

BREAKING THE CANON: TOWARDS FASHION MUSEOLOGY IN SERBIA*

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ABSTRACT

Often dominated by the canonization of fine arts, Serbian museology has only recently started to follow the global trends of exhibiting fashion. Since the publication of the first study to position Serbian fashion exhibitions within the frameworks of contemporary (Western) fashion museology,¹ national museums have witnessed a gradual acceptance of fashion museology as a valid discipline, moving from ethnological and anthropological placement of fashion in museums to the present-day fashion museology. By expanding the scope of the study, the author aims to further initiate the establishment of fashion museology by analyzing the state of fashion and its studies within Serbian university curricula, academic publishing, and museums. Special attention will be given to the fashion exhibition Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York as a catalyst for establishing fashion museology in Serbia.

KEYWORDS

fashion museology, fashion studies, fashion exhibitions, Balkans, Serbia

INTRODUCTION:

THE STATE OF FASHION STUDIES IN THE BALKANS, THE STATE OF THE BALKANS IN FASHION STUDIES

Fashion studies, or as Christopher Breward, one of the leading scholars of fashion globally sees them, the new body of work complementing those specialized studies of aspects of fashion culture that have been completed within the fields of social, cultural, and economic history² became an integral part of both academic and museum environments in the 21st century. To paraphrase Breward, fashion studies have been, by acknowledging the concerns of anthropology, psychology, linguistics, sociology, cultural studies, and art history on one and by concentrating on the fashionable western dress on the other side, established as a practice independent from aforementioned disciplines.³ Fashion museology (alongside fashion history and fashion theory constituting fashion studies) and its subject – fashion curation and fashion exhibitions – can be seen as the desire to divorce the subject (fashion) from its crude economic context, the desire revealed in exhibitions which have deliberately echoed the concerns of academic investigations of fashion.⁴ In *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, Marie Riegels Melchior distinguishes three periods in the establishment of fashion museology: The first period (1930s – 1960s) is the period of dress museology, when (Western) museums approached the single, tangible object with the focus on dress / costume rather than fashion with the aim to document it and build a collection; the second period (1960s – 1990s) shifted the focus from the single object to the visual impression and narrative of the exhibition; while the third period (1990s – present) marks the time in which fashion museology emerged from fashion studies and sees the rise of the fashion curator and spectacular shows creating unique visitors experiences.⁵

Given the historical circumstances and its geopolitical position, it is quite understandable that Serbia, like other Balkan and former Yugoslav countries, could not have been a pioneer in fashion studies. The main reason for the Balkans not joining the fashion studies academia until recently is that fashion was initially the

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¹ *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology, Fashion and Anthropology*, 2015, volume 10, number 4, Stefan Žarić, *Musealization without Museology: National Museums and Fashion Exhibitions between History, Theory and Practice*, pp. 915-924.

² BREWARD, C. 2003, p. 9.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵ *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, 2014, Marie Riegels Melchior, *Introduction: Understanding Fashion and Dress Museology*, pp. 1-18.

product of Western capitalism, its material culture and aesthetic system, which led to the emergence and establishment of fashion studies as a predominantly Western discipline. The West thus became, as Luz Neira Garcia says in the paper *The Centre of the Periphery in Fashion Studies: First Questions*, the central place of fashion studies, with everything else becoming the periphery:

“Most studies of fashion in the West emerge from theories that have taken shape and have been formulated in a European and North American context, because these theories have been given an impetus in geographic places where fashion has been endowed with political, economic and social significance – the so-called ‘central’ places. This means that not only fashion but also the grounds for studying it have always been (and continue to be) extensively reproduced in the regions that are regarded as peripheral to the field.”⁶

Having in mind the dominance of patriarchal societal norms in countries of the Balkan region and their dramatically slow transition from monarchist, communist, and socialist regimes towards (neo)liberal democracies, little space was left for Balkan academia to welcome fashion in its system. Socialist regimes established in Eastern European countries after WWII, among other things, copied Soviet clothing practices by denouncing Western fashion as a bourgeois perversion and advocating for the creation of classless socialist clothes adjusted to the working woman.⁷ As utilitarian clothing was given priority over the aestheticism of fashion, it is understandable that fashion could not as easily and rapidly become the object of academic and more importantly museological interest as it did in the West – North America and Western Europe.

In former Yugoslav republics, the process of studying fashion theoretically, historically and museologically (in addition to already existing studies of fashion, textile, costume, and clothes design) became more dynamic and inclusive in Slovenia and Croatia upon their accession to the European Union, which led to an increasing number of fashion exhibitions, symposia, and publications. This means that both countries are proving capable of following the mainstream cultural practices of their Western peers, thus justifying their own membership of the bloc. In fact, it could be argued that Croatia is the regional leader in fashion studies, given the several fashion and design related shows and publications it launches annually, alongside the establishment of the Centre for Research of Fashion and Clothing in Zagreb in 2013, and graduate studies in Theory and Culture of Fashion at the Faculty of Textile Technology, University of Zagreb.⁸

