

How did 'Matyó'('Kalocsai') pattern get on a Formula one suit?



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Turócziné Varga Ildikó



Preface

Traditional arts and crafts are a form of the manifestation of our ancestors and can be followed up in traditional markets, on displays of museums and there are a few enthusiastic people who keep track of old craftsmen. These masters are creative artists and highly acknowledged within their own communities.

In Hungary a kind of revival of old traditions, methods and elaborate patterns and designs have been able to be seen since 2010s; embroidered patterns are sewn on garments, printed on labels, painted on china, and even on Formula one race suits.

The following interview was made with István Kalmár who is a teacher and an ordinary man. Meanwhile, we can see what role he had in the revival of a traditional pattern. He is also an example to all how values and processes of traditional artistry can be taken closer to us.

I am really proud of this young, ambitious man as I was his formteacher in the secondary school.

- **Could you introduce yourself in a nutshell, please?**
- My name is Istvan Kalmar and I am 30 years old. I live in Budapest since 2007 when I started my university studies in English language and literature. I am an English and Hungarian as a foreign language teacher by profession but I have not worked as a teacher since I graduated in 2013. Before my university years I lived in Jaszladany, about a 100 kilometres to the South-East from Budapest. I attended the Meszaros Lorinc Secondary Grammar School in Jaszapati.
- **How did you come across this competition? What made you enter?**
- I have been a fan of Formula One since 2002 and I always wanted to get close to the world of this speed circus. I won my first ticket to the Hungarian Grand Prix in 2003 that had an everlasting impact on me. I enjoyed the sound the most because the difference between the car engines was quite distinct and obviously very loud. In 2011 a major sponsor of the British team McLaren started a campaign to celebrate their 30 years of partnership with the team. They invited fans from all around the world to design the racing suits of the two drivers. I read about this opportunity on a Hungarian Formula One news portal. I had nothing to lose, so I entered with the design that was eventually selected for the Hungarian Grand Prix in 2011.
- **Why did you choose a traditional Hungarian pattern on the F1 suit? Was it a conscious decision?**
- Let me pin down something, the embroidery pattern I used is from Kalocsa, in the Southern part of Hungary. Matyó is a completely different region's style from the Northern part of Hungary. I always said it is a Kalocsa-style embroidery, so it shows how hard it was to educate the press and people on this. It's like mixing up Northern Ireland and Ireland just because both speak the same language. The reason I chose the Kalocsa-style embroidery is because that was the third thing related to patterns that came to my mind about Hungary on the international level (after the dots of the Túró Rudi and the colour scheme of the Rubik's cube that are both trademarks therefore would be hard to be applied due to legal conditions). Embroidery styles are not owned by individuals or legal entities but are part of the collective ownership of a country or a nation. Flower motifs are not new in fashion, just think of the hippy era in the '60s

and '70s. My design had a retro feeling in a high-tech sport for people living abroad. In Hungary it was a patriotic action rather than a fashion style at first.

- **How did you win the competition? What was the reward?**

- My initial design was selected by the promoter from about 300 other designs. I think we should be realistic: the quality and seriousness of some entries easily dropped out from the competition, so the judges might have had a handful of good ideas when they selected mine. I was informed that my design was selected as the winning design a month after I entered the competition. I won a pair of tickets and accommodation for the time of the 2011 Hungarian Grand Prix in July. That was not all! The final prize was based on an online voting where fans had the chance to vote for the best race suit design that will be worn by the drivers on the season finale, the Brazilian Grand Prix in November. After a scandalous voting procedure my design was selected as the best one and I flew to Brazil with my wife who was my girlfriend back then. We had six enjoyable days in Sao Paulo with guidance, driver, five-star accommodation and of course I met one of the drivers too. We were treated just like the rest of the VIP guests at the event.

- **What was the reaction in Hungary?**

- Hungary is a small country and people appreciate every little success let it be in literature, medicine, sports or even fashion. Hungarians are proud of the Nobel Prize winners and tend to claim that most inventions are related to fellow citizens. To a country like that an international sports event with a pinch of unique Hungarian Kalocsa-style race suits is the manifestation of how Hungarians feel that they are the center of everything after all. I understand this is because the nation has been oppressed and torn apart several times, so we want to cherish the moments of success. That's why everyone was supporting the race suit I designed so intensely and this generated a hype around a future new fashion wave in clothing and other industries.

- **Do you have info about whether the racers liked this pattern?**

- Not really but if I have earned the same wages as they do I wouldn't mind what I wear at work. On a serious note, I met Jenson Button and read some interviews with him and he coined the design as "flower power". He even said that he would prefer a wet race on Sunday because flowers need watering. I think he had the best reaction to a somewhat overrated design. By the way, I also got his race suit that he was wearing signed by him and with a certificate of origin to make it more official.



- **You revived caring for old traditional patterns. Wearing embroidered pieces became trendy. What do you think?**
- I think there were some really nice products out there and the hype generated some extra income for several companies. Everyone asked me if I got any commission after these but my answer is unfortunately no. As said before, this folklore style is a public domain. There is, or at least wasn't that time, any regulation on the usage. What really annoyed me, and still does, is how the Hungarian press and companies are ignorant about the folklore style. They interchangeably used the word matyó and kalocsai to every flower pattern that resembles an embroidery style in any way. They mixed up traditional Mexican flower patterns with kalocsai, for instance. In a way this is an overreaction to the whole story: everyone thought that matyó and kalocsai rule the world. In reality, it was a way of how Hungarians wanted to be recognized by others, which is a bit sad.
- **How do you think you inspired other people?**
- If not with the folklore patterns, at least I think I inspired others with the success of an average person contributing to an international sports event in a way. I liked the fact that flower motifs became so popular that even men did not feel embarrassed to wear them.
- **What are your plans for the future?**
- After the race suits I was invited to contribute to several project ideas and a few became real as well. On the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi the Hungarian ski team

appeared in Kalocsa-style ski suits designed by me. It had a mixed reaction from the public because the sport team changed some of the patterns without my consent and I couldn't do anything. However, my design became known for Miklós Edit as she achieved great results at the Winter Olympics. Later I also designed a race suit for the Hungarian gokart team with the same patterns. I asked only for a race suit and some team wear I designed as part of the deal. So I now have two race suits at home, carefully packed and waiting to be displayed somewhere nice soon. I also designed a livery for the Opel Dakar Team. Currently I focus on my family and job, creative ideas come at hand sometimes in both cases.

- **Thank you for the interview.**

