, woodblocks from this dye-house were donated to the Tatra Museum by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz and Wojciech Brzega.

From historical sources, we know about other dye-houses in Podhale. One of them was operated in Nowy Targ, from 1884 probably until the end of the 19th



century by the local resident Alter Hamerszlag. The surname of the last dyer in Poronin was Hota who emigrated to America in 1907. The nickname Farbierz of the Majerczyk family, still living in Biały Dunajec village, lets us assume that there also used to be a dye-house.

Unable to cope with the competition from cheaper factory-made fabrics which started to appear in large quantities in the villages, dyeing work in the Podhale region declined at the end of the 19th century and petered out of existence at the beginning of the 20th century. However, although dye-houses continued to operate much longer in the neighbouring Slovak Spiš and Orava regions, the disappearance of dyeing and printing workshops in Poland meant that some dyers wanting to continue their craft moved to the Slovak Spiš region in search of employment in workshops.

### Items related to folk cloth dyeing in the Tatra Museum

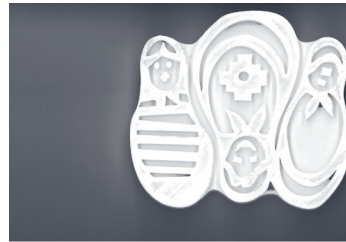
Almost all the dyeing woodblocks that are in the Tatra Museum collection go back to the 19th century, though the date of one block donated in 1978 remains unknown. The ink stamp suggests that it dates from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is not known where the other woodblocks were made and by whom. They were probably made in a specialised factory, such as in Luhačovské Zálesí or Nový Jičín in Moravia, where blocks for printing were carved in wood and stamped with brass wires and plates by professional craftsmen.

In 1903 several dozen woodblocks from König's dye-house were donated to the collection by S. I. Witkiewicz (aka 'Witkacy') and W. Brzega. This provides an interesting context to their provenance. Witkacy (1885-1939) and Brzega (1872-1941) were (and remain) acclaimed artists both in Poland and abroad. In the interwar period Witkacy played an important role in the cultural life of Zakopane, he also painted and drew. Brzega was a native highlander from Zakopane. A graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, he worked in sculpture. He contributed to the development of the architectural style of Zakopane, known as the "Witkiewicz style". The name refers to Stanisław Witkiewicz (Witkacy's father), who at the end of the 19th century sought to create the foundations for modern Polish national architecture based on the folk art of Podhale. The set of objects related to the folk dyeing and printing of cloth in the Tatra Museum consists of woodblocks and elements of women's dress. They are a testimony to the thriving craftsmanship that existed in the second half of the 19th century in Podhale, which finally disappeared in this region at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. It gradually fell into oblivion because of the popularization of inexpensive and colourful factory-made materials.

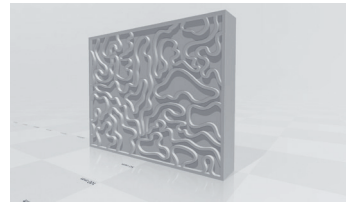
Among the museum's collection of woodblocks used for the manual printing of cloth, most are undoubtedly factory-made, and only a few, carved in wood,



1 Dolls pattern Blueprint



2 3D printed block, copy of existing wooden block



3 3D visualisation of printing block with pattern inspired by Władysław Strzemiński's art



4 Original pattern block made with CNC milling machine

may be of local origin - they were made by the dyers themselves or by specialist sculptors or craftsmen, mainly in Moravia and Spiš. Dyers brought the older woodblocks from Germany. In Podhale, as in the rest of Europe, the oldest printing blocks were carved entirely out of wood; sometimes the carved pattern was slightly supplemented with metal plaques and nails. In the 19th century, blocks in which the pattern was made entirely of brass plaques or wires and nails began to be used. As a result, the drawing on the cloth was emphasized in more detail, allowing for finer and more precise patterns on the fabric, similar to the ones found on factory-made textiles. Therefore, in the second half of the 19th century, the relief of the woodblocks was replaced with sheet metal.