The lack of attention given to fashion by academics from the Balkans like art historians and less by anthropologists, whose western counterparts actually influenced the emergence of fashion studies in the West, is not the only reason for fashion being understudied in the region. At the same time, Western fashion academia remained self-centered for many decades and it still isn't showing a notable interest in Balkan fashion history, contemporary fashion design, or fashion exhibitions. This originates in a cemented perception in Western, particularly politics of North America and European Union of the Balkan region as Europe's internal Exotic Other, unable to overcome its conflicts. Because fashion has been considered a European invention, Eurocentrism and exoticism are not separate from fashion dynamics.⁹ As this Otherness functions as a constitutive aspect in forming the image of the Self, by equating terms of European Union and Europe all other countries which are not member states of EU are automatically excluded from Europe as well.¹⁰

In this case, by claiming ownership upon European identity, The Self (European Union) refuses to integrate The Other within its cultural (and any other) identity. As such, The Balkans, Western Balkans in particular, remain only politically, but not culturally visible on the map of the world. This problematic I further observed while researching contemporary Estonian and Serbian fashion designs and their (in)visibility in the West:

⁶ *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, Special Issue: *The State of Fashion Studies*, 2018, volume 5, number 1, Luz Garcia Neira, *The Centre of the Periphery in Fashion Studies: First Questions*, pp. 95-110.

⁷ VELIMIROVIĆ, D. 2008, p. 37.

⁸ Croatia's most notable contribution to regional fashion studies is publication *Theory and Culture of Fashion* (Faculty of Textile Technology University of Zagreb, 2018), which for the first time offered an insight on all aspects of fashion studies: theory, history, and museology, both through theoretical perspectives and case studies. Additionally, one of the world's leading scholars in Socialist and Eastern European fashion, Djurdja Bartlett, is originally from Croatia.

⁹ NEIRA GARCIA, L. 2018, p. 96.

¹⁰ *Sociological Review*, 2018, volume 48, number 3, Dejan Jović, *Europe Outside the European Union? New Dilemmas in Defining European Identity*, pp. 359-394.

“Fashion academia expanded its scope mostly to those fashions whose cultures the West both positively and negatively affected. Furthermore, this inclusivity could be read as a sort of redemption for historical “misbehavior” of dominant structures towards the oppressed ones. As a response to Black Lives Matter and Beyonce’s *Lemonade*, African cultures came to focus, resulting in the splendor of costumes in *Black Panther*, celebrating the creative expression of Africa’s cultural diversity. Discussions on controversial laws banning different Islamic veils in the West inspired San Francisco’s De Young museum to stage *Contemporary Muslim Fashions* exhibit while the USA’s problematic stance on immigration sparked the conversation about South, Central, and Native American fashions respectively. It could be argued that only countries which were historically and in the present moment “trapped” between the East and the West, which is the case with both Estonia and Serbia, are the ones the least visible to the fashion academia.”¹¹

These in-between, or according to Luz Neira Garcia, peripheral fashion cultures are in the discourse of Eurocentrism sidelined and often totally ignored from histories of fashion.¹² Exhibiting Fashion Symposium, organized in March 2019 by The Fashion Institute of Technology in New York where it took place is the proof of that. Out of twelve presentations, only two were based on non-western phenomena: one about Mexico, and another one about African Diaspora, while the rest were whether about fashion studies as such, or fashion exhibits in the West.¹³ What could somewhat justify this lack of inclusiveness, in fashion museology particularly, is the fact that up to this paper nothing was written on relationship between fashion and museums in Serbia in English language,¹⁴ thus disabling Western scholars from being introduced to the subject. Besides political isolationism, the practice of constantly overlooking the “in-between” countries and these countries constantly overlooking fashion could further lead to other troubling discourses, like cultural appropriation. For example, insufficient branding and protection of the Romanian blouse in Romania led to the scandal with fashion house Dior, which copied models of traditional Romanian folk costumes of the Bihor region community without giving the credit (or profit) to Romania. Only as a response to this, Romanian fashion magazine *Beau Monde* decided to launch the campaign *Bihor Couture* joined by the cause *La Blouse Roumaine*, branding the authenticity of Romanian ethnic textiles and folk costumes and their usage in contemporary fashion design. Led by such image of fashion and its studies in the region, or the lack thereof, I aim to further initiate the positioning of fashion studies – predominantly museology – within national academic and museum systems respectively.

Given aforementioned, the idea of this paper will be demonstrated through the problematic of fashion in university curricula, academic publishing, and museum environment. As a potential solution to the problem, through a case study - the exhibit *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York* – which unifies university coursework, publishing, and museums, I will illustrate how fashion museology could potentially be established as an academic discipline in the country.

(WHERE IS) FASHION IN SERBIAN UNIVERSITIES, PUBLICATIONS, AND MUSEUMS?

Positioning of fashion in Serbian museum environment is still principally inseparable from positioning of fashion within the country’s academic publishing and university curricula.

