Mining Costume History Under The Lights of Las Vegas

By Brenna Barks

What better place to mine the fact and fantasy of costume history than Las Vegas, where the two are indelibly mixed?

The 2013 Costume Society of America Annual Symposium was extremely rich in variety and breadth of topics. The speakers came not only from every region, but also every conceivable area of costume studies. The jurors did an excellent job of balancing topics, regions, and areas of expertise. The keynote speaker was Jack Ricks, head of wardrobe for Cirque du Soleil’s Zumanity show. Ricks spoke on the history of costuming Cirque, and also the amazing innovations in costuming and textiles the Cirque costumers have made over the years. He brought a large collection of Cirque costumes, which attendees were encouraged to touch.

Millia Davenport Publication Award Winner Kathy Peiss spoke about her research into the zoot suit and its history in her book, Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of an Extreme Style. Having long been an admirer of Professor Peiss’s work, and having used one of her books as a source for my own writing, I was overjoyed to meet her and hear her speak.

This was my first time speaking at the CSA National Symposium. The theme – and the location – seemed the perfect excuse for me to set aside my usual research and look into a side topic that has long interested me: showgirl and cooch dancer costumes of the 1920s and 30s.

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Dear CSA Western Region Members,

First things first: A hearty and well-deserved thank you is owed to National Symposium co-chairs, Inez Brooks-Myers and Shelly Foote for their very hard work (over several years) that allowed our region to shine in the National spotlight. Thanks are also owed to our departing board members, Tara Maginnis, David Newell, and Deidre Thieman. Their service to the region and board has been exemplary and they will be missed. We are pleased to welcome returning board members, Meghan Hansen and Mary Gibson to the board, whose contributions (as Treasurer and Programs Chair/President Elect, respectively) continue to shape the direction of the board. Finally, we welcome new board member Kendra Van Cleave, and interim board members (replacing vacant board positions) Genna Reeves-DeArmond and Celia Sedwick Rogus. They are already making contributions to our continued success.

As you likely noticed on our most recent email correspondence, we have finally made the switch to online registration and payment for programs – a very large undertaking with delicate intricacies that took creativity, tenacity, and good old-fashioned hard work to achieve. We hope you will take advantage of this new service to register for upcoming programs. It’s something you asked for directly at the last Annual Business Meeting, and I’m happy that we’ve been able to deliver.

Programs Chair/President-Elect Mary Gibson is working hard on a new slate of programs for 2014, and is continuing to work on new meet-up opportunities. Please contact her with your ideas and watch your email for updates! A final slate of programs will be announced soon, so now is the time to put in your two cents. Mary is actively seeking ideas for 2014 programs, so you should feel free to contact her at marygibsonwr@ymail.com. Send Mary information about a fascinating fashion exhibition, private collection of dress/textiles, or a unique historic location and it might become the basis for a Western Region program.

One of my goals as President for the Western Region of CSA is to encourage your involvement, on any level, and involvement with board activities. Many members don’t realize that they can serve on committees (or even act as committee chairs) without being elected. It’s a great way to meet other members with similar interests, further your career, and build your skills. We will also be seeking new board members in the coming months – if you are interested in joining the board (as an elected member, a committee chair, or committee member), please contact ANY board member for more information on serving, or Nominating Chair Kendra Van Cleave at kendrav@sfsu.edu. Nominations for election to the board are due by January, so now is your chance to throw your hat into the ring!

Heather A. Vaughan
Heather.a.vaughan@gmail.com
Program Report: Resplendent Dress for Southeastern Europe

By Clarissa M. Esguerra

On Saturday, April 6, 2013, CSA Western Region members gathered at the Fowler Museum of the University of California, Los Angeles to view *Resplendent Dress for Southeastern Europe: A History of Layers*. The exhibition reflected the tradition of southeastern European folk costume and the layered meanings and history behind its stunning adornment. Those members who were lucky enough to attend this event were given a memorable curatorial walk-through by the exhibition’s charismatic curator, renowned scholar, and long-time CSA member, Dr. Elizabeth Wayland Barber.

