

# ELEGANCE FROM PAST TO FUTURE

*Women's Costume*

FROM THE LATE  
OTTOMAN EMPIRE  
TO THE EARLY  
REPUBLICAN ERA



open until October 29, 2024

opening hours  
11.00 am-7.00 pm  
(closed on Mondays)

Abdülmeçid Efendi Mansion  
Kuşbakışı Cad. No.18 Kuzguncuk  
34674 Üsküdar/İstanbul

**Curators:**  
Hülya Bilgi  
Sadberk Hanım Museum Director  
Dr Şebnem Eryavuz  
Art Historian  
Bahattin Öztuncay

**Design:**  
Dr Umut Durmuş



On the occasion of the centennial of the Turkish Republic, Sadberk Hanım Museum, the first private museum in Türkiye and a cultural institution of Vehbi Koç Foundation, is hosting an exhibition with a special emphasis on women, highlighting Ottoman and Republican era women's outfits from its most impressive collections. Supported by Koç Holding and Vehbi Koç Foundation, the exhibition 'Elegance from Past to Future' tells the story of how Ottoman women's clothing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century transformed from traditional to Western style in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and how the new fashion that started from the palace in İstanbul quickly spread to the major cities with the proclamation of the Republic. Pieces once meticulously collected by Sadberk Koç form the core of the exhibition, which will be open to visitors until October 29, 2024.

Abdülmeccid Efendi Mansion, situated in a wooded area in Bağlarbaşı, a neighbourhood on the hilltop above the historic district of Üsküdar, is currently housing images from a vibrant, colourful and rapidly evolving social life. It has opened its doors to the world of women and fashion, from the late Ottoman Empire to the early Republican era, for an exhibition that reflects the role women played in society and how that role has changed. On the centennial of the Turkish Republic, the exhibition "Elegance from Past to Future" highlights women's costumes from the Ottoman and Republican eras in one of the most impressive collections of Sadberk Hanım Museum, the first private museum in Türkiye. Pieces once collected by Sadberk Koç, who respected tradition while remaining unwaveringly committed to the values of the young Turkish Republic, form the core of the exhibition. The backdrop for this extraordinary exhibition is the Abdülmeccid Efendi Mansion, carefully chosen as the ideal venue. Here, visitors are promised an unforgettable experience, thanks to the mansion's unique setting and charming interiors that complement the exhibition's theme. The Sadberk Hanım Museum team shares details about the preparations that went into bringing this exhibition to life.



Wedding gown of Şehsuvar Baş Kadınefendi (1881-1945), wife of Caliph Abdülmeccid Efendi and mother of Prince Ömer Faruk Efendi. Made from brocade fabric and decorated with lace, artificial flowers, sequins, metal beads and various trims. İstanbul, late 19<sup>th</sup> century (1896). Donated by Bedia Şelale Okan. Sadberk Hanım Museum Collection.



## Hülya Bilgi, Sadberk Hanım Museum Director and 'Elegance from Past to Future' Exhibition Curator, provides insights.

Through the exhibition "Elegance from Past to Future", we explore how Ottoman women's clothing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century evolved from traditional to Western style in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the desire to capture the spirit of the times and how the new fashion that started from the palace in İstanbul quickly spread to the major cities with the proclamation of the Republic. Please take us back to the very beginning of this exhibition. Undoubtedly, selecting the exhibits should have been a challenge.

