

The Paris fashion system and the Basel designers

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The dependence of the Basel ribbon industry on fashion made the design of ribbons a central activity. The large ribbon houses employed designers, the *Dessinateure*, who created new patterns every season. The houses also maintained close contacts with Paris, the capital of fashion. Basel merchants and designers travelled to Paris to observe the latest fashions, to buy samples and designs, and to meet the milliners and dressmakers who used ribbons. Some houses maintained agents or branches in Paris.¹

The pattern books of the Basel ribbon houses, preserved in several museums, contain thousands of samples of ribbons, arranged by season and type, with their technical specifications and prices. They are a record of the changing tastes of two centuries and a testimony to the creativity of the designers and the skill of the weavers. They also show the influence of Paris on Basel: many patterns were adaptations of French designs, modified for the Basel production methods and the tastes of the export markets.

The relationship between Basel and Paris in the ribbon trade anticipates the relationship between Swiss industry and the global centres of fashion, design and luxury that continues today. The Swiss watch industry, which has become one of the leading luxury industries of the world, depends on design, brand and marketing as much as on technical skill. Its relationship with the fashion capitals of the world recalls the relationship of the Basel ribbon houses with Paris. The watch and jewellery fair Baselworld, which was held in Basel until 2019, was for decades the principal meeting place of this industry.

1 Notes

1. On the design departments of the Basel ribbon houses and their contacts with the Paris fashion trade, see the literature on the history of the Basel ribbon industry; the collections of ribbon pattern books in the Museum.BL and the Historisches Museum Basel. To be verified. ↩

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