

DATS

Dress and Textile Specialists

Conference programme 2022

*Skeletons in the closet: the legacies of dress and textiles
collection practices*



Death points an arrow at a female dancer. Aquatint by J. Gleedah, 1822

Schedule

Thursday 20 October

Curator-led visits

Option 1

09:45 Arrive [Blaise Museum](#)

10:00-12:00 Blaise Museum costume collection - led by Catherine Littlejohns

14:00-15:30 Fashion Museum Bath *You Choose* exhibition tour - led by Fleur Johnson

Option 2

10:15 Arrive [Fashion Museum](#) Bath

10:30-12:00 Fashion Museum Bath *You Choose* exhibition tour

14:00-16:00 Blaise Museum costume collection

Conference dinner

18:30 [Harbour House](#), Bristol

Friday 21st October

[M Shed](#), Bristol

09:15-10:00 AGM & Welcome with Lisa Mason, DATS Chair

10:00-11:15 'Restorations'

- Charlotte McReynolds, *From the Ashes: The Destruction and Rebuilding of the Ulster Museum's Fashion and Textile Collection*
- Kate Sekules, *Collecting Damage: The Mend as Museum Object*
- Landi Company, *The Making of The Beds at Burghley*

11:15-11:45 Refreshment break

11:45-13:15 'Engagement'

- Katy Canales & Kirsty Sullivan, *Young V&A*
- Uthra Rajgopal, *New Collecting - South Asian textile artworks*
- Louis Platman & Amy Foulds, *Re-collecting: a public exploration of the Museum of the Home's unused costume collection*

13:15-14:00 Lunch

14:00-15:30 'Narratives'

- Victoria Haddock, *Museo Evita*
- Kate Debono, *The Fashion Collection is not Neutral: Museum collecting, the curatorial role, and networks of redistribution*
- Ann French, *Can research influence conservation practice? Some personal reflections*

15:30-16:15 Problems shared & solved session + refreshments

16:15-16:45 Keynote

- Rosemary Harden, *GLOVES. GLOVES. GLOVES!*

16:45 Closing remarks

16:55 Depart

Abstracts & Biographies in schedule order

Restorations

From the Ashes: The Destruction and Rebuilding of the Ulster Museum's Fashion and Textile Collection

Charlotte McReynolds, Curator of Art, Ulster Museum (NMNI)

In 1976 the Ulster Museum's entire dress and textiles collection, comprising some 10,000 items, was destroyed when firebombs were planted in the building in which it was then stored, Malone House. The collection at the time contained women's costume from every decade since the 1730s, men's and children's costume, Irish, English and continental lace and embroidery, linen damask, domestic textiles, fans, accessories of all kinds, quilts, oriental costume, foreign textiles, toys and dolls, fashion plates and photographs. As a whole, the collection represented part of Ireland's history and heritage and was, in that sense, irreplaceable.

However, a resurrection has been possible due to several factors, including the outpouring of sympathy and support of both the general public and other institutions after the fire. Most crucially, however, was the fact that the Ulster Museum was able to claim compensation from the government to indemnify its losses. This enabled the curator at the time, Elizabeth McCrum, to focus on rebuilding the Fashion Collection with a cohesive collecting policy that aimed to collect fashionable dress as one of the most important of the applied arts, reflecting "the tastes and cultural interests and aspirations of the time it was made". In the early 1980s an additional collecting policy was devised that aimed to collect both highstreet and designer contemporary fashion every year – a policy that continues to this day. Now as we near the 50th anniversary of that catastrophic fire, it seems like an appropriate time to reflect on what it means to rebuild a collection from scratch and with an almost entirely "blank slate".

Biography: Charlotte McReynolds is a Curator of Art at the Ulster Museum, (part of National Museums Northern Ireland). Her primary responsibility is for the Ulster Museum's dress and textiles collection, as well as its collections of jewellery, silver and toys and dolls. Previous fashion exhibitions she has curated include Fashion & Feminism (2018), Vice Versa (2019) and La Belle Époque (2020).