In order to bring such a comprehensive exhibition covering the late Ottoman and early Republican eras to life, we joined forces with other institutions and individuals and loaned items from the İnönü Foundation Collection, the Rahmi Koç Museum Collection and the Mutlu İlmen Collection in addition to our own collection. The outfits worn by Mevhibe İnönü, who became the first lady of the Republic as the wife of İsmet İnönü, would undoubtedly be a compelling addition to the exhibition. The contributions of Özden Toker and members of the İnönü Foundation's executive committee were invaluable, particularly since Özden Toker was personally involved in selecting the outfits that belonged to her mother for the exhibition and providing us with guidance during the selection process. Clothes that Mevhibe Hanım had packed away in chests with mothballs before leaving Ankara to spend the summer in İstanbul are preserved to this day with the same care in the İnönü family residence, the Pink House in Ankara. The friendship between the Koç and İnönü families has enabled clothes belonging to both Sadberk Hanım and Mevhibe Hanım to be brought together in the exhibition. We were thrilled when Ayfer Neyzi donated the carefully preserved collection of clothes belonging to Leyla Saz and members of her family to the Sadberk Hanım Museum and, moreover, loaned Leyla Saz's harmonium to us. Outfits belonging to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his wife Latife Hanım in the Rahmi Koç Museum Collection and a dress belonging to Latife Hanım that Mutlu İlmen has loaned to the Rahmi Koç Museum for a temporary exhibition are also included in our exhibition and are of key importance in complementing the thematic content. The pocket squares belonging to Atatürk and outfits worn by his adopted daughter Afet İnan that were donated to Sadberk Hanım Museum by Arı İnan and Demir İnan in 2014 are also displayed in this special exhibition.





"İzmir 5/2/340 [5 February 1924] to Doctor Tevfik Rüşdi, Gazi M.K." dedicated photograph. Photograph: Jean Weinberg. Ömer M. Koç Collection.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's suit. Label by the French Maison O'Rossen, based in Paris. Hand-scripted "Le Gazi M. Kemal Pacha" on the label. Preserved by Colonel Halil Nuri Yurdakul, and donated by Professor Yurdakul Yurdakul and his wife Ayşe Acatay Yurdakul. Rahmi M. Koç Museum Collection.



The tailcoat exhibited in the room reserved for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is an exact replica of its original kept in the Anıtkabir Museum in Ankara and was tailored by the Beylerbeyi Sabancı Technical Institute in İstanbul. We are deeply grateful to both institutions and their directors for their invaluable contributions. As always, Topkapı Palace Museum, the Suna and İnan Kiraç Foundation's Pera Museum and the İstanbul Research Institute kindly permitted us to use images from their collections. In addition, the cooperation of Beyazıt State Library, İstanbul University Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Boğaziçi University Library, İstanbul Women's Library, İstanbul Municipality Atatürk Library and the Salt Research Centre was of inestimable value.

**What was the process you followed after the pieces that matched the exhibition's theme were selected?**

Once the exhibits were selected, dresses made of silk and other delicate fabrics, adorned with metal wire embroidery, beads and exquisite lace, had to be treated so that they would look as beautiful as on the first day they were worn. In particular, the garments that had been recently donated to the museum collection and those loaned for the exhibition were examined by museum curators and conservators to determine

which procedures were necessary. First, the materials were analysed, reports on their condition were drawn up, and then the required procedures were implemented. These procedures, which would ideally require specialists in diverse disciplines, such as pattern designers, embroidery experts, and conservators, were carried out with the utmost care by our small three-person team of textile specialists. Since the garments had been carefully stored in chests for many years, they had been protected from the adverse effects of mould, dirt, and other harmful substances. Damage caused by physical deterioration was patiently and carefully repaired. Bead embroidery was reinforced, and missing areas of fabric, unravelling, and tears in lace were repaired using materials in matching colours and textures as backing. Once this work had been completed, the next stage was planning how the garments would be exhibited to preserve their good condition. Consequently, our team decided that two dresses belonging to Mevhibe İnönü should not be displayed on mannequins but instead on angled horizontal panels, and preparations for this display method were made accordingly. Creases and wrinkles caused by the fact that the clothes had been stored folded for many years were removed as far as possible by using an ultrasonic humidifier. Since the dresses were in a wide range of sizes, supports made of acid-free materials were used to display them on the mannequins. Making these supports according to the size of each garment, followed by preparations for transporting them, was the responsibility of the conservation team. I should note that another crucial measure was monitoring the condition of the objects constantly to make sure that light, humidity, dust, and other environmental factors remained at optimal levels throughout the exhibition.



