



The Body in the Museum

New approaches to the display of dress

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Museum of London

BIOGRAPHIES & ABSTRACTS (in order of schedule)

Eleanor Thompson

Death and desire: The body in the museum

Mannequins are essential in giving form and presence to dress and yet more often than not, replica bodies in the museum have an uncanny lifelessness that only serves to draw attention to the absence of the fleshy human form. This talk will explore some of the conceptual issues around the much maligned museum mannequin and discuss how its relationship to other forms of bodily representation; the waxwork, the effigy, the anatomical model, the dressmaker's dummy and the shop mannequin have created an aura of deathliness and desire. Examples of contemporary museum practice that plays on the historical associations of the mannequin will also be explored in this presentation.

ELEANOR THOMPSON is currently writing her doctoral thesis exploring new methodologies for displaying historic dress. Eleanor studied decorative art history at the University of Brighton and museum studies at the University of Leicester. She began her career in the New Art Gallery Walsall. In 2003 she took up the post of Curator of Dress and Textiles at Brighton Museum, where she curated the touring exhibitions *Little Black Dress* (2007 - 2008) and *Fashion & Fancy Dress, 1865-2005* (2005-2006). She has lectured at the University of Brighton, the London College of Fashion and the Victoria and Albert Museum and has worked as a freelance exhibition consultant for the Fashion & Textile Museum in London.

Beatrice Behlen

The Pleasure Garden at the Museum of London

The Pleasure Garden display was intended to offer an immersive experience. Rather than learning about the gardens intellectually, we hoped that museum visitors would be turned into amusement park flaneurs. This intention influenced the way the 16 outfits on show in this gallery were displayed. While we did not want to go down the Madame Tussaud route, we nevertheless felt that accessorised full-figure mannequins with some sort of 'hair' had to be used, rather than the more fashionable cut-outs. This talk will provide further information about the decisions behind the look of the display, the issues that might arise from working with a designer not used to bureaucratic museum practices as well as practical concerns such as the choice of a conservation-grade paint that worked with the supplier's airbrush system.

BEATRICE BEHLEN studied fashion design in Germany and the history of dress at the Courtauld Institute, University of London. After three years as a curatorial assistant at the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection, Kensington Palace she taught fashion and design students at several art colleges and worked at the contemporary art gallery Annelly Juda Fine Art. In 2003 she returned to Kensington Palace as a curator, where she was involved in a number of displays relating to royal and court dress. Since the end of 2007 she has been now Senior Curator of Fashion and Decorative Arts at the Museum of London.

Sam Gatley

Hollywood costume: The challenges of creating character and movement

Autumn 2012 will see the opening of *Hollywood Costume: The Good the Bad and the Beautiful* at the Victoria & Albert Museum. The exhibition, curated by costume designer Professor Deborah Landis, will feature over 100 iconic Hollywood costumes and examine the role of the costume designer as an integral collaborator to creating character in film.

As the exhibition will focus solely on costume it was decided early on in the design process that the display mannequins needed to convey the life and character that inhabited each costume beyond that of conventional museum display figures. This paper will explore the variations on traditional mounting methods that have been employed by the V&A in order to try and capture the verve, life and movement of the character inside the costume.

The need to manage expectations of contemporary designers involved in this project by communicating the display limitations imposed when working with museum costume will also be addressed.

SAM GATLEY began her career as a mounting technician at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter and continued to work with diverse collections across the country as a technician, this led to completion of a BA (Hons) in Costume Interpretation from Wimbledon Schools of Art.

Having subsequently continued to work as a mount maker Sam went on to complete the first and last MA in Conservation and Mounting of Costume with the Royal College of Art/V&A. Since graduating Sam has been employed as a Textile Display Specialist in the V&A's textile conservation studio where she has mounted costume for many blockbuster shows including the *Golden Age of Couture* and *Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes*.

Carmen Lucini

The 'Historical Body' Collection and papier mâché museum supports

Historic dress does not cover an 'ideal' naked body but one shaped by contemporary culture. When choosing a mannequin for an outfit questions such as how arched was the original wearer's back or in what position did he/she hold their head, have to be considered.

Observational skills are required to determine the details that make up the correct silhouette for an object and also to translate this into sculpture. Museum supports must fit the object and not the other way round and I will discuss my restless quest to find the body shape nearest to the man or woman who once wore the item of clothing. Papier mâché provides an easier option than traditional materials (wood, fibreglass, plaster) and techniques employed in sculpture. It can be easily shaped, it is cost-effective and it fulfils conservation criteria.

I will also introduce the Body-Thèque, master copies of bodies from 1650 onwards, which could be made available around Europe.

CARMEN LUCINI studied textile engineering at the University of Barcelona. She is also a sculptor and holds degrees in the History of Art from the École de Louvre and in Preventive Conservation from the Université Paris-Sorbonne. Carmen was head of the Preventive Conservation and Curatorial Technical Team at the Musée Galliera in Paris and has applied her knowledge of historical body shapes and her skills in making papier mâché mannequins at the Musée des Arts Décoratives (Paris), the Musée du Cinema (Paris) and the Musée de la Dentelle (Calais). Carmen was also involved in the preparations for the opening of the Museo del Traje (Madrid) and more recently the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa in Getaria (Basque Country).