As a prelude to the tour of *Resplendent Dress*, Dr. Barber first shared that even before she decided to become an archeologist at age eleven, she was taught her first folk dance at age six. Both archeology and southeastern European folk dance would become and continue to be life-long, interrelated passions for Dr. Barber, which have culminated beautifully in this exhibition.

Upon entering *Resplendent Dress*, viewers are greeted with bold colors in irregular angles that evoke the distinctive mountain landscape of southeastern Europe. This scenography, accompanied by light folk music overhead, compliment fifty men’s and women’s ensembles and one-hundred individual aprons, vests, jackets, and robes on display. The objects, beautifully mounted on undulating platforms, represented nineteenth- through twentieth-century festive dress from Macedonia, Croatia, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Serbia, Hungary, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, Montenegro, and Romania.

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As the title suggests, the clothing on view were indeed resplendent, and highlighted fine techniques such as fiber felting, tapestry weave, cut work, embroidery, leatherwork, metalwork, knitting, beading, smocking, pleating, and much more. As Dr. Barber explained, this adornment was traditionally done by girls in rural areas for the clothing that they wore to Sunday afternoon village dances. Layers of color and applied details expressed the status of the dancer to onlookers, such as her marital status, religion, wealth, skill, and region. One room of the exhibition in particular displayed small singular objects such as shoes and vests so that the viewer could more closely observe the details of this handwork.

As members toured Resplendent Dress, Dr. Barber shared fascinating antidotes of information which enriched the exhibition experience. She dissected the components of the ensembles layer by layer, noting why certain developments were made, the gender and age of the garment’s wearer, if an ensemble was worn in the country or in urban areas, if it was made for cold or warm weather, specific regional differences, and the impact the mountainous environment had on the clothing. And that’s not all; Dr. Barber also shared other such impressive tidbits including why and how linen was used for ancient pleating, the symbolism of certain adornment patterns and motifs, why faggoting was used to join pieces of the chemise, the origins of trousers and the apron, the meaning of certain colors, and, of course, the evolution and significance of the string skirt.

Perhaps the most enlightening piece of information that was shared by Dr. Barber was in her closing remarks of our tour: the oldest documentable tradition of garments in the world is fossilized in the folk and dance wear on display in this very gallery. The history of European clothing, from the Paleolithic era on, can be traced in every layered detail of the resplendent ensembles of southeastern European folk dress.
When I presented my research, titled *Showgirls and Cooch Dancers: Selling Sexual Fantasies in the Circuses and Boardwalks of the 1920s and 30s*, I was more nervous than I expected. But, the experience was truly wonderful, since I received more new leads, ideas, and potential sources than I could have possibly imagined. Meghan Hansen, of FIDM Museum, spoke immediately after me, to discuss the threatening foreign other and depictions of Dracula since the initial publication of Bram Stoker’s novel, to present day film versions of the novel. Her paper was insightful, and demonstrated just how much dress not only gives us insight into the characters we are reading about, but also author and societal perceptions of dress in the time and place of a particular work’s writing and publication.

The Western Region was very well represented at this conference. Both Sophia Gan and Leigh Wishner of LACMA gave papers, with Sophia detailing the struggles of not only shipping LACMA’s seminal exhibit, *Fashioning Fashion*, abroad to Berlin and Paris, but in mounting it in such new and different spaces. Leigh examined historical recurrences in footwear from across the centuries, proving the old adage “everything old is new again” very true. Other Western Region presenters included Elise Yvonne Rousseau, who gave attendees an intimate portrait of the historic baseball uniform collection at the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and educated us on the history and evolution of the uniform itself. Cynthia Cicero and Alison Bazylinski represented Las Vegas, with Cynthia presenting an armchair exhibit of the history of fashion and shopping in Vegas – an apropos topic – and Alison discussing the construction and perception of Native American identity in dress, focusing on the mid-twentieth century.

Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell gave an amazing paper on the eighteenth-century board game *Le Nouveau Jou du Costume et des Coiffures des Dames dedié au Beau Sexe*, or The New Games of Women’s Fashion and Hairstyles Dedicated to the Fair Sex. This amazing game used fashion plates of dress and hairstyles as the playing squares. The players’ actions were determined by what square they landed on and what the woman in the image was wearing or doing. If you landed on some you had to dawdle while discussing the woman’s attire and the latest fashion with her until someone else could “take your place,” in other words, until someone else landed on the same square. Kimberly was able to conduct her research on this game and others like it with a travel grant from CSA. Kimberly, in collaboration with Melissa Leventon and Dale Gluckman, also facilitated a panel on freelancing as a dress historian. Extremely helpful and insightful, their panel was one of the most popular during the entire symposium.

