

Can Marfà, showcasing knitted fabric at the Mataró Museum

by MATARÓ MUSEUM

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Mataró has long been a leading centre for the production of knitted fabrics, a mainstay of the local economy and the industry that has lent the city its unique identity in Catalonia.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the knitted fabric industry fell into sharp decline in Catalonia as a result of successive crises across the whole of the textile sector. Against this backdrop, Jaume Vilaseca i Beltranpetit, an industrialist from Mataró, brought together a group of professionals (machine manufacturers, textile producers, mechanics, weavers, etc.) to begin work on the recovery, restoration, study and classification of diverse sources of material evidence related to knitted fabrics from an industry that was rapidly disappearing. His aim was to create a textile museum in Mataró dedicated exclusively to knitted fabric, bearing witness to its historical importance in the city and the wider region.

Mataró City Council, meanwhile, had been seeking an opportunity to present the city's textile heritage to the public as part of the Mataró Museum, adding a new element to its cultural and tourist amenities. It was particularly keen to focus on knitted fabric, given its crucial role in the history of the city.

The two projects converged and in 1996 the Jaume Vilaseca Foundation signed an agreement with the City Council to make the collection public. Although Vilaseca died in 1997, thanks to the commitment of his team of collaborators and the goodwill of his children the project went ahead, attracting support from private individuals, companies and professionals from across Catalonia. As a result, the Jaume Vilaseca Foundation succeeded in assembling one of the most remarkable collections of industrial heritage in the country.

In 2009, 2010 and 2011 the City Council undertook refurbishment of one of the factories in the architecturally striking industrial complex of Fàbrica Marfà, to house an extension to the Mataró Museum that would specialize in knitted fabrics. Fàbrica Marfà (or *Can Marfà*), a factory built in the Manchester style in 1880-1881, was once the leading producer of knitted fabrics in Spain, boasting the largest workforce and the finest product.

Can Marfà, a new extension of the Mataró Museum dedicated to the knitted fabric industry. Photograph: Sergi Ruiz.





▲ Partial view of the permanent exhibition: *Mataró, capital del gènere de punt*.

► Tools used in textile production, c. 1920-1940. Permanent collection.





Bank of knitting machines,
c. 1929. Permanent collection.

In 2013 the City Hall and the Jaume Vilaseca Foundation signed a definitive agreement to make the museum a reality. The collection donated by the Foundation is the basis of a permanent exhibition at the Mataró Museum focusing on the city as a capital of knitted fabrics. This makes it the third key area covered by the museum. The first two areas, which feature exhibitions in the main building at Can Serra, focus on Mataró as the Roman city of Iluro and on Mataró as a Mediterranean city.

Since 28 March 2015 **Can Marfà** has been home to the Mataró Museum's newest extension, dedicated to knitted fabrics, a crucial part of local and national history that did not have its own museum space until now. The new extension provides 1,800 square metres of space spread across three floors. The ground floor, which is a multipurpose space open to the general public, will host a varied programme of activities encompassing temporary exhibitions, lectures, conferences, presentations, educational workshops and more. The aim is to offer events that appeal to a diverse public, presenting the past and present of the sector alongside opportunities to learn and reflect, in a fun and entertaining setting.

The first floor houses a display of equipment, including a sizeable sample from the **Jaume Vilaseca Foundation collections**, organized thematically and chronologically. With this design, the curators aim to give visitors two distinct





Toton Comella display case.
Permanent collection.

paths to guide them through the exhibition. The first leads through the process of textile production, while the second charts the development of the textile industry in Catalonia from the eighteenth century to the present day. The display tells an economic and social history that many Mataró residents have experienced first-hand, inviting visitors to reflect on the events of the past and the challenges of the present and future. The exhibits on the first floor occupy an area of 600 square metres and are organized into seven thematic units that give context to the machinery, clothing, images and documents on display:

- Area 1. *Getting started:*** Video describing the characteristics of knitted fabric and the factors that have had a bearing on its production in Mataró and Catalonia.
- Area 2. *From fibre to mesh:*** The manufacturing processes for knitted fabric: spinning, weaving, conditioning and finishing, design, patterns, garments, labelling, packaging and sales.
- Area 3. *The beginnings of knitted fabric:*** Cottage industry and domestic workshops, the development and geographical locations of knitted fabric production in Catalonia. From handlooms to the first mechanical knitting machines.



Guided tour. Permanent collection.

- Area 4. *The industrialization of knitted fabric:*** The industrial production of undergarments and stockings. Technological innovation and the organization of labour in factories. The role of the industrial bourgeoisie in the development of the knitted fabric industry, exports and the consolidation of the Maresme cluster around Mataró.
- Area 5. *Fashion, imagination and sport:*** Changes in consumption patterns of apparel, the influence of fashion and the emergence of new products. The commitment to training and technological renewal.
- Area 6. *From autarky to sector growth.*** The economic policy of autarky and the impetus to build machinery for knitted fabrics. Ancillary industries. The nylon revolution.
- Area 7. *Future prospects:*** The continued survival of the Maresme cluster devoted to knitted fabrics. The importance of design, the commitment to quality and the application of new technologies. The sector's threats and opportunities.

The second floor, where work is ongoing, will provide space for collections, including a technical work area, a reserve section and storage facilities. It will house collections of clothing, scientific instruments and small-diameter machines. The aim is to provide access to a portion of the reserve collections, extending the display space and enabling visitors to view a significant proportion of the Jaume Vilaseca Foundation collections. The second floor will also have an educational space where visitors will be able to learn more about the displays on the first floor and gain hands-on experience.



Display case with stockings c.
1890-1910. Permanent collection.

Work is now under way on the second phase of the project, which includes the refurbishment of the second floor of Can Marfà and the second part of the Jaume Vilaseca Foundation inventory (4,000 objects have so far been catalogued out of an estimated total of 8,000 pieces).

The long-term goal is to establish Can Marfà as a pivotal institution in the Catalan network of science and technical museums and a member of the Network of Textile Museums of Catalonia. ●

For more information:

<http://culturamataro.cat/ca/museu-i-exposicions/museu-de-mataro/can-marfa>