Minor production of fashion exhibits, even in the country’s only Museum of Applied Art which stages a fashion related exhibits only once in a few years,¹⁵ is connected to the absence of fashion studies in the university curricula and academic publishing. Since the foundation of the Chair of Art History in 1905, further formation of the Department of Art History in 1963, and then the latest revision of the study program conducted in 2014, studies of art history at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, do not offer a single course on

¹¹ Estonian Art: The Paint Issue, 1/2019, Stefan Žarić, Ones to Watch: Estonia and Serbia’s Young Fashion Designers, pp. 76-81.

¹² NEIRA GARCIA, L. 2018, p. 96.

¹³ Another example is the mentioned publication, *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice* (Bloomsbury, 2014) edited by Marie Riegels Melchior and Birgitta Svensson, which included papers only by scholars from Northwestern Europe and North America. *Fashion Curating: Critical Practice in the Museum and Beyond* edited by Annamari Vaska and Hazel Clark (Bloomsbury, 2019) saw the same issue, with 12 out of 13 papers being written by scholars from Northwestern Europe, North America and Australia, and one paper by a Chinese scholar.

¹⁴ In a broader Balkan context, Xenia Politou, the curator at Benaki Museum in Athens realized a notable contribution by writing about Greek fashion museology in English.

¹⁵ The last fashion exhibition held at the Museum was Aleksandar Joksimović curated by Bojana Popović in 2015.

history and theory of fashion, or design and applied arts overall. Interestingly, in 1962 art and costume historian Pavle Vasić who served as a professor both at the Faculty of Philosophy and the Academy (later Faculty) of Applied Arts noted that history of costume utilizes its own methods, classifications, and divisions which often coincide with the periodization in history of art.¹⁶ While at the Faculty of Applied Arts Vasić indeed developed studies of History of Costume, such coursework (despite its potential which could have affirmed a course in history of fashion) did not land in the curricula of art history.¹⁷ Nowadays, even departments of Fashion Design, Textile Design, and Stage Costume at the Faculty of Applied Arts, besides the course Costume Design (former History of Costume conducted by Vasić) and general courses on art and design history, do not offer specialized courses in history and theory of fashion. However, aforementioned study programs do not educate students to become curators, theoreticians, or historians of arts, unlike the program in art history. Except in the cases of a focused paper or thesis research, students of art history are directed to fine arts exclusively. Without professionals educated in fashion history, theory and museology, exhibiting activities of museums are largely dominated by painting related shows which further solidify seemingly unbreakable canonization of fine arts. The academia is the one deciding what is worth of being studied, and what is, upon being studied, worth of being presented through a museum platform.

The only study program offering a theoretical, in this case anthropological perspective on fashion is the program in Ethnology and Anthropology¹⁸ through the course Anthropology of Fashion at doctoral level, conducted by Danijela Velimirović,¹⁹ having its roots in sociocultural approach to fashion. Back in 1980, sociologist of culture Aleksandar Todorović published a book that from the nowadays perspective could be seen as the only fashion studies publication in the 20th century Serbia: *Sociology of Fashion*. As Todorović stated, as an aspect of culture, fashion has been researched through ethnology, cultural anthropology, and sociology of culture.²⁰ This explains why anthropology provides the only academically established approach in studying fashion, and why it is not surprising that separate fashion collections in Serbian museums do not exist, as anthropology sees fashion inherent to material and consumerist culture, or as Todorović called it, as a “social fact”. The Museum of Applied Art came the closest to the idea(l) of a fashion collection with two of its collections: Textile and Costume, and Contemporary Applied Art and Design, but neither of these is solely focused on fashion.²¹ Unlike the Museum of Applied Art, other museums catalog and store their fashion items in collections of material culture, ethnology, cultural history, or applied arts overall.²² As such, most of local fashion exhibitions in Serbia were actually organized by museums focused on ethnology or such departments within museums. Xenia Politou observed the similar problem in Greece, where for a long time official museum policy gave priority to the preservation of material relics of the ancient world, so the only organizations systematically collecting heirlooms of the comparatively recent past – the Neohellenic material culture – were folklore museums.²³ Today, Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation has the most systematic collection of clothing items (fashion, traditional and theater costume, uniforms, vestments) in Greece. Several major fashion exhibits and events held in Serbia also testify of

¹⁶ VASIĆ, P. 1974, p. 15.

¹⁷ However, through an insight in Vasić's published lectures it can be concluded that students of art history most certainly acquired the knowledge of costume, and vice versa, as in addition to History of Costume, he taught Painting at the Academy as well.

¹⁸ The first complex academic study in fashion history was conducted at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, through the PhD thesis of Mirjana Prošić Dvornić, „Clothing in Belgrade from 1878 to 1915” in 1985. One of the members for the thesis defense commission was Pavle Vasić. The thesis was published in 2006 under the title „Clothing in Belgrade in the 19th and at the Beginning of the 20th Century” bringing a detailed insight on over 500 pages into economic, industrial, and cultural aspects of clothing in Belgrade and the change of styles during the stated period.

¹⁹ In 2008 Velimirović authored the first monograph of a fashion designer in Serbia, “Aleksandar Joksimović: Fashion and Identity,” based on her PhD thesis defended at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology.