Collecting Damage: The Mend as Museum Object

Kate Sekules, PhD Candidate, Bard Graduate Centre

From prehistory until the industrial age, textiles were the most valuable possessions of everyone from pharaoh to peasant, making mending, repair, and reuse a dominant aspect of human existence. Many scholars have partially addressed these mechanics of dress (eg. Styles, Richmond, Bogensperger, Clegg Hyer), yet there remains enormous scope for deepening engagement with damage, thereby broadening moribund hemline histories, disclosing narratives of colonialization, forced labour practices, vernacular skill sets—in short, ordinary lives. Turning fashion inside out to examine it through the lens of upkeep, from the perspective of wearer, owner, maker, and mender exposes the unconsidered, gendered, quotidian labour underlying every item of apparel: a parallel dress and textile history, from below, and within.

Research into mending calls for a multi-disciplinary, collaborative approach, combining object analysis with archival research, and utilizing archeological, ethnographic, literary, art historical, and anthropological methodologies. A mend interrupts the pristine fashionable façade museums strive to exhibit, instead manifesting the intimate relationship between wearer and worn that, as many colleagues know, is increasingly valued today. To illustrate this shift, I will show charismatic mends from collections (including Norfolk Museums'), discuss some recent exhibitions and publications—and introduce visiblemending.org, my new digital humanities project that maps mending worldwide.

Biography: Kate Sekules holds an M.A in Costume Studies (NYU), is a PhD candidate at Bard Graduate Center, assistant professor of fashion history at Pratt Institute, and author of MEND! A Refashioning Manual and Manifesto. She teaches the history, contexts, and practice of textile repair and has exhibited her work widely.

The Making of The Beds at Burghley

Louise Shewry, Melinda Hey, Kelly Grimshaw, The Landi Company

Burghley House, Stamford, houses a collection of five state beds dating from the 17th century. All the beds have been adapted over the centuries according to changes of use and in line with the fashion of the day. Textiles have a shorter lifespan compared to other objects within a collection, which is another factor that has informed changes to the beds we examine here.

In this presentation we intend to explore the beds and their textile elements at Burghley through the years; discussing the (un)natural selection of the decision-making processes around their conservation and display. As part of this we will be examining alterations, both structural and decorative, that have been made to the beds and their furnishings, and the influences behind these motives including aspects that have gained and/or lost significance over time.

The role of the beds has evolved from domestic use to solely for display purposes. As a result, the beds have now effectively become 'trapped' in time. We will explore how the styles of the beds have been decided, as well as the impact these styles have on the stories told to visitors.

Biographies:

Louise joined The Landi Company in 2018 as a Textile Conservator. She holds an MA Textiles from Royal College of Arts, and an MA Conservation from the University of Lincoln.

Melinda originally trained in Fine Art Embroidery, and has been at The Landi Company since 2018. She holds an MA Conservation from the University of Lincoln.

Kelly joined The Landi Company in 2019 as a Textile Conservator after having completed the GradDip and MA in Conservation at the University of Lincoln.

All three work together to care for the preservation of the textile collection at Burghley house and on a variety of private and public objects that come into the workshop.

Notes:

Engagement

Young V&A

Kirsty Sullivan, Senior Producer Formal Learning & Katy Canales, Online Exhibition Producer, Young V&A Museum

As part of the major redevelopment of Young V&A, teams from Learning and Collections have been working with local children and artists to re-examine and re-frame the collection. Children from the community group Spotlight were invited to attend weekly and half-term activities led by YV&A's Learning team and supported by colleagues from Collections and experts from Central St Martins. In these sessions the children explored the design and making processes. Studying items from the collection from skeleton suits, Spitalfields Silk to Dispo Kid, many of which were made nearby in East London, the children developed their own designs. Some of their creations will be displayed in the new galleries next to the pieces which inspired them. These sessions have helped inform how we view our collections, interpret and display them and ensure that our collections remain relevant within our community.

Biographies:

Kirsty Sullivan has been working in museum learning for 20 years, including five working on the redevelopment of the Young V&A. She holds an MA in Museums and Galleries in Education from UCL Institute of Education, and her own practice is in textile crafts with an increasing interest in sustainability. She also holds a PGCE Primary (Early Years) from University of Wales Aberystwyth, and taught in East London schools for five years before joining the museum sector. She previously managed the schools programme at the Museum of London Docklands, and worked with the learning team at National Army Museum.