The printing blocks used by dyers in Podhale were usually made of two wooden plates joined together with pins - the lower one (relief) with a pattern to be imprinted on the cloth, the upper one serving as a handle. The patterned relief was carved, or laid out, thanks to brass wires and sheet metal driven into the wood. The Tatra Museum's collection comprises 100 woodblocks. There were originally 101 of them, but in 1942 during Nazi occupation, one item was stolen by the Germans (as stated in the inventory book):

- 95 of the woodblocks come from the dye-houses of F. König in Chochołów. In 1903, 91 items were donated to the Tatra Museum collection by Witkacy and W. Brzega. In 1906, the museum bought another four woodblocks from W. Brzega.
- Two blocks come from the collection of Zygmunt Gnatowski, which the Tatra Museum purchased in 1906; they most likely also originate from Chochołów.
- Two woodblocks were donated to the Tatra Museum collection by J. Zborowski, which he bought from August Zajac from Czarny Dunajec in Orava. A. Zajac bought them in 1923 in Lipnica Wielka (Lipnica Dolna) in Orava. They may have been used in the local dye-house run by a Jew whose surname was Vix. This dye-house closed c. 1932. It is known that the cloth was printed in black or navy blue with white flowers, and it was also dyed in a single colour (black, red or blue).
- One woodblock, 17 x 11 cm, was purchased in 1978 from Ignacy Ciężyński from Zakopane. The preserved fragments of the inscription on the ink stamp seem to point to an atelier in Vienna.

Woodblocks from the Tatra Museum's collection fall into groups based on the various details on their surface.

#### Patterns

Polish folk textile printing did not stand out in Europe with its own individual features. The woodblock patterns that König had in his dye-house were

remembered by Jan Pluciński, a highlander from Jurgów in the Spisz region who worked as a teacher in Chochołów from 1951 to 1967. He distinguished several characteristic motifs that he remembered: buttons, lines, flowers, leaves, twigs, snake (*gadzik*), cones, stripes.

- 58 woodblocks bear floral patterns: Tiny flowers and leaves (often arranged in a chessboard pattern), grapevine, twigs (including one with an edelweiss pattern), trifoliate leaves.
- 32 woodblocks have geometric ornaments with a stripe and ribbon arrangement: A grid consisting of small rectangles and squares, dots, wavy and straight lines, ovals, bows, tear droplets.
- 10 woodblocks have a mixed floral-geometric ornament in a striped pattern, resembling embroidery.

The correspondence written in the 1920s between J. Zborowski, director of the Tatra Museum, and Seweryn Udziela, director of the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow, reveals details about textile printing and patterns typical of Podhale. Zborowski intends to write a short note to the *Lud* quarterly about dyeing woodblocks for old aprons and skirts<sup>1</sup>. Udziela asked for imprints of regional-style woodblock patterns that are in the museum's collection<sup>2</sup>. Zborowski replies: "attempts made a few years ago did not bring any results, only tips from old dyers about the use of chalk slurry in which the cloth is bathed have led us in the right direction. If you want the patterns drawn, I could talk to the draftsmen, but they charge dearly"<sup>3</sup>. In the next letter, Zborowski informs: "(...) so far I am not able to give you their advice. Here, the attached print comes out well where the wires are studded (we have a lot of woodblocks only with wires). On the other hand, those woodblocks that are part wooden (leaf pattern) or which are fully made of wood do not come out well when the wood is worn down. I fill in ink according to the traces on the woodblock. (...) Rather, they should be copied by eye (...). So, I can do it now and have prints from these sheet metal relief woodblocks, and perhaps leave those carved in wood for later?"<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The note probably never appeared. Letter dated April 30, 1922, Archive of the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow, inv. no. I / 1894.





“I want to highlight the similarities between my Portuguese origins and Slovak folklore by retracing the multiple layers that have shaped the two cultures, from ancient Rome to the present.”



### Pattern-making methods

25 woodblocks are entirely made of wood and have a convex carving pattern. These woodblocks belong to the oldest copies, which have survived longer in the eastern regions of Poland.

6 woodblocks with a carved pattern complemented by wires, nails and brass plates driven into the wood, which subtly ornament the cloth. Fabrics printed with this type of woodblocks are characteristic of the western regions of Poland - according to the division introduced by R. Reinfuss, based on research.

