



ART LIBRARIES SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

36th Annual Conference
Grand Hyatt, Denver, Colorado, May 1-5, 2008

Session: No Doubt About It, Fashion Is an Art

Monday, May 5, 2008 10:15 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

Moderators: Greta Earnest and Erin Elliot

Speakers:

Maria T. Rothenberg, Technical Services/Reference Librarian, The Laboratory Institute of Merchandising: The College for the Business of Fashion

Ana Noriega, Assistant Director of Library Services, The Laboratory Institute of Merchandising: The College for the Business of Fashion

Greta Earnest, Assistant Director, Gladys Marcus Library, Fashion Institute of Technology

Erin Elliott, Librarian, Sotheby's Institute of Art

Amber Fischer, Senior Editor, Grove Art Online

Recorder: Jenni James, Institute of American Indian Arts

Introduction

Greta Earnest welcomed attendees and introduced the presenters who spoke about researching fashion and fashion's status in arts and material culture studies. Traveling with us as a reference point through the session was the iconic black dress from the classic 1961 film, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. This Givenchy designed dress, worn by Audrey Hepburn as Holly Golightly in the opening of the film, was auctioned by Christies South Kensington on December 5th, 2006. The estimated value for the dress was £50,000 - £70,000 (\$100,000 - \$140,000). However, it sold for much more and the presenters discussed the significance and implications of that result.

Design It - Maria Rothenberg

Using this quote from Heidi Klum of Project Runway, "one day you're in and the next you're out," to illustrate the importance of staying current with the rapid changes in trends, Maria Rothenberg explained how designers try to create fashion that meets the desires of consumers.

Fashion forecasts provide key information to the industry by giving designers

an idea where the apparel market is going. Rothenberg explained that forecasts consist of the colors, fabrics and looks expected to be the trends in an upcoming season. Forecasting companies visually present information as “mood boards” in the form of a book or a box containing fabric swatches, yarn, Pantone colors and imagery.

Forecasters systematically predict trends by understanding the influences on past fashion trends and determining similarities and differences with current events, demographics and culture. Past forecasts are reviewed for accuracy with actual consumer behavior. Significant deviations from predictions inform revisions in strategies for future forecasting.

Rothenberg provided the audience with an overview of upcoming trends for Fall '08 through Spring '09; and concluded with a visual comparison of the *Breakfast at Tiffany's* dress with today's take on the little black dress.

Make It, Market It – Ana Noriega

With the globalization of the manufacturing and marketing of fashion, an item of clothing is likely to have been made of fabric woven at a mill in one country, such as Pakistan, from cotton grown in the United States and spun elsewhere, then sewn in yet another country such as China. After being marketed, purchased, worn, and discarded by someone in the United States, apparel is often re-sold in bulk to poorer countries where it is once again marketed and sold as second-hand clothing.

Prior to the 1990s, small companies were the predominate manufacturers of clothing for the apparel industry. Those small companies have been replaced by subcontractors with lower labor costs outside the United States. This shift created increased production levels and shorter turnaround time; what is termed “fast fashion”. With copies of designer clothes now appearing in as little as 24 hours following a fashion show, consumers seeking the newest and latest look are driving sales.

Using an image of a t-shirt imprinted with a sketch of the “little black dress” and hanging from a tree at an outdoor shop selling second-hand clothing in Nigeria, Noriega provided an example not only of the global life-cycle of a clothing item and the international westernization of style, but also the multiple layers of the industry when considering intellectual property. Her research found the copyright of the image on the t-shirt belongs to French conglomerate LVMH which owns the Givenchy brand.

Value It - Greta Earnest

Asking why the Givenchy/Golightly dress sold for \$807,000 at auction, \$700,000 more than anticipated, Greta Earnest gave a history of auctioned clothing.

Visiting the Frick's collection of 73,000 auction catalogs, Earnest found that early catalogs listed textiles but rarely clothing. She suggested the reason

may be that clothing was worn until unusable or because there was a stigma attached to used clothing for hygienic reasons. The definitive answer as to why early auction catalogs did not contain items of clothing is not apparent and presents an area needing research.

Earnest sees the high sum paid for the Givenchy/Golightly dress as signifying the confluence of several trends which led to the explosion of clothing in auction catalogs from the 1970s onward. She presented the trends chronologically.

The rise in designer recognition and a pervasive societal cult of celebrity; what Earnest calls "Celebrity Cultism" of both the clothing designer and the movie star.

The growing popularity of fashion/costume exhibitions in museums.

The rise of popular culture studies in academic enquiry and the inclusion of clothing, textiles, and style trends as serious contributors to understanding history.