**Senior Curator Dr Lale Görünür: "The Sadberk Koç Collection forms the core of the museum's collection."**

Sadberk Hanım Museum houses more than 20,000 objects from different periods and diverse cultures, spanning a period of nearly 8,000 years. The first large group that forms the core of the museum is the Sadberk Koç Collection, consisting of nearly 3,500 pieces, which were donated by the Koç Family to establish the museum.

The museum acquires pieces through two channels; donations and acquisitions. Pieces that people wish to donate, or we intend to purchase are carefully inspected and accepted only if we confirm that they would enhance or complement the museum's collection. A meticulous investigation is conducted to obtain factual information about the pieces. Besides the pieces, their condition reports and photographs are examined to determine their authenticity and condition, which are key factors in our decision to accept them. For the most part, the pieces are individually inspected by museum experts. Thanks to the trust we have earned as a museum and the appreciation of our efforts, we receive a large number of artefacts through donations. Sometimes, multiple artworks are donated in a group, and sometimes in single pieces. We also purchase objects from individuals, collectors registered with the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, local and international auctions, and antique dealers. So, authentic artworks and artefacts of superb quality become part of our collections.

Our museum is an internationally well-esteemed and acclaimed institution, both in touristic and scientific terms. The museum stands apart, particularly with the Iznik tiles collection and the embroidery and costume collections, which continue to expand by the day. We exhibit a relatively small but diverse collection that sheds light on 8,000 years of Anatolian civilisations in a mansion along the Bosphorus, which receives great interest and appreciation from the visitor.



Wedding gown of Fatma Fethiye Hanım (d. 1956), granddaughter of Mehmed Hasip Pasha, Minister of Foundations and Finance. Made from silk fabric, tulle, and guipure lace. İstanbul, late 19<sup>th</sup> century-early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Donated by Ali and Akgül Şanal. Sadberk Hanım Museum Collection.



The "palace gown" of the poet and composer Leyla Saz (1850-1936) made of silk taffeta. İstanbul, early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Donated by Ayfer Neyzi. Sadberk Hanım Museum Collection.



The photograph features Leyla Saz in this gown, adorned with the Compassion medal awarded to women engaged in charitable work.

Wedding gown, made from satin fabric with gold embroidery. İzmir, early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Belonged to a woman from the Uşakizâde family. Donated by Vecihe İlmen, the sister of Latife Hanım, the wife of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Sadberk Hanım Museum Collection.





Two pieces outfit belonging to Billur Pelver Uçar, the daughter-in-law of Giritli Mustafa Naim Pasha. İstanbul, early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Donated by Şerife Yalçın. Sadberk Hanım Museum Collection.