69 woodblocks have a decorative motif made entirely of brass wires, plaques and sticks driven into a wooden plate.

### Size and shape

76 woodblocks with a thickness of 4 to 5.5 cm are almost square-shaped: 20 x 22 cm, 24 x 25 cm, 25 x 26 cm or rectangular: 16 x 24 cm, 11 x 21 cm, 15 x 20 cm. They are made of two plates stuck or pegged together:

- The bottom plate, 1 cm to 2.5 cm thick, cut most often from pear wood, less often beech, sycamore, ash and birch wood, displays a pattern for imprinting on the fabric.
- The upper plate, 2.5 cm to 4.5 cm thick, made of spruce, pine or fir planks, with two deep cuts for the hand grip.

21 narrow woodblocks, 20 to 32 cm long, 4 to 9 cm wide and 2.5 to 4 cm thick. They were used to reflect patterns along the edges of the fabric in aprons and scarves, and to print a pattern in the lower part of the skirt. By mirroring the patterns side by side, a repetitive strip of one motif was created. Among the woodblocks for edge patterns there are 5 with wooden reliefs, 14 with metal reliefs and 2 with mixed ones. They feature strip and ribbon patterns with floral and geometric motifs. One of them - all wooden -, shows a different relief of patterns on both sides. On one side, there are carved arches and dots made of pegs mounted in a board, on the other side, irregular geometric patterns. There are remains of indigo on the brick.

2 woodblocks with dimensions of 7 x 8.5 cm and 7 x 9.5 cm:

- Patterned with spilled spots and tripartite teeth
- Metal plated, with a ribbon pattern, and a motif of intersecting wavy lines and bilberries

1 woodblock, 17 x 11 cm, which was used to decorate cloth vests.

### Signing

35 woodblocks are numbered and marked with initials. The numbers, letters and stamps are cut or painted with oil paint, written in pencil on the top plate or on the side of the woodblock. These are probably the initials of the dyers who owned the bricks. Dyers exchanged bricks or bought them from each other, hence two or three different initials are visible:

- 19 woodblocks have a number and the letter T written in white paint, e.g. "65 T"
- 5 woodblocks display "KAL" in an oval rim
- 4 woodblocks bear the letters "T I"
- 1 woodblock has the number 36 and a stamp with details of a private atelier, which was located at Neubaugasse in Vienna.

Among the others, there is one woodblock with the initial "Jak" on the top, "73 EK" on the long side, and engraved crosses on the short side.

The numbers on the woodblocks are of white, black or russet (less frequently) paint and correspond to the numbers of the patterns that were removed from them and included in the templates used by dyers. From these stencils, women chose the pattern they wanted to have printed on cloth for skirts and aprons.

### Traces of use

- 7 woodblocks show remnants of sapphire-coloured paint on the surface
- 15 woodblocks have remnants of a greenish insulating mass on their surface.

The collection of the Tatra Museum also includes several elements of women's clothing from the foot of the Tatra mountain range. From Podhale there are five so-called *farbanica* skirts and one apron from the second half of the 19th century. The cloth intended for skirts was dyed one colour - black, navy blue or blue. Four of them were made in the years 1877-1890 by F. König, and the fabric for one was brought to the dye-house by a resident of Ciche. The three remaining skirts were purchased from König at the markets in Chochołów

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated February 16, 1922, Archive of the Tatra Museum, inv. no. 45 / A

<sup>3</sup> Letter dated March 11, 1922, Archive of the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow, inv. no. 1 / 1894

<sup>4</sup> Letter dated April 30, 1922, Archive of the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow, inv. no. 1 / 1894



“I deconstructed the pattern of the Czech textile on the computer, to generate a more abstract design of undulating lines. I paired the material with found objects to create accessories.”

and Nowy Targ by J. Zborowski for the museum in 1929 and 1932. The fifth skirt comes from the collection of Z. Gnатовski, donated in 1906.