²⁰ PETROVIĆ, A. 1980, p. 7.

²¹ Fashion items from both collections are available on Europeana platform. URL: <https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/search?f%5B%5B%5D%5B%5D=Museum+of+Applied+Art%2C+Belgrade&view=grid> (quoted 22. 3. 2019).

²² Regional Museum Maribor can serve as an example of a good practice to other local and regional museums because it has classified objects of textile provenance into several different collections (Liturgical Textiles, Banners, Fashion, Ethnology, and Uniforms) rather than cataloging them within sub collections of a textile collection. On the other side, Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb still catalogs its fashion objects in Textile Collection, despite them (including pieces by Patou, Balmain, Valentino, Fendi, Moschino) being the most numerous objects in the Collection. The Textile Collection of the Museum of Arts and Crafts is digitized under AthenaPlus Network. URL: <http://athena.muo.hr/?object=linked&c2o=16> (quoted 22. 3. 2019).

²³ POLITOU, X. 2010, pp. 29-37, p. 29.

ethnological and anthropological museum valorization of fashion. For example, in 2007 the National Museum of Čačak's Department of Ethnology staged a major fashion exhibit, *Fashion Mirrored by the Sixties* authored by Snežana Šaponjić Ašanin while the Department of Ethnology at the National Museum Šabac organized the exhibit *Fashion of Hats* in 2013, authored by Aleksandra Jovanović. In 2011 the annual meeting of ICOM's Costume Committee was held at Belgrade's Ethnographic Museum with the same museum staging the first retrospective exhibit of one fashion designer in Serbia - Mirjana Marić: *Fashion and Design* - in 2014, authored by the museum's director at the time, Mirjana Menković. Nevertheless, the Museum of Applied Art's activity of first collecting and then exhibiting fashion prior to 2000s was pivotal for other museums to join the cause.

The first fashion exhibit in Serbia - *Women's Fashion from the mid 19th Century to 1930s* - took place back in 1966 at The MAA. The show was curated by the Museum's first curator of textiles and costume, art historian Dobrila Stojanović whose statement that the exhibit aims to display the material that is hard to acquire as it was often destroyed or not enough appreciated²⁴ witnesses of pioneering attempts to introduce fashion to Serbian museums. This exhibit was followed by the exhibit *Urban Dress in Serbia in the 19th and early 20th Century* by the same curator in 1980, while the period in between the two wars was for the first time exhibited in 2000 by Bojana Popović, the Museums Contemporary Applied Art and Design curator, in the exhibit *Fashion in Belgrade 1918 – 1941*. Even though they didn't elaborate on museological positioning of fashion in accompanying publications, researches by Dobrila Stojanović and Mirjana Prošić Dvornić of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century clothing in Serbia, and the exhibit by Bojana Popović are the first to in-detail deal with the influences of global fashion to clothing in Serbia.²⁵

As such, it could be argued that Serbia has a solid dress museology, which according to Riegels Melchior pertains to the actual material and practice of collecting dress, but not fashion museology which emphasizes the visibility of the museum through the staging of spectacular show, primarily creating unique visitors experiences.²⁶ Only in the last decade, the first academic and museum impulses towards studying fashion the sense of western established fashion studies have finally emerged, with Serbia seeing its first publications on the subject. In 2010, Marina Kocareva Ranisavljev published *Fashion and Clothing: Psychosocial Aspects of Clothing*, whereas one year after, Iva Jestratijević published *The Study of Fashion: Signs and Meanings of Clothing Praxis*. As subtitles of the books indicate, both authors shifted the focus of studying fashion from sociocultural anthropology by offering psychological, communicational, and semiotic reading of fashion, aligning with contemporary tendencies in fashion studies.²⁷ What Kocareva Ranisavljev and Jestratijević have succeeded in doing is establishing fashion as a credible cultural text within contemporary theories of culture and arts, thus liberating it from the material culture framework. However, neither of the two authors touched upon the relation between fashion and museums. Sensing that fashion studies are still incomplete without at least the basics of approaches to different aspects of fashion, Danijela Velimirović initiated the first thematic publication in fashion studies acknowledging fashion theory, history, and museology respectively. Thematic issue of journal *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology*, titled *Fashion and Anthropology* edited by Velimirović in 2015 has gathered art historians, anthropologists, ethnologists and fashion theoreticians in order to acknowledge the interdisciplinarity and relevance of fashion studies, and more importantly, initiate the discipline in our environment.²⁸ Despite its name that would suggest that fashion would be interpreted only anthropologically, papers in the publication have in fact provided diverse perspectives, including today's very actual question on role and significance of fashion within museums.²⁹ On the invite by the editor, I contributed to the publication with the paper *Musealization without Museology: National Museums and Fashion Exhibits Between History, Theory, and Practice*, which marked

²⁴ STOJANOVIĆ, D. 1966, p. 1. URL: <https://digbibliotekampu.loccloudhosting.net/items/show/17> (quoted 22. 3. 2019).

²⁵ Zbornik Muzeja primenjene umetnosti, 2/2006, Mirjana Menković, Tri izložbe posvećene odevanju i ukrašavanju, pp. 115-119.