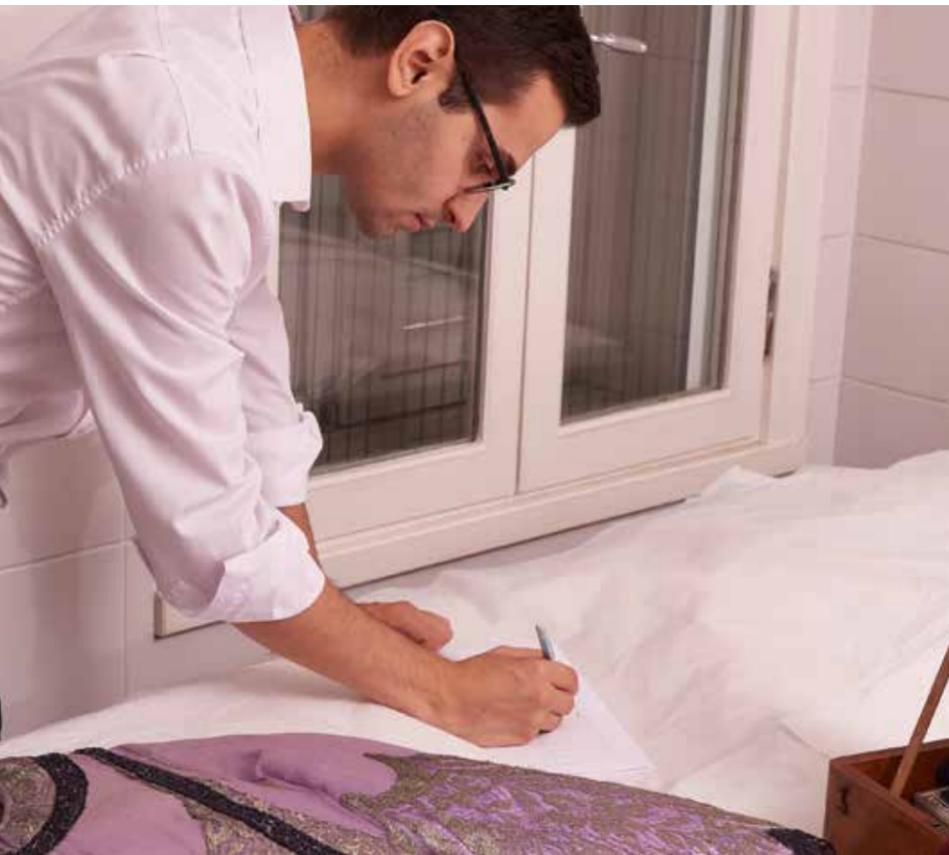
Tulle dress and matching shawl embroidered with silver wire. İstanbul, 1920s. Bequest of Sadberk Koç. Sadberk Hanım Museum Collection.



## Samed Ercan - Textile Conservation and Restoration Atelier: “We employed contemporary conservation and exhibition methods, addressing every aspect from storage to preservation.”

Two conservation departments carry out conservation and restoration procedures at Sadberk Hanım Museum. One of these departments is specifically responsible for the maintenance of the textiles. Since textiles are predominantly organic, they are adversely affected by many environmental factors, such as light, humidity, and pollution, which cause various physical, chemical, and biological damages. As textile conservators, we are tasked with analysing the objects, using appropriate conservation methods, and repairing the existing damage using our practical skills. We are also responsible for creating the optimal environment for storage and display, research and documentation, and passing them to future generations in the best conditions possible.

This exhibition, which features nearly 100 exquisite objects, gave us the opportunity to work with different materials over a period extending from the last years of the Ottoman Empire to the early Republican era. The condition of the pieces to be displayed in the exhibition varied greatly, with the most fragile among them being the garments made of silk. Therefore, we employed different approaches to meticulously restore and prepare these remarkably delicate and fragile textiles for display. We applied contemporary conservation and exhibition methods, addressing every aspect, from storage to preservation. We created the optimal environmental conditions to ensure that the works were not affected by any adverse factors throughout the exhibition. We completed the preparations by making sure that the exhibits were displayed in a safe and protected environment without being damaged.



**The Koç Family has clearly provided unconditional support for the preservation of the Sadberk Hanım Museum, a cultural institution of Vehbi Koç Foundation, and passing the collections to future generations. Please share your thoughts on the allocation of Abdülmecid Efendi Mansion, which is owned by Koç Holding Pension and Assistance Fund Foundation, for this exhibition.**

The mansion, set in extensive grounds and surrounded by lush gardens, an ornamental pool and bridges, and the colourful, fairy-tale atmosphere of its rooms, is like an oasis hidden amidst the bustling city. The interiors and façades have an “oriental” touch, influenced by the European arts and architectural trends of the period. Tiles with designs reminiscent of traditional Ottoman art were used to adorn the walls in places. The walls and ceilings feature paintings inspired by the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Alhambra Palace in Andalusia. These red, blue, and gold compositions, Maghreb-style column capitals and lobed arches are creatively blended into a harmonious composition. Once it was decided that the “Elegance from Past to Future” exhibition would be held in this mansion full of memories, the preparations for the exhibition gained momentum.