On the inside of the three skirts purchased at the market, numbers on the natural colour of linen cloth are visible. It can be assumed that they correspond to the numbers of the woodblocks used to print them. An example is a skirt made of navy blue linen cloth with blue dots displaying a white and blue pattern at the bottom. The skirt with the inventory number E/4005/MT was purchased for the collection from the Stoch family in Nowe Bystre. Anna Stoch wore it sporadically, even in the 1920s. On the inside of the skirt, at the hem, near the side seam, there is a small piece of fabric in natural linen colour, similar in shape to a triangle. It may well be that in this place a mark was sewn to the fabric, which protected the place underneath from the dye. This feature, in the form of a piece of copper plaque with a number, served as an identification stamp and was sewn onto the cloth. The second stamp with the same number was shown when the cloth was picked up. Based on it, the dyer searched for the material accepted for dyeing and gave it to the owner.

*Farbanica* skirts were the most popular in Podhale in the 1870s and 1880s, especially among the less affluent highlander women. They were cheaper than skirts from factory-made materials. Some skirts were adorned at the bottom with a wide stripe featuring a floral and geometric pattern, in white or white and blue, which resembles lace and clearly reflected against the dark blue, sapphire-coloured or navy blue background. The background of the skirt, on the other hand, is printed in a white or light blue pattern, consisting of floral or geometric motifs – most often leaves or large dots. In Podhale, aprons and bed linen – duvet covers and pillowcases – were also sewn from dyed cloth. The aprons were decorated similarly to the skirts, so at the bottom there was a wide trail with floral and geometric motifs, and above it, symmetrically distributed over the entire surface of the background, a small pattern of circles or dots. These types of skirts and aprons were characteristic of the dyeing and printing workshop in Chochołów. The indigo-coloured apron from Witów, bought for the museum in 1914 by Tymon Niesiołowski, is embroidered with silver and gold thread and sequins. It is not known whether the cloth was decorated in the same way by dyers from Poronin and Nowy Targ.

Slightly different patterns were present in women's clothing in the Pieniny region, where they were printed on linen cloth as well as on thicker factory-made cotton fabrics. The museum's collection includes a large shoulder scarf, which comes from Szczawnica from the end of the 19th century, and from Jaworki a skirt, apron and a headscarf purchased in 1928 by Ferdynand Rabowski, who collaborated with the Tatra Museum to expand its collection. F. Rabowski (1884–1940), graduated in

Switzerland, conducted geological research in the Tatra mountains for the University of Warsaw. The collection of the Tatra Museum also includes elements of women's clothing from the Spisz region. One quilt cover and five skirts made at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries originate from Jurgów, and two single-colour aprons from Trybsz and Niedzica: sapphire and black.

The museum also stores fragments of hand-dyed and printed cloth preserved as linings and inserts in two skirts – one from Podhale, the other from Spisz – and one cap from Jaworki. They probably come from old elements of women's dress, which were used to line garments made of factory-made materials. These few objects related to the folk dyeing and printing of cloth document the craft that flourished in the Tatra region in the second half of the 19th century, but disappeared in this area at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. One can only guess why this happened. Decorating cloth with the technique of Blueprinting in Poland from the 18th century developed in small workshops, then in factories. It was subsequently pushed out to towns and villages by the manufacturing industry. For many years, until the 1920s, it served only the needs of the small-town and rural population.

### Folk printing and applied arts

At the beginning of the 20th century, an artistic movement animated by designers educated at academies of fine arts began to develop in parallel with folk printing. Inspired by folk crafts, they sought to create a new type of design, striving for a way of working close to folk crafts: production methods, tools and simple technical devices. The Polish Applied Arts Society was founded in 1901 in Krakow in this context – as mentioned by Zborowski and Udziela in their letters.

