



The Journal of Dress History  
Volume 1, Issue 1, Spring 2017

ISSN 2515-0995

journal@dresshistorians.org  
www.dresshistorians.org

Copyright © 2017 The Association of Dress Historians

The Association of Dress Historians is Registered Charity #1014876 of The Charity Commission for England and Wales. The Association of Dress Historians supports and promotes the advancement of public knowledge and education in the history of dress and textiles.

*The Journal of Dress History* is the academic publication of The Association of Dress Historians through which scholars can articulate original research in a constructive, interdisciplinary, and peer-reviewed environment. The journal is published biannually, in the spring and autumn.

*The Journal of Dress History* is copyrighted by the publisher, The Association of Dress Historians, while each published author within the journal holds the copyright to their individual article.

*The Journal of Dress History* is published on an Open Access platform distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

The editors of the journal encourage the cultivation of ideas for proposals. Please view the Submission Guidelines on the journal's website for more detailed information regarding the submission of articles, book reviews, and other pieces for publication consideration.

The graphic design of *The Journal of Dress History* utilises the font, Baskerville, a serif typeface designed in 1754 by John Baskerville (1706-1775) in Birmingham, England.

Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim, *The Dress Detective: A Practical Guide to Object-Based Research in Fashion*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2015, Index, 150 Colour Illustrations, Appendices, 224pp., £24.99.

If you have ever looked at a garment, focusing on the traces of the wearer, feeling like Sherlock Holmes, then you have landed in the middle of Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim's *The Dress Detective: A Practical Guide to Object-Based Research in Fashion*. With their colourful and amply equipped publication, Ingrid Mida, curator and coordinator of Ryerson University's Fashion Research Collection, and Dress Historian Alexandra Kim present an exciting journey through the wide field of exploring a garment's history. The authors look through the lens of the curator, conservator, dress historian, and fashion researcher simultaneously and at eye level. Their approach is precious in a time where we, as dress researchers, are confronted with dress artefacts made out of different, more often unorthodox materials, and two- or three-dimensional fabric that is neither easy to store, present, nor preserve.

The book is a long-anticipated guide to object-based dress research with the baseline of a high standard but still readable for students, scholars, and all who are interested in the adventure of reading clothes and learning from a garment's history. The very idea of introducing dress research as an investigation, and by doing this following the tradition of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous protagonist, is more than refined. And, as a fashion studies researcher, you are taken by it from the very first moment of reading garments through the magnifying glass.

The volume opens with a brief history of object-based research with dress artefacts, which is helpful but impressive, in particular, because you not only learn about the research history but gain insight into research methods. These methods were developed to enable the reading of garments by interpreting all their obvious (e.g. cut and colour), hidden (e.g. construction), literal (e.g. gown), and abstract (e.g. style) information. In this chapter you will find references to well-known researchers including Anne Buck, Doris Langley Moore, Valerie Steele, Alexandra Palmer, and Lou Taylor. It is remarkable to read about Jules David Prown, who with his evidence-based research of objects, opened doors for analysing material culture more than thirty years ago. Valerie Steele followed his track and refined Prown's method for the study of dress artefacts.

The following chapter provides tools to enable us to read a dress artefact. This is crucial for researchers. The book utilises a body of methods from literary studies and foremost linguistics. Some internationally established fashion studies and dress history researchers have a scientific background of this kind. If you look at a garment and understand it as a text that contains a full range of information, then the most important thing to do is to organise your approach by regarding the steps of observation, reflection, and interpretation. Here, Prown's method is again leading the way. In this process of converging, Mida and Kim quote Merleau-Ponty's idea of 'inhabiting an object' while looking at it. Why this is important becomes clear instantly as all garments have so much information to offer for investigation. Here, once more, the authors' efforts bear fruit because of their step-wise presentation of all these aspects.

I dived into the subsequently presented case studies where Mida and Kim applied the rolled-out methods by choosing a selection of garment masterpieces. These included the likes of a yellow woollen pelisse, a grey-blue sateen corset, a brown velveteen and wool bodice, a man's evening tailcoat with trousers, a Lanvin wedding dress, and a wonderful Dior ruby red velvet jacket.

Each of the analyses is clearly described in detail. You can really study them and learn from them. Included in the book are absolutely useful checklists for observation and reflection. Those are the kinds

of resources you often forget to prepare although they are so important and ensure a successful research project.

Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim's publication is extremely valuable as they also had a good hand in selecting appealing illustrations that attract all kinds of readers. Even if you are not a dress researcher, you will be delighted by these wonderful images, full of details in high resolution. I recommend this outstanding volume to students and faculty alike.

**Rainer Wenrich, PhD**

*Catholic University, Eichstaett-Ingolstadt*

Copyright © 2017 Rainer Wenrich

Email: rainer.wenrich@ku.de