**The process of preparing the mansion for the exhibition most likely involved many stages...**

Indeed, the preparation process consisted of several stages. Since the exhibition was to be staged outside the museum, first of all, permission was obtained from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The fact that the exhibits were mostly textiles, which are particularly sensitive to environmental conditions, presented a new challenge. So, in the second stage, Abdülmecid Efendi Mansion was fitted with climate control equipment to ensure that the venue met museum standards. Our experience of environmental control in Azaryan Mansion—the first-degree listed building that houses Sadberk Hanım Museum—was brought to bear when preparing Abdülmecid Efendi Mansion for the new exhibition. Advised both by our museum conservators and external consultants, the optimal environmental conditions were achieved. The architect, Dr Umut Durmuş, who designed the exhibition, prioritised the concerns of the museum team with respect to the status of the venue as a historical building while designing displays that would meet the expectations of visitors. In other words, his design achieved the correct balance between the needs of the exhibits, the building, and the visitors. Umut Durmuş sums up this process, which took many months, as “transforming the mansion into a museum” instead of “staging an exhibition in the mansion”.

Satin ferace with velvet ornaments.  
İstanbul, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.  
Bequeathed by Münire Sultan  
(1844-1862), the daughter of Caliph  
Abdülmejid, to Adviye Hanım, the  
older sister of Leyla Saz. Donated by  
Ayfer Neyzi. Sadberk Hanım Museum  
Collection.



Chiffon Charleston dress.  
Ankara, 1920-1930s.  
Donated by Feral Eke.  
Sadberk Hanım Museum  
Collection.



Dress with transparent glass  
bead embroidery. İstanbul, 1920s.  
Belonged to a woman from  
the Fethi Ahmed Pasha family.  
Donated by Rüya Nebioğlu.  
Sadberk Hanım Museum  
Collection.



Charleston dress. Made of silk and adorned with velvet trims and silk ribbons. İstanbul, 1920s. Sadberk Hanım Museum Collection.



Charleston dress, belonging to Hüsniye Aktar, the sister of Vehbi Koç. Embroidered with beads and crystal stones on silk. İstanbul, 1930s. Donated by Hüsniye Aktar and Emin Aktar. Sadberk Hanım Museum Collection.



A dress belonging to Latife Hanım (1898-1975). Beaded embroidery on chiffon. On loan from Mutlu İlmen.

## Berrin Caka - Restoration and Conservation Laboratory: “Our foremost responsibility is to pass on our museum collections to future generations.”

Transferring our cultural assets to future generations in the best conditions possible is among the primary functions of museums. Therefore, we start with preventive conservation measures in the museum and then carry out remedial restoration work. Our foremost priority at the Sadberk Hanım Museum Restoration and Conservation Laboratory is to preserve the integrity of the museum collection under the right conditions in accordance with the conservation rules and to help transfer it safely to future generations. Therefore, we establish the optimal conditions that ensure the preservation of the pieces and mitigate the potential risks posed by environmental factors and human contact. We diligently identify appropriate conservation techniques, including the implementation of preventive conservation principles in order to slow down their natural wear and tear, and continuously monitor the condition of the pieces at regular intervals.

As museum conservators, we focus primarily on passive conservation, which means achieving the optimal humidity, temperature and light values and keeping the exhibition spaces suitable for conservation through pest, disaster, and risk management. Once these conditions are established, retroactive practices such as strengthening and completing the deficits are carried out by conservators in the museum laboratory for objects in need of repair. Just as we inspect every single piece added to the collection, we revisit the objects previously included in the collections and examine them regularly. The duties of conservators also include working with specialists from the relevant departments for the temporary thematic exhibitions held at the museum to determine the current condition of the potential exhibits and assisting in preparing them for display.



### Please walk us through the exhibition “Elegance from Past to Future.” How would you describe the exhibition based on staging it in the mansion?