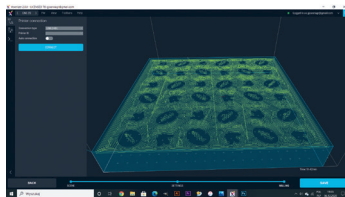
A few years later, the Polish Applied Arts Society became the Krakow Workshops Association. As part of this organization, the artists collaborated with craftsmen and developed the traditional batik technique by creating patterns inspired by folk art. Antoni Buszek was especially laudable for the development of the Polish batik school. One of the achievements of the Krakow Workshop Association was the preparation of the pavilion for the International Exhibition of Decorative Arts and Modern Industry in Paris in 1925. The Polish designs received both critical and public acclaim. Following the dissolution of the Krakow Workshops Association in 1926, the methods that had been developed were continued by the “Ład” Artists’ Cooperative, art academies as well as schools such as the Technical and Industrial Museum in Krakow. In the book of protocols and reports of the Tatra Museum Society<sup>5</sup> for the years 1921–1924, it states that at the request of Zborowski, it was decided to exchange a dozen items between the Tatra Museum in Zakopane and the Technical and Industrial Museum in Krakow. The Tatra Museum offered 10 or 15 wood-



blocks for printing patterns on fabric in return for pictures painted on glass <sup>6</sup>. However the planned exchange did not take place.

In post-war times, in the 1960s and 1970s, Eleonora Plutyńska was the continuator of A. Buszek's method, drawing on the heritage of folk design. She established the Polish school of artistic fabrics, but folk blueprinting on cloth in its original form did not exist in Poland at that time. Admittedly, at the end of the 1940s, the Headquarters of the Folk and Artistic Industry (Polish CPLiA) started its activities, absorbing the existing artistic co-operatives, manufacturing enterprises and workshops dealing with folk and craftsmanship, and benefitting from their experience. Its aim was to protect and popularize folk art. Its wide range and visible effects bloomed in the second half of the 1950s. CPLiA led the activities and created a kind of brand that did not pay attention to creative individualism. Mass production and satisfying the sales market meant that over time the individualism of folk artists disappeared completely.

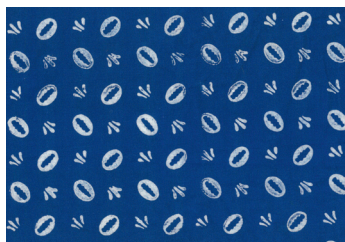
A few years ago, in the Orava Open-air Ethnographic Museum in Zubrzyca Górna, a dye-house was reconstructed, in which it was planned to conduct thematic workshops and exhibitions. Cooperation with Matej Rabada from Párnica in Slovakia was established. Eighteen patterned dyeing woodblocks that used to exist in Orava were recreated. The ambitious project is awaiting further realizations in this area. Undoubtedly, the activities undertaken in Poland today reflect a renewed interest in the batik technique. However, attempts are made on an individual basis; they are mainly artistic and creative aspirations without anything being organized on a large scale. ■



[5] Recreation of a traditional printing block from Muszyzna - visualisation of CNC milling process



[6] Modern version of printing block from Muszyzna - traditional pattern of shells and seedlings



[7] Blueprint resulting from recreated block. This block and textile were created by Joanna Graniczewska, one of the few artists still practicing blueprint in Poland.

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<sup>5</sup> The Tatra Museum Society was established with the aim of opening the Tatra Museum in Zakopane. One of the tasks of the Society was to raise funds, and search for ways to set up and develop this facility.

<sup>6</sup> Book of protocols and reports of the Tatra Museum Society for the years 1921–1924, protocol no. 118, Archive of the Tatra Museum, inv. no. 11 / A, p. 101.







“I transcribed the perfect regularity of the flower pattern in a cinematic design interlaced with the symbolism of blue drawn from the ancient Chinese indigo dying tradition.”



# Hungarian blue-dyeing craft in the light of tradition and renewal

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The craft of blue-dyeing in Hungary is represented by the blue-dye workshops and various individuals and cultural institutions safeguarding and researching the tradition of blue-dyeing.

Blue-dyeing was once practiced by families and the masters and apprentices working in plants. As blue-dyeing factories ceased to operate, the trade lived on through family workshops. The factory workers did not set up workshops after the factories closed. Their knowledge, which contained an element of craftsmanship, differed from the traditions of small workshops, and has not survived.

The community of Hungarian blue-dyers consists of the family-owned small workshops still operational today. This is the only way for the trade to survive, as without any formal training, learning both the theoretical and practical knowhow of the craft is only possible within the workshops. The future of the operational and temporarily closed workshops lies in the hands of the future generations. Recent times have shown that there is still an interest in upholding and continuing this trade.