²⁶ RIEGELS MELCHIOR, M. 2014, pp. 1-18.

²⁷ Interestingly, *The Study of Fashion* was published under the edition *Theory of Contemporary Art*, alongside books on well established artistic phenomena like fine arts, theater, and literature, (un)intentionally referring to the publishing of *Fashion* by Christopher Breward within Oxford History of Art series in 2003, as Breward was the first to author an academic book on fashion.

²⁸ *Etnoantropološki problemi*, 2015, volume 10, number 4, Danijela Velimirović, *Moda i antropologija*, pp. 791-794.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 791.

the first paper on contemporary fashion museology in Serbia³⁰ after presenting its tenets as a guest curator of History Written by Fashion exhibit held at the City Museum of Novi Sad in 2015.³¹

Through the paper, I focused on showing that in Serbia there is an increasing practice of organizing fashion exhibitions, but at the same time, there is the lack of academic explanations on why is fashion exhibited and what is its relation to a museum. As such, by juxtaposing local and regional exhibition production to that of renowned Western museums, the paper pointed out to certain aspects of fashion museology well-known in the West, but up to that point not largely incorporated in the Serbian academic discourse.³² Musealization without Museology hence offered an insight into a concise history of fashion museology and conditions which influenced its emergence in Western societies, as well as an insight in observations on the subject by scholars like Valerie Steele and Judith Clark. Besides the paper proving seminal, as only two years after its publishing another study on fashion museology was published,³³ it has also served as the base for developing my MA thesis and the exhibition project Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York, which will be presented as a case study of affirmation of fashion museology.

CASE STUDY: MAISON BARILLI: BELGRADE / NEW YORK

The exhibition Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York was initially organized at the memorial home of Serbian multimedia artist Milena Pavlović Barilli (5. 11. 1909 - 6. 3. 1945), The Gallery of Milena Pavlović Barilli in Požarevac, Serbia, in 2017 (Image 1). Principally, the exhibition was based on my MA thesis, Fashion Illustrations of Milena Pavlović Barilli, defended at the Department of Art History at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade.



Image 1: View of the exhibition Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York, The Gallery of Milena Pavlović Barilli, Požarevac, Serbia, December 2017 (Photo: Draško Vujić).

While Barilli realized quite a complex oeuvre which includes fashion illustration, graphic and product design, painting, poetry, and costume design, Serbian art history was keen to disregard her work in the field of fashion and design as inferior to high forms of art - painting and poetry. The 20th century criticism in Serbia saw a sin-

³⁰ In 1976, Dobrila Stojanović published the paper Textile and Clothes as Subjects of Collecting and Preserving and their Valorization in Museums: Beginnings of Collecting of Textile Objects on our Grounds with a Reference to Monastery Treasuries which elaborated methods of textile museology in the country for the first time. See: Journal of the Museum of Applied Art 13/2017, Draginja Maskareli, Museum of Applied Art in Belgrade and the Beginnings of Fashion Museology in Serbia: Department of Textile and Costume 1950-1980, pp. 22-29.

³¹ The City Museum of Novi Sad organized the first fashion exhibit in Novi Sad: Fashion Legacy of Novi Sad's Citizens in 1989.

³² In 2008, Mirjana Menković (former director of the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade) published the article proposing the translation of 15 fashion history books to Serbian language, including books by Valerie Steele, Christopher Breward, Lou Taylor etc. The author stated that these publications are often quoted in the world, but that in Serbia their usage is fragmentary and limited as they are available only in private and not public libraries. See Mirjana Menković, Istorija mode i odevanja: Predlog knjiga za prevod na srpski jezik, in: Muzeji, volume 1, pp. 173-185.

³³ Journal of the Museum of Applied Art 13/2017, Draginja Maskareli, Museum of Applied Art in Belgrade and the Beginnings of Fashion Museology in Serbia: Department of Textile and Costume 1950 -1980, pp. 22-29.

gle paper which elaborated on Barilli's design works³⁴ while all the other publications, including the first monograph on the artist, Milena Pavlović Barilli – Life and Work (1966), authored by one of the biggest authorities of Serbian art history, Miodrag B. Protić, took a negative stance towards it, or in most of the cases, completely ignored it. At the same time, most exhibitions about Barilli showcased her paintings exclusively. Such positioning of the artist led to her canonization as a painter and poet, making her fashion related works invisible both to academic and museum scenes. In the last decade, parallel with the affirmation of gender studies and fashion studies in the country, first interdisciplinary readings of Barilli's art and life by the national art history emerged, which resulted in thus far the most complex publication on the artist in 2010, *New Meanings of Milena Pavlović Barilli*. Out of three volumes the monograph is consisting of, the second volume, titled *Pro Futuro*, is solely devoted to Bailli's work in fashion, costume, and graphic design. However, the artist is still in most of the cases interpreted as a painter, which is why, through the MA thesis research, I aimed to further position fashion both within and beyond her oeuvre: within by showing that fashion and fine arts were inseparable in her artistic expression, and beyond by analyzing correlations between her fashion works and the production of western fashion cultures – design, illustration, photography – in the first half of the 20th century.