Katy Canales has worked in the museum sector for over 11 years, including seven years at the V&A Museum. Katy's specialism is in children's clothing held at Young V&A. She brings her experience of producing family-focused exhibitions, displays and public programme content to the Online Exhibition Producer role. Prior to working in museums, Katy worked in PR for Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's Charity, Oxfam and Notting Hill Housing Trust. Katy holds an M.A. in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester, an M.A. (hons) for History of Art and Architecture from the University of Glasgow and a Fine Art Foundation from The Slade, University College London.

New Collecting - South Asian textile artworks

Uthra Rajgopal, Independent Curator

In 2019 Uthra Rajgopal was awarded the Art Fund New Collecting Award to purchase a collection of contemporary South Asian textile artworks made by women artists from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and the South Asian diaspora in England. The aim of the collection was twofold. Firstly, to bring a fresh narrative to the existing South Asian textile collection held at the Whitworth, which had originally been established during the time of British colonial rule, resulting in the erasure of the identities of the original makers. And secondly, to generate a conversation between the South Asian diaspora 'over here' and those living in South Asia, 'over there', so that stereotypes and presumptions from within the communities can be challenged and begin to be broken down. After a period of travel and research artworks were acquired from the following artists

Artpro (Bangladesh), Madi Acharya-Baskerville (UK), Kangan Arora (UK), Suman Gujral (UK), Arshi Irshad Ahmadzai (India), Yasmin Jahan Nupur (Bangladesh), Rehana Mangi (Pakistan), Bharti Parmar (UK), Rakhi Peswani (India). By bringing together these textile artworks here and now we can help foster a greater sense of belonging and celebrate a permanent place for South Asian women's voices in the Whitworth's collection.

Biography: Uthra Rajgopal is an Independent Curator with a specialist interest in South Asian contemporary art and textiles. She works with artists from the subcontinent and the Diaspora, exploring issues around home, identity, migration and displacement.

Re-collecting: a public exploration of the Museum of the Home's unused costume collection

Louis Platman, Curator & Amy Foulds, Collections and Library Manager, Museum of the Home

The Museum of the Home has a large costume collection, which has mostly languished unused in its stores for decades. Not only have we lost expertise in our costume collection, most staff and visitors aren't even aware of its existence. Previous attempts at disposal fell through for various reasons, and it hasn't been examined in detail since a Madeleine Ginsburg review in the 1990s.

Rather than conduct a collections review behind closed doors, we wanted to invite the public to share their opinions and feelings about these objects, opening up the disposals process and perhaps even finding new stories to imbue these objects with a new-found relevance. The result was the exhibition Re:Collect, a rotating display of costume and woodworking tools that put collections management in the public eye, asking people to participate, and even interrogate the process.

Examining our costume collection in this way has led to a host of discoveries, be it newly uncovered rare shoes, or some unpleasant consequences of leaving objects unchecked for years. We have also managed to engage new audiences, inspire new uses for the collection, and collect oral histories in what has proved to be the beginning of a long and fascinating journey.

Biographies:

Louis Platman is Curator at the Museum of the Home. Louis helped develop many of the new permanent displays at the Museum, and was the creative lead for Re:Collect. Louis is currently working on a collecting project to increase the representation of migrant stories in the Museum's period room displays.

Amy Foulds is Collections and Library Manager at the Museum of the Home. Amy is responsible for all collections management activities from strategy to delivery and developed the concept of Re:Collect. Amy is currently working on increasing collections access and a programme of inclusive cataloguing.

Notes:

Narratives

Museo Evita

Victoria Haddock, Freelance Writer & Collections Officer, SS Great Britain

This paper will examine the creation of the large dress and textile collection at the Museo Evita in Buenos Aires, Argentina, through an interdisciplinary approach. Uniting the methodologies and contributions of dress history and politics, it will explore how The First Lady of Argentina, Eva Peron (1919-1952), one of the most divisive figures in 20th century history, used dress to create a 'Cinderella' image that was promoted around the world. By focusing on the ideologies and material voices at play in the collection of her garments this study will illustrate the complex nature of the biography of objects that belonged to Peron, and how a dress collection such as this was created whilst those of other controversial figures, such as Margaret Thatcher, have been sold and split up.