Besides wide popular recognition, blue-dyers have also earned the respect of the industry. Four people have won the title Master of Folk Art, while even more have won the Young Master of Folk Art award. To complement this, fifteen people are, or were plying their trade under the title of Applied Artist in the Folk Arts.

The creation of fabrics painted with indigo by the use of woodblock printing is a world phenomenon, practiced throughout all five continents. In areas where types of indigo suitable for dying grow (India, China, Japan), the tradition goes back thousands of years. It spread throughout Europe with the beginning of mass imports of indigo. Today these workshops have become a rare commodity in some countries (for example in Germany, the Czech Republic and

Austria). In Hungary the recent past of blue-dyeing is unique in its kind as it is the only region where mechanised as well as handcrafting technologies are utilised simultaneously while both indigo and synthetic indanthrene are employed. The practice of traditional blue-dyeing existed throughout the regions of historic Hungary.

The first labour organisations of masters of the trade were the guilds, initiated in regions of the Felvidék (the northern region of Greater Hungary) and including blue-dyeing masters from hundreds of kilometres away. The first blue-dye workshops in Hungary were set up in the Felvidék and Dunántúl (the areas lying west of the Danube) regions, and it took another fifty years for the trade to spread throughout the Alföld areas (the eastern Great Plains of Hungary). At the beginning of the 20th century about 400 workshops were in operation throughout the country. Transformation of the textile industry and the growing number of large factories heralded a decline in the trade of blue-dyeing in manufactures, resulting in a large number of workshops shutting down in the second half of the 20th century, with only a handful remaining in operation. In the 1970's, less than 30 were still producing textiles.

A 2013 study titled 'The Title of my Trace' (Mesterségem Címere), mapping the current situation of the handicrafts in Hungary listed 11 masters of blue-dyeing, which is possibly the number of certified craftsmen, and not the number of masters of the trade still in activity. The few workshops in operation often look after and uphold the heritage of other workshops, such as their tools, machines and patterning woodblocks. This equipment and the patterning woodblocks often form part of museum collections, however many have become the property of foreigners, are used in other European workshops, or have been destroyed.



“My project questions traditions. In tracing their origins, I have come to realize that nothing is permanent and that we are all connected.”

Workshops still operated through full-time employment as the primary job of their workers are the following: the Tiszakécske-Szentendre Kovács workshop, the Horváth workshop of Tolna, and the Gerencsér-Tóth (originally Ehling) workshop of Győr, the Skorutyák workshop of Bácsalmás, the Sárdi workshop of Nagynyárad and the Szakács workshop of Szombathely. The Gál-Vadász workshop of Dunaföldvár, and the Bolyós workshop of Debrecen endured heavy losses when their masters passed away and were not replaced. Against all odds, the founder and, for more than a decade, guardian of the Blue-dyers' Festival, the Sárdi workshop of Nagynyárad continues to safeguard the tradition. The people working in these workshops, often including family members, do everything in their power to enable the workshop to operate, to exhibit and ensure its survival.

Blue-dyeing as a special type of textile printing became an independent industry during the 18th century. Since the beginning, blue-dyers have maintained and looked after the pressing plates which by now have become a symbol of their trade. We also have to note the plant used for blue-dyeing, indigo as well as the reserve method with which it went hand in hand. The craftsmen received indigo in its final form, as from the 19th century preparation was carried out on an imperial level.

Textile pressing can be divided into two types of techniques, positive and reserve or indirect pressing. In the former the pattern is pressed directly onto the base material, whereas in the latter method the pattern is deprived of dye. There are a variety of different recipes for insulating pastes. The method is derived from the batik technique of India which was preceded in Europe by the not so durable pigment and mordent printing, which were used to solidify the pattern.

Material proof states that traditions of textile pressing existed in Hungary before the emergence of blue-dyeing. The first mention of the reserve method of blue-dyeing originates from Jakab Kistler from Sopron and dates back to the 17th century. The term was first mentioned in writing in 1770 in Pápa by a blue-dyer named István Bengly. The trade of blue-dyeing appeared in Hungary in the 18th century and unfolded over the course of the following century at which time workshops operated within the frame of dyers' guilds.