The research for *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York* started off by chronologically mapping the artist's fashion illustrations, as art history thus far structured the periodization of her work based on dominant stylistic changes in her paintings and places where she created them: Belgrade and Munich phase, Rome / Metaphysical period, Parisian / Surrealist phase, and American phase. Such periodization, initiated by Protić and followed by many other scholars³⁵ acknowledged her fashion works in the American period only, often describing them as “commercial” and done out of “financial necessity” while the previous periods have been valued in terms of the tradition of European painting. On the other side, the artist did create fashion illustrations throughout all phases, not just during the American. In fact, Belgrade and Munich phases are completely dominated by fashion illustrations, as Barilli created her first painting only before leaving Munich in 1927, meaning that for the first half of her life she produced fashion illustrations, and then fashion illustrations and paintings respectively. However, as soon as she incorporated painting in her repertoire, the Belgrade period, in which she created fashion illustrations only, was joined to Munich period. In accordance with that, further phases of her work have been foreshadowed by painting as well.

Interestingly, the first painting the artist created was not a self-portrait, or a portrait of a family member, ruler, historical figure etc., but a portrait of a Hollywood celebrity icon, Rudolph Valentino. More importantly, Barilli represented him in a costume of his role in the movie *The Sheik*, accentuating the power of costume in the process of (self)imagining and creating an artwork. Using the highest technique of fine arts – oil on canvas – for the first time, she did not present a self-portrait, portrait of a family member, friend, or a ruler, landscaper, still life, nor a religious subject, but fashion and popular culture. This portrait was the only oil on canvas presented at the exhibition *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York*, alongside fashion illustrations and Barilli's own fashion items. Since Valentino's portrait, elements of fashion remained omnipresent in her paintings. As such, even Barilli's canonization as a painter (if we are to disregard her fashion illustrations as a “lower” cultural product) could help us foster the narrative of establishing fashion history and fashion museology within the studies of art history coming back to Vasić's idea that methods of art and costume histories often coincide.³⁶

For this reason, the exhibit was named *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York*, emphasizing the fashion potential of the artist, as *maison* is a noun used for fashion houses. Home of Pavlović and Casa Barilli are two terms often used in reference to the artist's ancestry – a traditional Serbian household dominated by her mother's good manners, and a poetic, musical environment of her Italian father's family. *Maison Barilli* aimed to disrupt these narratives, and through a platform of a fashion exhibition offer a new reading of Milena Pavlović Barilli's life and work which was, from the starting point in Belgrade, to the end of her career in New York City marked by fashion. More importantly, the complete project was awarded with The Pavle Beljanski Memorial Collection Award for the Best Thesis in Art History – recognition established with the aim to foster graduates

³⁴ The paper titled *Milena Pavlović Barilli: Life and Work in New York 1939 – 1945* was published by the first researcher of Barilli's American period and her fashion illustrations, ballet costumes, and graphic design works, Olga Bataveljić, in 1979.

³⁵ This includes Lazar Trifunović's *Serbian Painting 1900 – 1950* (1973), Olivera Janković's *Milena Pavlović Barilli* (2001), Žana Gvozdenović's *Milena Pavlović Barilli: The Keys to Dreams* (2010).

³⁶ VASIĆ, P. 1974, p. 15.

of art history to develop innovative readings of national artistic phenomena. As such, the exhibit was, after its premiere in Požarevac, organized at The Pavle Beljanski Memorial Collection in Novi Sad, Serbia, in 2018. *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York* thus became the first fashion related exhibition in the history of the institution, renowned for its modernist painting collection.

For this occasion, the thesis was modified into an accompanying publication, *One Study of High Fashion and High Art*, whose purpose was to bridge the difference between high / elite and low / popular creative practices on the example of Barilli's fashion illustrations, as visitors of the Collection were not used to seeing fashion related content in its space. Both the exhibition and the publication conveyed the idea that fashion can rightfully be placed in a museum setting often reserved for high culture only. In that sense, the exhibition has served as a positive catalyst for the implementation of fashion museology through traditionally conceptualized art museum and a canonized art historical figure like Milena Pavlović Barilli.³⁷ As the project *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York* through a university thesis and in collaboration with two renowned national art museums, The Gallery of Milena Pavlović Barilli and The Pavle Beljanski Memorial Collection, the audience was more likely to acknowledge fashion as a high culture phenomenon which deserves its museology. Official statistics on numbers of visitors presented by The Collection's PR Department and the data extracted from the institution's Facebook page for the period of June 14th 2018 to December 30th 2018, we can observe how interest in a fashion exhibition operated in relation to other (painting focused) exhibitions at The Collection which took place in the indicated timeframe. As statistics show, 3116 guests visited The Mediterranean exhibition, 2534 *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York*, and 1552 Milan Konjović. While The Mediterranean scored the most visitors taking into account the summer tourist and festival season, *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York* was the exhibition with which the audience interacted the most through social media.