Auction houses creating theme-centered sales of clothing with museum-like displays and catalogs.

Research It - Erin Elliott

Erin Elliott followed up the previous presentations with information about the resources Rothenberg, Noriega, and Earnest used for their research.

Forecasting/Design Resources

Forecasting products run a broad spectrum from statistical charts to touch boards containing colors and trends in a tactile presentation.

Theory and science texts provide the structures and methodologies for forecasting and design. Other resources, such as the **American Generations Series**, cover demographic tastes and habits.

The **Trend Union Touchbooks** convey major textile trends through grouped fabric samples, inspirational images, texts and keywords.

The resource **Promostyl** provides a sharper focus by including more specific concepts and ideas for designs.

Specific and concrete information is provided by **ESP Edits** with reports that include actual runway photos and go beyond other resources by relating trends to realistic use. The **ESP Edits** reports and trendbooks can help pinpoint the trends, colors, items, and fabrics that will define a season.

The image database **Stylesight** is updated daily and allows the user to search over 2 million images by color, season and clothing items among

other options and create a folder of images for inspiration and development. The database helps the designer put it all together as they create their own trendboards.

Manufacturing/Business Resources

To research the production and sale of fashion, Noriega used three main resources.

Euromonitor International's online databases provide international market information on industries, countries and consumers. With its global breadth, this resource is very useful for researching the international industry of fashion. Reports may be browsed by industry, country, consumer, company or geographical location or the user may search on specific criteria.

Factiva.com is useful for current business news and information. The user may search with combinations of free text and specific criteria such as industry, region and date.

Noriega found the licensing and copyright information for Givenchy fashions by using ***LexisNexis***. This resource includes the detailed information of *Hoover's Company Profiles* in addition to the full-text of selected national and international newspapers, trade publications, legal periodicals and scholarly journals.

Auction Sales Resources

In her search for evidence of clothing in historical auctions, Earnest used several databases.

Digital versions of art sales catalogs, including early items, are included in ***Art Sales Catalogues Online***. Searches are limited to the bibliographic records and do not search the full content of the catalogs so specific items such as clothing might be missed.

As a database of art and sales catalogs, ***SCIPIO*** covers the 17th century to the present. Specific material listed in the catalogs can be difficult to locate as searches are limited to the catalog level rather than lots. The notes sections of records occasionally highlight contents of the sale catalog and may be searched with keywords. *SCIPIO* allows limiting searches by year which can provide an interesting statistical overview. The records also indicate libraries which hold the catalogs.

Some libraries, such as those at the Frick, the Met and the Getty, include records for auction catalogs in their OPACs, which may be searched without charge via their websites. Auction house websites often give information on upcoming and past sales. Some larger houses also provide online archives of sales with limited search functions.

With the ***ArtPrice*** database, the researcher may search by lot and view digitized versions of over 290,000 catalogs from over 2900 auction houses. Descriptive information includes the provenance, bibliographic references and estimated prices. *ArtPrice* also indexes the collection by theme such as "Textiles – Fashion".

Artifact is the most comprehensive source for auction sales in the decorative arts. This database is not indexed by subject but the user may search by lot and for sale price information. Text from catalogs is provided as "Lot Details".

More historical and current fashion and costume content is found in the following online resources.

ABM

BHA

DAAI

Art Full Text

Art Index Retrospective

JSTOR

Encyclopedia of Clothing and Dress – available electronically through Gale or as a three volume print edition.

The journals **Fashion Theory; Selvedge; Dress; and Costume** are examples of scholarly periodicals in the field of fashion and costume.

Fashion is a growing field for scholarly study as indicated by the increasing number of museum exhibits focused on fashion, fashion symposia at schools such as F.I.T., the increasing number of graduate programs in the field, the inclusion of listings for fashion in the *CAA Directory of Graduate Programs* in art, and the upcoming addition of fashion entries in Grove Art Online.

Historicize It – Amber Fischer

Fashion has not been totally ignored by Grove Art as editions included an article on dress, but it has not been widely accepted as a subject of serious academic study. In the contemporary arena there is debate about what constitutes art and fashion and how they interact and influence each other.

The inclusion of fashion entries into Grove Art Online is taking place in two phases. Phase I has begun with contracts for contributors completed. Grove is working with two educators at F.I.T., Lourdes Font and Nancy Deihl, as consultants in this project. Entries for 19th and 20th century fashion will be created and include images from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the museum at F.I.T.

The resource will include a listing of 99 fashion houses and designers, and thematic entries such as classical and historical periods of dress, tailoring, environment and sustainability. Scholars and professionals in the field will be commissioned to write the articles. The material will be added to Grove Art Online during Phase II with an expected release in 2009.