I was able to sneak some time in to see a few of the Western Region members’ research exhibits, such as my Worn Through colleague, Michaela Hansen’s on Jane Addams and Hull House, and Laura Kane of Oregon State University’s on one of her amazing cosplay costumes. Also representing Oregon State University was Genna Reeves-D’Armmond, who presented an exhibit examining the use of dress displays to teach dress history to the general public in exhibits and experiences examining the H.M.S. Titanic disaster. Having worked with Genna on a guest post on the same topic for Worn Through it was wonderful to meet her in person and get an even broader look at her work on the subject.

What struck me most about this particular symposium as compared to others I have attended – both held by CSA and other groups – was the sheer variety of information, and how “on-schedule” the entire conference was. Shelly Foote and Inez Brooks-Meyers did an amazing job of not only organizing the conference, but of keeping it organized. Papers, panels, exhibits, and tours started as scheduled, and ended on time. This was a truly wonderful accomplishment considering how interesting every topic was, and how many questions attendees had for speakers. There were also plenty of breaks, enabling us to ask speakers questions even if a panel had technically run out of time.

Overall, it was an amazing conference. Several times I wished that I could clone myself, so that I could attend absolutely all the papers I wanted to hear. I’m already looking forward to next year in Baltimore!
Western Regions Invites you to Attend...

Let’s Party! at the Museum of Ventura County
and
A Tour, Lecture and Tea at Santa Barbara’s Lotusland
Saturday, October 26, 2013

Join CSA friends and colleagues for a full day of fun!

Our day will begin with the Western Region Annual Meeting in the courtyard of the Museum of Ventura County. Co-Curators Shelly Foote and Anna Bermudez will lead a guided tour through the exhibit Wear to Party! A Century of Celebration in Ventura County. As part of the Museum’s continuing Centennial Celebration, this exhibition explores the ways people have socialized with family, friends and others in the community. There will also be time to view the intriguing George Stuart Collection of historical miniature figures. We will enjoy lunch on our own at nearby Ventura cafés on Main Street before carpooling to Santa Barbara.

When we reach Santa Barbara, our afternoon at Lotusland will begin with a highlight tour of the estate’s beautiful and exotic gardens. Following the tour, we will have an opportunity that visitors rarely get. We will be allowed inside the house, where we will join Lotusland members, for a special program by CSA member Louise Coffey-Webb entitled Erté and Walska.

Madame Ganna Walska, a well-known Polish opera singer and socialite, purchased the estate in 1941 and spent the next 43 years creating Lotusland. The spectacular collections of exotic plants throughout the 37-acre property are a very personal expression of Walska’s penchant for the dramatic, the unexpected, and the whimsical. After her death in 1984, Lotusland became a nonprofit botanical garden and opened to the public in 1993. To end our day, we will join Lotusland members for an afternoon tea on the adjoining patio.

Registration for this event will open on September 1, and close on October 11, 2013. Western Region members will receive an e-mail announcement with registration info, or you can register via the Costume Society of America Website. Register online: http://goo.gl/ WPAc1.

As always, this program is open to all CSA members and their guests. Invite your friends or family to join us for this fun and fascinating event!

Madame Ganna Walska (1887-1984), founder of Lotusland.
Welcome aboard to Kendra Van Cleave, the newest member of the CSA-WR board, and welcome back to our three returning board members: Mary Gibson, Meghan G. Hansen, and Heather A. Vaughan.

Mary Gibson-CSA member since 1989

I have been a CSA member since 1989; now retired from my career as a theatrical costume designer and teacher. Since being elected to the Board in 2010, I have served as Treasurer and now as Programs Chair and President Elect. I am eager and enthusiastic about continuing on the Board. I see exciting things ahead for our Western Region. I hope to strengthen our programs by creating a robust schedule of Events and Meet-ups throughout the whole region, drawing attention to the many rich offerings available. CSA is a unique organization, made up of a diverse membership from those at the top of their game to those just starting out. The willingness to share knowledge and experience is one of the best things about CSA and one we can continue to foster.