The first chart shows like reacts to the announcement of exhibits through the concept of a cover image on The Collection's Facebook page (Image 2). The cover image for the exhibition The Mediterranean organized at the museum prior to *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York* had 16 like reacts only, while *Maison Barilli* had 172. More importantly, the eponymous exhibit of a Serbian expressionist painter Milan Konjović organized

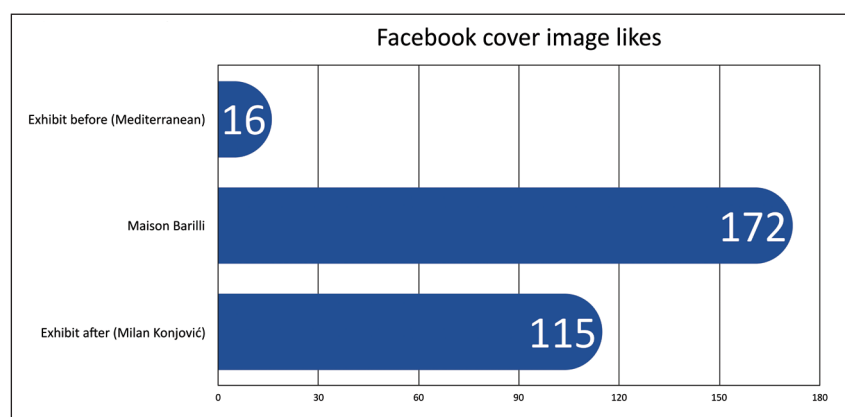


Image 2: Facebook cover image like reacts on The Pavle Beljanski Memorial Collection Facebook page for exhibitions The Mediterranean, *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York*, and Milan Konjović for the period from June 14th to December 30th 2018.

after the fashion exhibition still had less like reacts than *Maison Barilli* (115) but in relation to The Mediterranean significantly more. The second chart shows responses of Facebook users to invitations for the openings of all three exhibitions, following the same pattern (Image 3). The exhibition before had the least, the fashion exhibition the most, while again the exhibition after had less responses than the fashion exhibition and more than the first exhibition. Additionally, media platforms that otherwise do not necessarily write about museum events, like fashion magazines, reported on *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York*, which could be seen as one of the reasons for increased social media engagements with the exhibition. Fashion, according to Riegels Melchior, makes the museum newsworthy, both in general publications and specialized fashion media such as magazines, blogs, and other social media platforms.³⁸ As such, presented charts suggest that the audience expressed a significant interest in an exhibition of fashion and that such exhibition can act as a catalyst for engaging the audience and media with a museum. As Riegels Melchior concluded, the strength of fashion

³⁷ In Serbian contemporary culture, fashion is often misperceived only as a status symbol of national pop stars copying western trends whereas the exhibition pointed out to artistic and heritage aspects of fashion.

³⁸ RIEGELS MELCHIOR, M. 2014, pp. 1-18.

in museum is its public engagement; it heightens the appeal of the museum and thereby it gives it access to new audiences, both in terms of age and socioeconomic background.³⁹

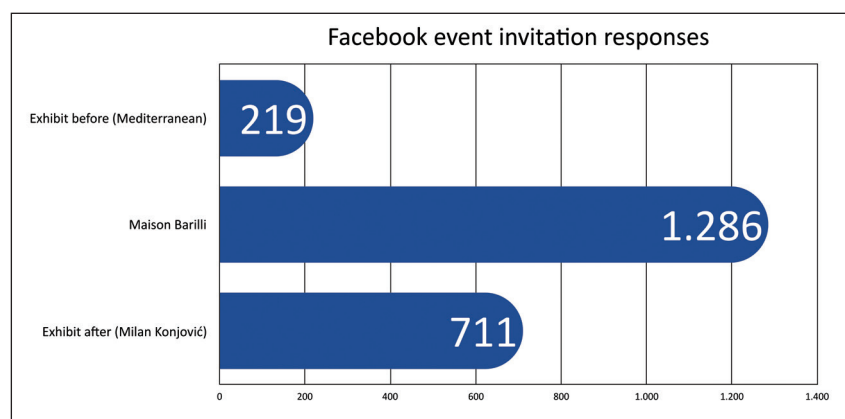


Image 3: Facebook event invitation responses on The Pavle Beljanski Memorial Collection Facebook page for exhibits Mediterranean, Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York, and Milan Konjović for the period from June 14th to December 30th 2018.

Such pattern also speaks of the increasing awareness of fashion in museums, which does not resonate any more with students, academics or curators interested in its museological potential, but with demands of the audience too. Activities of worldly renowned fashion collections, like The Met's Costume Institute and The V&A's fashion collection brought unprecedented records to institutions they are part of. The Met Gala and the V&A's annual fashion shows are drawing more and more attention of global media, professionals, and audiences respectively. Serbia certainly has phenomena who could help us, in terms of fashion exhibitions, to join the cause – Bernat Klein, Roksanda Ilinčić, and Ana Ljubinković to name a few. Only through joint efforts of evaluating fashion through university curricula, academic publishing, and museum presentations the solidified fine arts narratives and their museum canonization in national academic and museum institutions could be broken. Thus far biggest exhibit on Yugoslav architecture has been organized by the MoMA, and not by museums of any former Yugoslav republics. The question is: who will be the first to organize a blockbuster show about Roksanda Ilinčić: London or Belgrade?

