

Slavica Moslavac. Take a Peek Underneath - Underwear and Hygiene. Moslavina Museum, Kutina at the Museum "Staro selo" Kumrovec, 18th May - 20th August 2018

Exhibition Review

The exhibition "Take a Peek Underneath - Underwear and Hygiene" is one of many successful exhibitions organised by Slavica Moslavac, an ethnologist, the head of the Ethnographic Department of the Moslavina Museum in Kutina, and the museum advisor. Slavica Moslavac has been doing ethnographic research in the Moslavina region for many years. She showcased this particular topic by offering an historical overview of evolution of underwear and the ways people maintained personal hygiene and kept their clothes clean. The exhibition opened in the Museum "Staro selo" Kumrovec as a part of marking the International Museum Day. The exhibition is also a result of a long-standing cooperation between Moslavina Museum and the Museum "Staro selo" Kumrovec.

The exhibition "Take a Peek Underneath - Underwear and Hygiene" addresses a topic rarely spoken about in the museum and ethnographic circles - underwear and hygiene in and around Moslavina, Posavina, Banovina and Bilogora before the 20th century. So far no extensive research of underwear has been undertaken, most likely because people are reluctant when it comes to "opening up" about topics in which individual differences in maintaining hygiene and keeping clothes clean come to the fore, whereby hygiene and cleanliness are both determined by familial habits.

The exhibition was set up in the form of 12 roller banners in which soap making, underwear, bathing, undershirts, diapers, lace (for ornamental purposes), briefs and panties, socks, hygiene and folk hygiene are displayed. In addition to original objects from times long gone crafted from various materials such as plush, cotton, linen, lace, flannel, marquisette, silk, and satin, three works of art which depict underwear painted by Ivana Ožetski, a clothes drying installation by Vlatka Vidiček Dam, and a socks and underwear drying installation complete the exhibition. In addition to the underwear people used to wear in villages, the visitors can see contemporary underwear as well: petticoats, slips, bras, corsets, panties, socks, and garter belts, all of which were obtained by the author while doing field research, in liaison with numerous individuals and museums - the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, Cultural Centre Travno, the National Costume Rental and Production Workshop in Zagreb, Đurđevac City Museum, the Museum of Đakovo Region.

The exhibits are accompanied by a catalogue with the same title. A new poem by Božica Brkan written in kajkavian dialect, "Night Gown", and a dictionary for the poem are also published in the catalogue.

Underwear has always had a practical function - to provide support, ensure hygiene, and to prevent intimate body parts from coming into contact with everyday clothes.

Hygiene is maintained by washing face, washing hands, and washing in general. A basin was used for this - every household in Moslavina owned a basin. The exhibition puts stress on ritual ablutions of the face in floral water before Easter with the aim of achieving health, beauty and welfare, as well as on the ritual washing of the face at Christmas in water with apples for health. Handcrafted towels and tapestries with embroidered or woven in messages were a part of the household inventory. They were used as decorations, but they also had a practical function. After the body was washed clean in this way, underwear was put on, which is a result of European influence at the end of the 19th century and is not a part of traditional attire. Sawed linen brasiers, silk and linen slips, and knickers only came into fashion in the second half of the 20th century. Pleated underskirts and summer panties lined with lace were brought here by women from other parts of Europe.

A part of the exhibition is dedicated to soap production, namely to soap which women used to make by leaching water which was used for washing clothes and for maintaining hygiene. In villages women used to wash clothes in creeks in wooden tubs with washboards. The author notes that women who lived in cities used to wash ladies' clothes for a living, and that it was considered disgraceful for a girl who lived in a village not to know how to wash her family members' clothes properly.

The exhibition emphasizes undershirts - *košuljci* or *untorak*, sleeveless or short-sleeved, which women used to wear under main clothes, made from two pieces of buckram with holes for head and arms, hip or knee length. Underskirts were worn at all times, sometimes they were short, sometimes narrow, sometimes layered since the beauty of female body was reflected in hip width, i.e. skirt width.

A cabinet into which visitors peek and thereby get acquainted with panties and briefs, codpieces, corsets, garter belts and thongs is the most intriguing part of the exhibition. Underpants (*gaće*) are a clothing item which came into use relatively late, but the word *gaće* (meaning underpants in Croatian standard language) was used for men's pants which they wore every day. In poor parts of the world the only item of clothing people could afford to wear was an apron-like garment. Over the centuries people from Lika and Kordun relocated to Moslavina. Winters in Lika and Kordun were harsh and people had to shield themselves against it so they layered long johns and wore codpieces made of wool to protect themselves against coldness. Interestingly, women did not use to wear panties, but this changed with time and women's lingerie became a real fashion staple.

Underwear is depicted in works of art as well - watercolor and combined-technique, and the catalogue lists numerous academy-trained artists and their artworks in which scenes of laundry washing in the Sava river are depicted, and a child wearing dungarees, grape-stomping, women in nightgowns, and other themes which can be seen in the early 20th century postcards.

The exhibition "Take a Peek Underneath - Underwear and Hygiene" has so far been put on at Etno Art Gallery in Zagreb, Đurđevac City Museum, in Ivanić in Križ Municipality, the City Library of Lipik, and the plan is to bring it to people all over Croatia. Many pupils and high-school students have already had a chance to become familiar with

this taboo topic in the Museum "Staro selo" Kumrovec as a part of their field trips. Visitors from many other countries - Slovenia, North America, England, China and Germany - also saw this exhibition.

The author's intention to bring closer a topic which has up until now been neglected in ethnographic research has been achieved through a wholesome overview of maintaining hygiene, washing laundry and keeping clothes clean, and through a presentation of the evolution of underwear from the end of the 19th century to modern age.

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Tihana Kušenić