

V&A/RCA History of Design Research Seminar Series 2020 (London, 13 Jan–9 Mar 20)

Royal College of Art, London, Jan 13–Mar 9, 2020

Caroline McCaffrey-Howarth

V&A/RCA History of Design Research Seminar Series, 2020

The V&A/RCA History of Design Research Seminar Series provides a forum for engaging with new thinking in the history of design and material culture, including cutting-edge research in related fields such as anthropology, economic history, the history of art and architecture, medical humanities and the history of science and technology

Seminars take place on throughout the academic year and are open to all with an interest in the field. All seminars are free and you are advised to arrive early, as space is strictly limited. External attendees are asked to contact hod@rca.ac.uk to reserve a seat.

Talks take place from 2–3.30pm at the RCA's Kensington or Battersea Sites.

Research Seminars 2020

13 January: Paul Basu, Professor of Anthropology, SOAS, University of London on Re-mobilizing Colonial Collections in Decolonial Times: Exploring the Affordances of an Ethnographic Archive

Lecture Theatre 1, Darwin Building, RCA Kensington

This presentation reports on the work of the AHRC-funded 'Museum Affordances' project and its work with the ethnographic collections and archives originally assembled by the Government Anthropologist N. W. Thomas in West Africa between 1909 and 1915. This comprehensive ethnographic archive, which includes artefacts, photographs, sound recordings, botanical specimens, field notes and published reports, was assembled in the context of a series of anthropological surveys sponsored by the colonial governments of Southern Nigeria and Sierra Leone. It is doubtful that the surveys ever fulfilled whatever governmental purposes they were perceived to afford and the assembled materials were effectively 'shelved' in various institutions, where, for the most part, they have remained dormant and hidden away in storage for over a century. Now the collections are part of a museological experiment in which they are being re-assembled, re-circulated and re-configured in order to explore what they afford to different stakeholders, not least in the context of demands to decolonize museums and archives. The presentation reflects on the different ways the project is attempting to mobilize the ethnographic archive in West Africa and the UK through 'archival returns', 'diasporic reconnections' and 'creative reengagements'. In particular, through such interventions, the project considers what decolonial possibilities these explicitly colonial collections might afford. For further information about the project, please see

<https://re-entanglements.net>.

3 February: Royce Mahawatte, Senior Lecturer in Cultural Studies, Central Saint Martins on Tailoring Caucasacy: Nineteenth-Century Men's Fashion and the Elite Body

Senior Common Room, Darwin Building, RCA Kensington

This paper explores the construction of whiteness inherent in the tailoring of the early nineteenth-century menswear. From the mid 1820s onwards, male gender performance was increasingly linked to the fashioned male body and the wearing of the 'unpadded' suit. Changes in design methods, the rise of tailoring as a profession and a developing fashion media began to challenge the idea of the gentlemen from one based on inheritance and lineage, to one based on the presentation of self via the body. The disciplined body of the elite man, whether suited or in military costume, was one that could administer Great Britain's imperial project abroad, whilst also consolidating the status of an expanding middle class at home.

This paper will look at tailoring as a way of constructing the elite male body, an idea presented by Christopher Breward and Jonathan Harvey. In these discussions, the white raced body is not addressed, but of course, whiteness does not reveal itself willingly. I, therefore, will present the suit as constructing Regency and proto-Victorian caucasity. This happened not just because of the suit's economic value, but also because of the way the garment and taste were presented in fashion media.

Drawing on excerpts of 'dandy novels' by Edward Bulwer Lytton and Samuel Warren, Regency fashion editorial, and the tailoring manuals of Henry Wampen and W Hearne, I will look at how the male body was systematized through developing codes of measuring and notation, and consequently, positioned against non-white, colonized bodies, the working classes and Jewish people. At the same time, accusations of effeminacy and 'dandyism' punctuated a rising fashion culture for men, which presented hegemonic power through a new male silhouette.

10 February: Neil Ewins, Senior Lecturer in Design and Contextual Studies, University of Sunderland on Regionalism and Authenticity in a Globalized World: the Case of English Ceramics.

Senior Common Room, Darwin Building, RCA Kensington

In the last chapter of Frances Hannah's *Ceramics: Twentieth Century Design* of 1986, the possible future of English ceramics was briefly discussed. It was predicted how there would be a continued growth of multi-nationalism, the utilization of world-wide cheap labour, and a declining tendency to manufacture surface-designs to suit national tastes and different markets. These observations have much in common with what is related to the characteristics of globalization. In a context of a surge world-wide competition and factory closures, the focus of this seminar is how the English ceramic industry (centred around the Staffordshire Potteries) has responded to globalization. The surprise, perhaps, is how there has not been a complete collapse, or disappearance of the ceramic industry. As evidenced by marketing strategy and design, a renewed interest in regionalism and issues of authenticity have also become some of the qualities of contemporary ceramics. In short, the actual consequences of globalization remain complex and diverse.

24 February: Anna Maerker, Reader in the History of Science, Technology and Medicine, Depart-

ment of History, King's College London on Making Model Communities: Artificial Bodies and Reform in the Nineteenth Century

Room 111, Dyson Building, RCA Battersea

In recent decades, cultural historians have paid close attention to representations of the body in health and disease, demonstrating the deeply value-laden character of supposedly objective medical images, models, and museum displays. In particular, historians have suggested that the creation of body images in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries went hand in hand with the emergence of particularly modern identities characterised by self-control and optimisation of productivity. In contrast I want to suggest that anatomical models were not just used to impose specific identities. They have also been used and reinterpreted in different ways which allowed users, in more or less radical ways, to articulate new types of identities and to shape new forms of communities. A challenge for historians working with anatomical representations, then, is how to tell stories about these medical objects in a way that acknowledges their disciplinary power while also recovering their potential not just for personal fulfilment through the adoption of sanctioned personal identities, but also for the articulation of new types of identities and communities. Today, I want to briefly introduce cases of anatomical model use which illustrate how models were employed in efforts to create new identities and communities through processes of emulation, focusing on public health activists in the U.S. and new groups of medical practitioners in Egypt.

2 March: Naomi Paxton, Knowledge Exchange Fellow, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London on New ways, new stories: Votes for Women and the Edwardian Stage

Senior Common Room, Darwin Building, RCA Kensington

9 March: Deniz Turker, Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, History of Art, University of Cambridge on Exhibiting Ottoman Photograph Albums: Surveying, Documenting, and Gifting

Senior Common Room, Darwin Building, RCA Kensington

Reference:

ANN: V&A/RCA History of Design Research Seminar Series 2020 (London, 13 Jan-9 Mar 20). In:

ArtHist.net, Jan 11, 2020 (accessed Jul 10, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/22384>>.