SUMMARY

Having in mind the dominance of patriarchal societal norms in countries of the Balkan region and their dramatically slow transition from monarchist, communist, and socialist ideologies towards (neo)liberal democracies, little space was left for the academia in the Balkans to welcome fashion in its system. However, it is not solely the fault of academics of Balkan countries for fashion history, theory, and museology being undervalued and understudied in the region. Western (North American and Western European) fashion academia as the world's leader in fashion studies as well shows the lack of interest in Balkan fashions, which originates in a cemented perception in Western, particularly politics of North America and European Union of the Balkan region as Europe's internal Exotic Other, unable to overcome its conflicts. What could somewhat justify this lack of inclusiveness, in fashion museology in particularly, is the fact that up to this paper nothing was written on relationship between fashion and museums in Serbia in English language, thus disabling Western scholars from being introduced to the subject. Led by such image of fashion and its studies in the region and more narrowly in Serbia, or the lack thereof, the paper aims to further initiate the positioning of fashion museology within national academic and museum systems respectively. Given aforementioned, the idea of the paper is demonstrated through the problematic, or rather the absence or a minor presence of fashion in Serbian university curricula, academic publishing, and museum environment. As a potential solution to the problem, through a case study - the exhibition Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York – which unifies university coursework, publishing, and museums, the paper illustrates how fashion museology could potentially be established as an academic discipline in the country, by using a canonized art historical figure and a traditional fine arts collection as its platform.

³⁹ RIEGELS MELCHIOR, M. 2014, pp. 1-18.

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Strokovni članek (1.04)

IZVLEČEK

Srbska muzeologija, ki je pogosto pod vplivom kanonizacije likovne umetnosti, je šele v zadnjem času začela slediti svetovnim trendom razstavljanja mode. Od objave prve študije o umestitvi srbskih modnih eksponatov v sodobno (zahodno) muzeologijo mode, Muzealizacija brez muzeologije: narodni muzeji in razstave mode med zgodovino, teorijo in prakso, nacionalni muzeji doživljajo postopno sprejemanje muzeologije mode kot uveljavljene discipline, ki se giblje od etnološke in antropološke umestitve mode v muzeje do današnje muzeologije mode. Avtor želi nadalje s širitvijo obsega raziskav analizirati stanje mode in njenega preučevanja v univerzitetnih učnih načrtih, akademskem založništvu in muzejih. Posebna pozornost je namenjena modni razstavi Maison Barilli: Beograd / New York kot katalizatorju za uveljavitev muzeologije mode v Srbiji.

KLJUČNE BESEDE

muzeologija mode, študij mode, modni eksponati, Balkan, Srbija

POVZETEK

Ob upoštevanju prevlade patriarhalnih družbenih norm v državah Balkana in njihovega dramatično počasnega prehoda iz monarhističnih, komunističnih in socialističnih ideologij v smeri (neo)liberalnih demokracij je akademskim krogom na Balkanu ostalo kaj malo prostora (in pripravljenosti) za obravnavo mode znotraj svojega sistema.

Da je moda, bodisi lokalno bodisi globalno, v regiji tako podcenjena in neraziskana, pa ni zgolj krivda balkanskih akademikov. Tudi globalni (severnoameriški in zahodnoevropski) modni akademiki ne kažejo zanimanja za balkansko zgodovino mode, kar izvira iz okostenelega dojemanja zahodne politike, zlasti v ZDA in Evropski uniji, da je balkanska regija tisti Eksotični Drugi znotraj Evrope, ki ne zmore preseči svojih sporov. Kar bi lahko upravičilo to pomanjkanje vključenosti Zahoda, še posebej v muzeologijo mode, je dejstvo, da do izida tega članka v angleškem jeziku ni bilo napisanega ničesar o odnosu med modo in muzeji v Srbiji, kar je zahodnim znanstvenikom onemogočilo, da bi se seznanili s to tematiko. Na podlagi takšne podobe o modi in njenih raziskavah v regiji oziroma pomanjkanju le-teh je prispevek namenjen nadaljnjemu pozicioniranju in še pomembneje neodvisnosti modnih raziskav – predvsem muzeoloških – znotraj nacionalnega akademskega in muzejskega prostora. Kot smo že omenili, je cilj prispevka predstaviti problematiko oziroma odsotnost ali okrnjeno prisotnost mode v srbskih univerzitetnih učnih načrtih, akademskem založništvu in muzejskem okolju. Članek na podlagi študije primera – razstave Maison Barilli: Beograd / New York, ki združuje univerzitetno študijsko delo, založništvo in muzeje – prikazuje, kako bi lahko muzeologijo mode vzpostavili kot uveljavljeno disciplino, ob tem pa kanonizirano umetnostnozgodovinsko figuro in tradicionalno zbirko likovne umetnosti uporabili kot njeni platformi.