Deborah Phipps

Developing a new figure for historic mannequins

Displays of historic costume are very popular with many museums and institutions. Papier mâché torsos produced by Proportion London are a versatile and cost effective way of achieving this objective but they usually need some sort of intervention to enable the safe and correct display of objects. This intervention may be in the form of padding; adding underpinnings; or - in some cases - the mutilation of bust or shoulders or ribcage, or some combination of all those techniques. This all adds time, and cost to often already expensive projects.

The Petite mannequin was specifically designed to help alleviate some of the most common problems found with the standard workroom range of Proportion London torsos. This paper will discuss in more depth the reasons behind developing this mannequin and the processes involved.

DEBORAH PHIPPS studied Textile Art at Norwich School of Art and Design before completing her MA in the Conservation of Historic Objects at DeMontfort University in Lincoln followed by a two-year post graduate internship with the National Trust at their Textile Conservation Studio, to specialise in textiles. After short contract with the Museum of London preparing for a costume exhibition, the opportunity to go freelance arose.

Specialising in costume conservation and mounting Deborah works for a variety of museums and institutions such as the National Trust, the Royal Collection Trust and the Victoria & Albert Museum on special projects and exhibitions. Currently Deborah is working for Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service on a museum re-display as well as undertaking general textile and costume conservation duties.

Miriam Langford

Safety first: secretly supportive mannequin materials

In 2008, *The Last Debutantes* exhibition at Kensington Palace opened with a number of 1958 dresses, displayed on 'cut-away' mannequin forms, which supported the objects without being visible. This elegant, modern 'look' was well received by visitors, curators and designers and Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) conservators have since been searching for an efficient, affordable technique to make cut-away forms, which we can achieve without an in-house mount-making team or equipment. HRP's conservation science team were involved in forming our 'conservation-sound' parameters, and in-house Oddy testing has helped us create our list of safe (and unsafe) materials. These parameters, combined with designer concepts, have been our design-brief for the past few years, working towards the *Victoria Revealed* exhibition, opening at Kensington Palace in March 2012. This talk will summarise the results of a scoping study into existing materials and techniques used by textile conservators across the world, as well as share the results of our materials analysis and investigation of both ready-made and bespoke mannequin options. Our results show how we have met our conservation parameters at the same time as meeting designer visions and exhibition budget constraints.

MIRIAM LANGFORD studied conservation at the University of Canberra, Australia. From 2001 she worked in textiles and objects conservation for seven years at International Conservation Services (ICS) in Sydney, where she became a Senior Conservator and Head of the Textiles Conservation department, working for a variety of Government, historic and private collections. In 2008, Miriam took up the position of Treatment Conservation Manager for Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) in London, where she manages the four treatment conservation teams, including the costume team, who care for the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection housed at Kensington Palace. During this time, she has been involved with the *Enchanted Palace* exhibition in 2009 and the re-presentation of Kensington Palace opening in 2012.

Janet Wood

Acrylic Mannequins at the Bowes Museum

There is an ever-increasing demand from exhibition designers for new ways to display historic dress. As a textile conservator the need to provide conservation sound solutions to these demands is a challenge. The brief from the exhibition designer at the Bowes Museum was: I only want to see garments in the showcases - not mannequins. This paper follows the ethics behind the decisions to use acrylic and the design problems that had to be overcome in order to create these new additions to the range of body forms available for the display of historic and modern dress in museum galleries.

JANET WOOD's first career, following a BA Fashion and Textiles degree from the Gloucestershire College of Art and Design, was as personal assistant to the London designer Thea Porter. She then joined the fashion company Monsoon, employed as their first trained designer to work with factories in India, Afghanistan and Romania producing seasonal ranges of women's clothing for the UK market. Following this she successfully produced her own cocktail and eveningwear range made both in India and the UK. In 1992 she re-trained as a textile conservator with Historic Royal Palaces and has spent the last 18 years working as part of the Conservation and Collection Care team and as a freelance consultant. Her specialist field and passion is the conservation and display of costume.

Hilary Davidson

Fibre-glass cut-out mannequins

When the Museum of London's project team decided to use fibreglass, cut-out mannequins for the display of costume in the new Galleries of Modern London it was the first time any of the team had worked with this technique. When done correctly, the effect is as if each piece is self-supporting, with the mannequin 'disappearing' along the lines of the object. A lot of lessons were learnt along the way to achieving this finished result. The clothing that needed to be mounted as cut-outs dated from 1740 to 2004, with each period and individual garment presenting its own challenges of fit, support, and visual integration with the rest of the display.

This talk looks at some of the issues arising from working with fibreglass as a specialist hard-moulded material, including the time needed for painting and off-gassing, and the importance of multiple fittings and accuracy at each stage of the process. It will also address how to add padding and other conservation support while maintaining the illusion of invisibility. Some of the most complex mannequins like the 1752 Fanshawe dress and 1980s punk clothing will be presented in more detail as case studies.

HILARY DAVIDSON studied shoemaking in her native Australia before moving to England in 2001. She completed a MA in the History of Textiles and Dress at Winchester School of Art in 2004, and worked as a dress historian and lecturer in textiles, fashion and design history in Britain and Europe. Hilary joined the Museum of London in 2007 as Curator of Fashion and Decorative Arts. She continues to teach, publish and lecture on topics ranging from medieval dress to cultural theory, with a special interest in replica garments as a research practice and what can be learned about historic bodies from historic clothing.