Biography: Victoria Haddock has an MA in the History of Design and Material Culture from the University in Brighton, where her dissertation focused on fashion tie-ins inspired by film costumes during the 1930s. She is a freelance writer and researcher who works as the Collections Officer at the SS Great Britain.

The Fashion Collection is not Neutral: Museum collecting, the curatorial role, and networks of redistribution

Kate Debono, PhD student, University of Brighton

Practices of collecting fashion are starting to receive scholarly attention, as evidenced by the 2018 Fashion Theory special issue on the subject. However, explorations and critiques of curatorial practices relating to the acquisition of fashion by museums are more limited and have largely focused on major institutions overlooking regional practices, which have their own distinctions.

Using the substantial costume collection at Worthing Museum and Art Gallery as a case study my research seeks to understand what has and has not been collected and the motivations behind these decisions. As Catriona Fisk highlights: 'collections and their absences are not neutral' (Fashion Theory, 2019). Drawing on museum documentation, interviews with curators past and present, and the collection itself. I will present six items that illuminate central debates about what was considered 'worthy' of acquisition and retention. This sample reveals much about curatorial practices at Worthing and the impact of individual curators on the collection. It exposes networks of redistribution between museums, regional and national, and enables exploration of the boundaries between what was considered as 'fashion' by curators and institutions and what was othered as 'ethnography'.

Biography: Kate Debono is a third year AHRC Techne funded PhD student at University of Brighton researching the collecting of twentieth-century fashion by UK museums c.1960-c.2005. Kate is currently on a placement as curatorial assistant at Historic Royal Palaces, working on the exhibition 'Court to Couture' that opens April 2023.

Can research influence conservation practice? Some personal reflections

Ann French, Collections Care Manager/Conservator (Textiles), The Whitworth, University of Manchester

Since 2005 I have been researching – off & on – my grandfather's collection of Greek Island Embroideries, and associated archives, now at Liverpool Museums. This work was to be the subject of a now abandoned PhD. I am a textile conservator by training, but my research approach was museological and historiographical. My talk will cover how my conservation experience and my research experience have influenced each other, how much the research has benefitted from a long approach, and how my practice as a conservator has utterly changed as a result.

Biography: Ann French trained as a textile conservator at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and has worked in that capacity for a variety of institutions including Glasgow Museums and the National Trust. She has been employed at the Whitworth, the University of Manchester since 2002 being responsible for all textile-based material in its collections encompassing post-Pharaonic textiles from Egypt to contemporary art textiles. Since 2005, she has been researching the Greek embroidery collecting of her grandfather and his contemporaries; and is currently cataloguing the associated archive in Liverpool Museums with the aim of making this available online to accompany a catalogue of the Wace embroidery collection.

Notes:

Keynote

GLOVES. GLOVES. GLOVES!

Rosemary Harden, Senior Curator and Manager, Fashion Museum, Bath

I'm interested in collections within collections.

As the Fashion Museum in Bath prepares to close its doors, temporarily, I find myself musing on discrete groups of objects within this fantastic collection of historical and fashionable dress.

There is the peerless Dress of the Year collection; the 'wardrobe' collections, from Lady Curzon in 1900s to Roy Strong in 2000s; and the Archive collections, gifted by British designers - David Sassoon, Victor Edelstein.

Each collection has its unique culture, and set of stakeholders. How do we as custodians of collections, offered in a supreme act of trust, manage expectations and do the right thing, for stakeholders, visitors, and the collection itself? To explore this further I will talk about the collection of the Worshipful Company of Glovers of London, which is on loan to the Fashion Museum. Even here there are three different collections: the Spence, the Harborow, the Masters.

I will reference issues of governance. Who decides what happens?

And the day to day. Who collects, who accessions, catalogues and photographs? And how do we facilitate display, whether in a gallery or at the Livery's Annual Banquet at the Mansion House?

Finally, how do different glove collections interface with each other...?

Biography: Rosemary Harden is Senior Curator and Manager of the Fashion Museum Bath, where she has worked for over 30 years. Previously also involved with DATS (as the Group for Costume and Textile Staff in Museums), The Costume Society and the West of England Costume Society, Rosemary is an Honorary Glover.

Notes: