STITCHES IN TIME: (AD)DRESSING HISTORY

Event Type: Symposium

Hosted By:
Macquarie University and the State Library of NSW

Join some of Australia's experts in exploring the meanings of dress through history: from Sydney streets to the courts of Renaissance Europe.

Speakers, including Margaret Maynard, Margot Riley, Lindie Ward, Sally Gray and Fiona Reilly, will address the intriguing themes of deception, beauty, nudity, cross-dressing, idealization, identity, and display.

Tuesday 11 September 2012
9:30 am to 5:30 pm
State Library of NSW Macquarie Street, Sydney

FREE Bookings essential

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STITCHES IN TIME: (AD) DRESSING HISTORY PROGRAM

9:30-9:40 – arrival & nametags
9:40-9:45 – Welcome
9:45-10:40 – KEYNOTE
   Associate Professor Margaret Maynard: “Deceptive Habits”
[10:40-10:45 – short break]

EARLY MODERN COSTUME HISTORY
DISCUSSION PANEL and 1st SPEAKER

10:45-11:45 - Panel discussion
Nicholas Scott Baker, Elizabeth Reid and John Gagné:
“Fashion, politics and deception in Early Modern Europe”

11:45-12:15 - Margot Riley:
“FLASH BACK: fashion photography at the SLNSW”

[12:15- 1:00 –Lunch break]
INTERPRETATION OF CLOTHING IN CREATIVE MEDIA

1:00-1:30 - Peter Corrigan:
“Clothing in Utopian Societies”

1:30-2:00 - Victoria Flanagan:
“Delving into the Closet: Cross-dressing in Children’s Literature”

2:00-2:30 - Fiona Reilly:
“Dags, divas, bag ladies and old men: dressing characters for theatre, film and television.”

2:30-3:00 - Sally Gray:
“A Tale of Two [or three or four] Cities: Sydney Fashionability in the 1970s and 80s”

[3:00 – 3:30 – 30min Coffee break]

AUSTRALIAN COSTUME HISTORY

3:30-4:00 - Lindie Ward:
“Stories of Love and Loss”

4:00-4:30 - Melissa Bellanta
“Queen James and the Larrikin King: Homosexuality and flash street style in turn-of-the-twentieth century Australia”

4:30-5:00 - Liz Conor
‘Clad in their Complexions’ or ‘Imperfectly Clad: Settler Ambivalence about the Clad Native’
Presentations, Bios and Abstracts.

Margaret Maynard

Title: Deceptive Habits

Bio: Associate Margaret Maynard is one of Australia’s foremost dress historians and has published widely on Australian and international dress.

Abstract: We tend to believe clothes, whether outfits worn in public or seen in the media, convey accurate meanings. They occasionally do. Yet problems surround clothes as straight forward communicators. In the past and today, in Australia and around the world, dress can be an unreliable informant, whether intentionally or not. This talk examines the confusions, distortions, and lies which are perpetrated by clothes wearing. Should we ever trust the appearance of dress? Perhaps the very point of clothing is its capacity for deception.

Discussion Panel

Title: Fashion, politics and deception in Early Modern Europe

Bios:
1. John Gagné lectures in Renaissance French & Italian history at the University of Sydney.
2. Nicholas Scott Baker is a cultural and political historian of Renaissance Italy.
3. Elizabeth Reid is a PhD candidate investigating the role of clothing in Renaissance identities.

Abstract: This panel will discuss early modern clothing and will identify trends which have been maintained, augmented or recurred throughout the history of western dress. Panelists will begin by providing an overview of a key aspect of their research, including; the conceptual interplay between divine truth, free-will and society in renaissance judgments of sartorial honesty (Reid); the use of clothing in the political construction of an idealized masculine figure in early modern Florence (Baker); and the circulation of clothing and efforts to control that circulation in early modern Milan (Gagné). The audience will then be invited to join in the panelist’s ensuing discussion (by asking questions and sharing their perspectives and knowledge) to delve into this fruitful historical context and find the avenues it opens for exploring society and its clothing.

www.historyweek.com.au
8–16 SEPTEMBER
Margot Riley

**Title:** FLASH BACK: fashion photography at the SLNSW

**Bio:** Margot Riley is based at the State Library of NSW. She is a cultural historian with special interest in textiles and dress and her professional experience includes curatorial positions with the Powerhouse Museum and the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales.

**Abstract:** Most photographs illustrate dress in some way but the term ‘fashion photography’ usually refers to those images used to promote or sell clothing. This definition is complicated by the fact that a photograph can be used as a fashion photograph even though it may originally have been taken for another purpose, such as personal or celebrity portraiture. Images also play an important role in fashion history by recording the look and detail of clothing and appearance long after original garments have disappeared.

This talk will trace the emergence of Australian fashion reportage through the State Library’s photographic collections as viewed from a dress history perspective.

Peter Corrigan

**Title:** Clothing in Utopian Societies

**Bio:** Peter Corrigan is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of New England, Armidale, Australia. He has published books on the sociology of consumption and on dress, and is currently working on separate projects on death and aesthetics.

**Abstract:** This presentation considers the role of dress in forty utopian texts ranging from Thomas More’ Utopia of 1516 to the feminist science fiction of the 1970s. It shows how dress and social structure are intimately connected, and looks at clothing in relation to power, the role of aesthetics, class, and gender.
Victoria Flanagan

Title: Delving into the Closet: Cross-dressing in Children’s Literature


Abstract: Despite assumptions that cross-dressing is a sexualized (and therefore adult-oriented) cultural practice, representations of cross-dressing abound in all forms of children's literature. The most common form of cross-dressing found in children's fictions is female-to-male, with girl characters disguising themselves as boys in order to prove that they are equally (if not more) capable than their male peers. Cross-dressing thus becomes a feminist strategy, revealing that gender is performative - a social construct that can be "learned" if an individual is astute enough to recognize the behaviors and gestures that constitute "authentic" masculinity and femininity. This presentation will take listeners on a tour of the different cross-dressing characters found in a diverse array of children's narratives, examining the ways in which transgressive gender behavior becomes a potent tool for educating child readers about appropriate gender expression.

Fiona Reilly

Title: Dags, divas, bag ladies and old men: dressing characters for theatre, film and television.

Bio: Fiona Reilly is a set and costume designer, and sometime producer, who has worked in Australia and internationally designing and teaching for theatre, film and television.

Abstract: When yet another season is announced by an Australian dance company with fashion designers given prominence in billing…when an opera production features an entire chorus of individuals dressed in the current range of an Australian designer…when a European clothing designer yet again imposes their current fashion aesthetic on a period film…should we not stop to consider the purpose of costume design, the place of costume designers in our current arts and entertainment scene and the needs of the works that these designs serve? Are we to return to the past when Lady Macbeth wore her best evening gown and character be damned? What role does fashion play in the creation of stage and screen characters and costumes? Social and historical research underpins much of the work of the costume designer, yet the incursion of the name fashion designer undermines much of the intellectual and analytical basis of this work.
Sally Gray

**Title:** A Tale of Two [or three or four] Cities: Sydney Fashionability in the 1970s and 80s

**Bio:** Sally Gray is an Australian Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of NSW where she is supported by the Australian Research Council to write a book encompassing cities, creative friendship circles, art and clothes. Sally is also an independent curator, most recently co-curating A Short history of Facial Hair at 'The Fashion Space' Gallery, London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, in September 2011.

**Abstract:** In December 1980 Jane de Teliga curated an influential exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, entitled Art Clothes. For this she brought together fourteen ‘fashion’ practitioners, mainly from Sydney and Melbourne, with differing approaches to the juxtaposition of the two words: Art and Clothes. My paper will trace some these and the surrounding cultural themes, impacting on Sydney fashionability, as the 1970s gave way to 1980s. The paper will look at the traffic in aesthetic ideas between the two mentioned cities and New York, London and elsewhere.

Lindie Ward

**Title:** Stories of Love and Loss

**Bio:** Lindie Ward is the curator of textiles and lace at the Powerhouse Museum, and curator of the Museum's exhibition Love Lace currently on show there.

**Abstract:** Garments live with us and reflect all our activities, more so than other decorative items, and can tell us about times of abundance and austerity. Military uniforms, children's dress ups, work clothing can uncover extraordinary stories about real people. Garments entered on the Australian Dress Register shed light on communities all around New South Wales, however small. The Register encourages small volunteer-run historical societies, individuals and large institutions to put their garments on the website and to explore the history that they release.
**Melissa Bellanta**

**Title:** Queen James and the Larrikin King: Homosexuality and flash street style in turn-of-the-twentieth century Australia

**Bio:** Melissa Bellanta is a writer and historian based at the University of Queensland’s Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies. A former lawyer, she now writes about Australian popular theatre, culture and urban social history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

**Abstract:** At the same time that a homosexual subculture was beginning to develop in Australia’s largest cities at the turn of the twentieth century, rough youth known as larrikins were also involved in a subculture of sorts. This larrikin subculture was focused on street fights and late-night revelry in vacant lots and entertainment hot-spots and placed great store on a flash sartorial style. This paper explores the friction that developed between the larrikin and incipient homosexual subcultures, both of which were focused on public urban space and were located on the outer margins of turn-of-the-century Australian life. It takes as its starting point a criminal case revealing conflict between a homosexual ‘queen’ and a young man rumoured to have connections to a larrikin street gang in early twentieth-century Brisbane. It goes on to speculate on the implications of this conflict for male larrikins’ street dress at the start of the new century.

**Liz Conor**

**Title:** ‘Clad in their Complexions’ or ‘Imperfectly Clad’: Settler Ambivalence about the Clothed Native.

**Bio:** Liz Conor lectures at the National Centre for Australian Studies Monash University, and is the author of The Spectacular Modern Woman and a number of academic journal articles and freelance commentary.

**Abstract:** The nakedness of the New Hollander, as is by now well-established, was a key descriptor for their ranking as primitive and as living in a state of nature. The role of clothing in first contact scenarios and intercultural exchanges has also been documented - as has the significance of clothing to the project of civilizing ‘the native’ and later to the various state administrative regimes of the assimilation era. A racialised dichotomy of exposure/enclosure was mapped over hybrid bodies, in an attempt to maintain a clear divide between domestic and wild, civilised and primitive, often many years after settlement and in areas where Indigenous people had adopted clothing for generations. This paper will explore a certain nostalgia in play for primitive nakedness that persisted in types such as the Noble Savage and Native Belle, and was underscored by settler ambivalence about the Aboriginal adoption of European clothing.