Meghan G. Hansen-CSA member since 2006

I have been a member of the Western Region Board of Directors since July 2010. During the first two years of my term I acted as Mail manager, maintaining the region’s email list and sending out announcements for events, deadlines, etc. Since November 2012 I have served as Treasurer for the region. I have helped in planning events hosted by my institution, FIDM Museum, and attended many events and symposia. I plan to contribute to this year’s national Symposium in Las Vegas by presenting a research paper, as well as by helping with media and the silent auction. It has been a pleasure to sit on the Western Region Board of Directors for 3 years, and I look forward to helping the region grow and change in the next 3 years.

Kendra Van Cleave-CSA member since 2003

To date, my CSA involvement has been limited to attending symposia and events. I would like to get more involved, and the Western Region Board seems like the perfect opportunity. I am very organized with strong leadership skills, so I would like to contribute to the practical running of the Society. As a librarian, I’m often closer to an independent scholar than a professor or museum professional, so I would like to lead outreach activities that will recruit more independent scholars and provide opportunities for their greater involvement. Finally, I am well connected in the historical costume/re-enactor communities, both in person and online, and would like to increase membership and participation in these communities. My background in professional and community leadership includes six years on the board for the Greater Bay Area Costumers Guild, including three years as president, as well as chair and membership of various committees of the Association of College & Research Libraries and American Library Association.

Heather A. Vaughan-CSA member since 2002

I have been a continuous member of CSA for 10 years, and have been heavily involved on both a regional and national levels since 2004. First I was the National CSA E-News editor, and in 2006, I joined the Western Region board, acting as secretary for four years. In 2010, I became the programs chair/president-elect and very much enjoyed organizing such programs as Charmian Lond- (Napa) Fashion at the Getty (Los Angeles), and Levi Strauss Archives (San Francisco). Throughout this time I have served on a variety of committees on the board including Education, Elections, Publicity, and the Jack Handford Award Committee. In 2012 I began my term as President of the Western region and choose not to re-run for the elected spot on the board to allow more people to be involved in leadership of the Western Region.

Upcoming Western Region Board Vacancies

Want to get more involved with CSA? Make an impact on the future of CSA by joining the Western Region board. Composed entirely of volunteers, the board guides regional initiatives and programs with an eye towards ensuring the future growth of CSA-WR.

There will soon be four vacancies for non-specific positions on the CSA Western Region Board. CSA-WR will need to list at least six qualified candidates for these openings. Any Western Region CSA member who would like to nominate someone to run for the board is welcome to do so by contacting Nomination Chair Kendra Van Cleave at kendrav@sfsu.edu. Contact the Nomination Chair for further information.
Regional Announcements and Exhibitions

Costume Society of America-Western Region
Jack Handford Summer Internship for Summer 2014

The Western Region is proud to present the Jack Handford Summer Internship for the summer of 2014. This winning applicant will receive a $2000 stipend for a student internship with an accredited museum or accredited educational institution with a costume collection. Applicants must be current CSA Western Region members to apply. The internship is open to undergraduate students about to commence their senior year and graduate students.

The Western Region is looking for student applicants AND accredited institutions looking to host a student intern for the summer of 2014. The internship must pertain to a specific project that can be completed in the allotted time.

Applications for students and institutions are available through the CSA Western Region Website: http://www.costumesocietyamerica.com/RegionV/awards-scholarships.htm. The application deadline is January 10, 2013.

For more information, please contact:
Jeremy Miller
Student Awards and Summer Internship Chair, CSA Western Region
Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising
55 Stockton Street, San Francisco, CA 94107
jmiller@fidm.edu

2014 Western Region Events

Planning for Formal Programs and Meet-ups are always in progress. If you know of upcoming exhibit or event in your area that would make a great Western Region meet-up for 2014 or formal program in 2015, send an email with information to marygibsonwrcsa@yahoo.com as soon as possible.

Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum
212 Wedgewood Dr.
Fairbanks, AK
99701
www.fountainheadmuseum.com

In addition to the museum’s current display of over 100 beautiful garments ranging from the 1880s-1930s, the Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum is proud to present its newest exhibit:

Beauty and the Bird: A Tale of Feathers, Fashion, and Our Fowl Obsession
June 2013-March 2014

For centuries, feathers have symbolized wealth, status and elegance among many cultures. By the late 1800s, however, their use in fashion had reached unsustainable levels. Millions of birds from around the world were being slaughtered to meet the demand for lavishly decorated hats. Explore the history of this “murderous millinery” with elaborate examples from the museum collection and discover how two women helped halt the ruthless plume trade, launching the modern bird conservation movement.
The Re-Birth of Venus: Fashion & the Venus Kallipygos
Human Ecology Gallery, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada
May 3, 2013-March 2, 2014
Co-curated by Anne Bissonnette, PhD, Sarah Nash, and Loretta Yau.

The exhibition explores the influence of art on fashion through the study of Venus Kallipygos, a statue from the National Archaeological Museum in Naples, Italy, and its pervasive influence on dress. Unlike other statues, this goddess exposes herself without a hint of modesty. The research investigates the artifact in terms of genre, production and cultural significance. This interdisciplinary approach pays attention to what this Venus is wearing and, as importantly, how it is worn and how it may have influenced late 18th century neoclassical fashion and late 19th and early 20th century dress behaviors.

For more information, see http://www.hecol.museums.ualberta.ca/en/ClothingAndTextiles/Exhibitions.aspx.

The Art of Bulgari: La Dolce Vita & Beyond, 1950–1990
de Young Museum
San Francisco, CA
September 21, 2013 - February 17, 2014

An exhibition of approximately 150 pieces created by the renowned Italian jeweler over four decades. This exclusive exhibition will highlight jewelry that defined a pivotal period in Italian design, and will include many pieces from the personal collection of Elizabeth Taylor. The exhibition will include innovative uses of sketches, photographs, and other archival materials that help to reveal a fascinating intersection of celebrity, design, and fine craftsmanship.

A World of Paper, a World of Fashion: Isabelle de Borchgrave meets Mariano Fortuny
Bellevue Arts Museum
Bellevue, WA
November 21, 2013 - February 16, 2014

For more than fifteen years, Belgian artist Isabelle de Borchgrave has been producing a completely original body of work that is easy to explain but difficult to categorize. Her central project revolves around recreating exquisite, life-size historical costumes and fabrics entirely out of paper. Taking inspiration from depictions in early European paintings, iconic costumes, period photographs, sketches, and descriptions, de Borchgrave skillfully works paper to achieve her aims: crumpling, pleating, braiding, feathering, and painting the surface to mimic textile effects and fool the eye of the viewer. This exhibition presents a collection inspired by Mariano Fortuny, a Spanish-born eccentric whose designs were the height of fashion in the early 20th century. In the exhibition’s North American debut, BAM is pleased to present Isabelle de Borchgrave’s Fortuny collection in its entirety, offering a rare glimpse into the minds of not one, but two influential artistic figures.
CSA’s 40th Annual Symposium Call For Papers

The Costume Society of America's 40th Annual Symposium
May 28-31, 2014 - Baltimore, Maryland

"Reflecting Forward: 40 Years of CSA"
Celebrate CSA's anniversary and our enduring influence
Call for Papers
DEADLINE: October 1, 2013

CSA invites submissions of original research which may include:

• Influential figures in the study of fashion and textiles—including those from other disciplines
• Milestone moments in the fields of costume, fashion, and textile histories—how they made an impact then, and how they affect the present and future
• The enduring influence of our field onto other fields or disciplines of study (or vice versa)—past, present, and future

Other aspects of dress and related disciplines are also welcome, including but not limited to: art, design, fashion, history, conservation, ethnography, archeology, social sciences, and marketing. Scholars, educators, museum specialists, students, makers and marketers of wearable art, re-enactors and other clothing enthusiasts are encouraged to submit proposals.

Submitters must be members of the Costume Society of America. Submit abstracts of 500 words or less, including endnotes and/or selective bibliography (for panels, each panelist’s abstract must be 500 words or less).

More information can be found at: http://www.costumesocietyamerica.com/Call-for-Papers-2014.pdf