Parallel to this, textile manufactures were founded. Due to a number of immigrant foreign craftsmen there was a wave of new workshops opened primarily in the Dunántúl region (Kluge of Pápa). The following wave of workshops were set up in the second half of the 19th century. A number of craftsmen from the Dunántúl region moved to the Alföld in search of a new market while many locals of that region opened

workshops. At the turn of the century, there were hundreds of workshops in operation meeting the demands of the local market.

Blue-dye textiles first became popular in interior design, and later in fashion design, including as a means of complementing or replacing expensive, ornate clothing. With the development of means of transport, workshops possessing the required material and intellectual resources were able to answer demands in their products and export to other regions and even neighbouring countries.

The influx of cheap Austrian and Czech products created competition for workshops. Only the ones possessing the required material and intellectual wealth could compete. The shortage of materials during WWI and WWII, as well as the periods of financial crisis, also resulted in a number of workshops closing, swept away by the upheavals of the mid-20th century.

On dyers' forums examples of entire workshops put up for sale are still frequent. For many workshops the path to survival lay in the replacement of indigo by the cheaper indanthrene. The workshops that made it through to the renaissance of blue-dyeing in the 1970s could gain a bit of momentum. Today there are five workshops upholding the memory of this once great industry with the help of handicraft organisations and government support.

From the second half of the 20th century onwards blue-dyed souvenirs became popular, which require a different range of pattern types. The souvenir scarf usually depicts a scene or a destination for tourists. The blue-dye scarf created by Ramasetter portraying the castle of Sümeg is an early instance of advertising souvenir products. Other new forms of products are textiles bearing national symbols ordered by political parties for campaign purposes or items to commemorate anniversaries of institutions, religious festivities, souvenir scarves, calendars, wall-hangings bearing the embroidered text of a family blessing (*házi áldás*) and so on.

During the 1950s a number of textile-designers set out to collect patterns throughout the country and managed to salvage a number of patterns, all the while inspiring new ones. As traditional Hungarian dress became fashionable in the 1960's blue-dye products made a comeback. The minute patterned, frilled blue-and-white clothes decorated with white lace did not always represent real blue-dye products. Blue-dye textiles were easily copied by factory carton-pressing, making for a cheap product.

The textile company Pamutnyomóipari Vállalat (Cotton Printing Co) started producing 'blue-dye'





“The delicate pattern of small flowers on the Hungarian textile fuses with the codes of contemporary sportswear and the wrap around principle of traditional Indian dress.”

cartons in 1973. Many applied artists turned to blue-dyeing which was taught at the department of textiles of the Polytechnic of Applied Arts (today Moholy-Nagy University). Irén Bódy devoted her career to saving the trade of blue-dyeing. The Blue Dyers' Museum, as well as many blue-dye workshops, are indebted to her efforts.

Currently, Hungarian blue-dyeing is represented by the five active workshops. As they are the sole creators of these products, they are key players in upholding this trade and tradition. Fortunately, all five workshops are in full knowledge of their significance as this is one of the contributing factors in this initiative. Workshops have realised that this tradition can only be upheld and maintained through cooperation. All of the workshops work strictly in keeping with traditions and utilising only the ancient technologies of blue-dyeing. They use plates that are sometimes over a hundred years old, which they have repaired and maintained throughout the years looking after the original motivic wealth.

The families know each other well and do not compete with one another in this microcosm but instead try to make their mark by going about their trade each in their own and unique way. They do not have an independent organisation; however, all masters of this trade are members of the local branch of NESZ [Association of Hungarian Folk Artists]. In the plants that are temporarily not producing textiles the workshop is untouched and gives room to exhibitions in an attempt to try and raise the new generation of craftsmen.