We decided to design the “Elegance from Past to Future” exhibition like a didactic fashion show. The mansion’s first floor is dedicated to the late Ottoman period, while the second floor features a display of outfits from the first decade of the Republic. Stepping through a curtain and stepping into the entrance hall, visitors encounter superbly dressed upper-class Ottoman women, as they would have looked in their palaces and houses. Music with rhythms inspired by classical Turkish music playing in the background and filmed scenes dating from the period are shown on a 12-metre-long reflective surface, recreating the mood of the time and thereby enhancing the excitement and interest felt by visitors.

Upon entering, visitors are welcomed by the elegant wedding dress of Şehsuar Hanım, the mistress of the mansion and the wife of Caliph Abdülmecid Efendi. On the same floor, visitors can see the palace outfit worn by the poet and composer Leyla Saz with the insignia of a decoration presented to her by the sultan and her harmonium. Songs written and composed by Leyla Saz are played in this section. İstanbul women in street outfits, such as ferace and çarşaf, which they would have worn when visiting parks such as Göksu and Sadabad or strolling in Sultanahmet Square, as depicted in Osman Hamdi Bey’s painting, can also be seen here. These examples provide clues about the evolution of fashion and the position of women in society over time.

We allocated the upper floor for clothes from the years immediately after the proclamation of the Republic. On the route that starts from the heart of the venue, as on the ground floor, the visitor encounters elegant women dancing to the music of the period, as if at a Republic Ball. In this section, the most elegant clothes, bags and shoes of Latife Hanım, Mevhibe İnönü and Afet İnan are presented to the visitors. The clothes of women who show the modern face of Turkish women to the whole world, who can attend receptions held in honour of foreign statesmen, who give conferences on women’s right to vote and be elected, or who ride horses freely and do sports, are like the sparkles of light emanating from the capital Ankara. The



fact that Mustafa Kemal himself designed the outfit that Afet, his adopted daughter, would wear at the conference suggests that he saw the outfit as a means of giving a message to society.

On the occasion of the centennial of the Republic, it was only natural for us to allocate one room for the personal belongings of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the new Republic. This section features some of his personal possessions from the Sadberk Hanım Museum and Rahmi Koç Museum collections, alongside signed photographs of Atatürk from the Ömer M. Koç Collection.

### Lastly, please tell us about the exhibition catalogue.

In order to mark the centennial of the Republic, we included 100 pieces in the exhibition catalogue: eight wedding gowns, 34 special occasion dresses, ten street outfits, and two riding suits and boots, along with 16 pairs of shoes, 22 bags and seven parasols selected from the Sadberk Hanım Museum, Rahmi Koç Museum, and İnönü Foundation collections, and Osman Hamdi Bey’s painting Women on a Stroll from the Yapı Kredi Bank Collection. However, the personal belongings of Atatürk, which we are honoured and excited to include in our exhibition, are not featured in the catalogue.

A dress belonging to Mevhibe İnönü (1897-1992). Made of silk fabric and decorated with long tassels in Art Deco style. Ankara, 1929. İnönü Foundation Collection.



The evening gown worn by Mevhibe İnönü (1897-1992) at the reception on October 30, 1930 at Ankara Palas in honour of Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos. İnönü Foundation Collection.

The dress worn by Afet İnan (1908-1985) at the reception on October 30, 1930, at Ankara Palas in honour of Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos. Embroidered in the double darning technique on silk. Donated by Anı İnan and Demir İnan. Sadberk Hanım Museum Collection.



The outfit worn by Afet İnan (1908-1985) during the conference she gave on April 3, 1930, at Ankara Türk Ocağı, where she spoke about Turkish women's suffrage. It has been reported that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had personally described the design of the dress, which was tailored by the seamstress Güzide Hanım. Donated by Arı İnan and Demir İnan. Sadberk Hanım Museum Collection.



The riding outfit of Mevhibe İnönü (1897-1992). Wool jacket and jodhpurs. Stone & Blyth, Wien Badgastein. Leather riding boots, labelled Altun Çizme, Eminönü, İstanbul. 1930s. İnönü Foundation Collection.



 **Vehbi Koç Vakfı**