Demand in products of the blue-dye workshops has dwindled in recent decades. Their main outlets are the folk-dancing movements and traditional restaurants, however, even these kinds of orders have lessened over the years. It is hard to compete with cheap imported textiles. One type of clientele that still remembers and respects the craftsmen and can afford their products is tourists, who are the main buyers of blue-dyed dress. Were the phrase 'blue-dye' to become a synonym of 'high quality', this would attract customers to these more expensive products. Reinforcing this with a carefully designed marketing scheme would be of great significance to the trade. Raising all services to the adequate quality and the restoration of workshops from a visitor-friendly perspective complemented by an area for shows and arts-and-crafts sessions are essential tasks that workshops cannot carry out without outside help.

The craft of patchwork quilting has also discovered the art of blue-dyeing. Hungarian patchwork quilters are a well-organised association, with highly dedicated members. Blue-dye textiles are amongst their most favoured materials and have been the focus of

many grand applications and exhibitions, which have drawn surprisingly large crowds and contributed to popularising blue-dyed textiles and their range of patterns.

All 225 blocks of the patchwork piece titled 'Debreceni Dear Jane' (DDJ) are blue-dye textiles of one type or another.

Another such initiative was started with the opening of the 2006 exhibition of the Museum of Ethnography titled 'Jeans forever' (*Az örökéletű farmer*). The exhibition focused on the indigo plant as the link between blue-dyeing and jeans, creating an opportunity to combine the two materials. The resulting clothing demonstrates that the two kinds of textiles are not so different. They are the basis of wonderful fashion designs: practical collections readily adoptable for everyday wear.

The blue-white combination of blue-dye products has influenced a number of artists who use the same colour-scheme. Their exhibition was titled 'Quasi' blue-dye as they didn't necessarily follow the strict procedures of the reserve method, but rather the different versions of handcrafting techniques.

The central question was how to reply in a contemporary fashion to an ancient Eastern pattern technique, reserve pressing which has gone through so many renewals and changes since its arrival in Europe in the 16th century, utilising its full toolkit. An increasing number of festivals have been organized in Hungary since the end of the 20th century. It was at this time that the council of Nagynyárad went on to cooperate with the Sárdi blue-dye workshop to organize a national festival dedicated to blue-dyeing.

The first edition took place in 2000. Since then a constantly evolving version of the Festival has been organised annually. The objective of the village and its inhabitants, dressing up in blue for the occasion, and that of the various activities on offer (workshop viewing, exhibitions of blue-dyed products, fashion-shows) are to popularise the trade and the village. Some of the clothes on display do not represent the traditional folk dresses that feel alien to today's youth, but rather a type of clothing that is more fashionable and tailored in a modern way for everyday use.

The tradition of blue-dyeing in Hungary represents a complex value from the point of view both of ethnography and the history of technology which renders it essential that it be safeguarded and its importance be clearly proclaimed.

The future of the five workshops in existence, in one form or other, is uncertain. At the same time learning this trade depends upon a number of variables,

however, outside the context of family tradition it is hardly possible. Safeguarding would give a sense of security not only to the heritage but also to its current guardians, the craftsmen who could be backed up and protected by well-defined cultural and industrial laws and a background guaranteeing the quality of both studying and working in this area of trade.

It is essential to grasp every opportunity to popularise this craft and help it live on in the collective culture in order to make the products of blue-dyeing an object of value for future generations. ■



1 Various steps of traditional  
Blueprinting in Hungary,  
Kekfészkovacs manufacture



# — HEAD Genève

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Workshop Blueprint with First year Bachelor

Fashion design students under guidance

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HEAD – Genève, Dr. Alexandra Schüssler,

anthropologist, guest lecturer, Madeline Ribeiro,

technical assistant, Quentin Langlet, designer,

fashion design assistant and coordinated by

Jasmina Barshovi, deputy of the Fashion Design

department

**Blue-dye workshops that donated textiles**

Austria: [www.originalblaudruck.at](http://www.originalblaudruck.at) and

Wagner family [www.blaudruck.at](http://www.blaudruck.at),

Czech Republic: Joch family manufacture,

nowadays run by Klara Jurková,

[www.straznický-modrotisk.cz](http://www.straznický-modrotisk.cz),

Hungary: [www.kekfestokovacs.com](http://www.kekfestokovacs.com),

Slovakia: Modrotlač Rabada [www.modrotlacmr.sk](http://www.modrotlacmr.sk)

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