



Salon Session: Elevating and Evaluating Curatorial Scholarship

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Fashion curation is an integral form of public scholarship within our field and yet has historically been overlooked as such. Unlike creative design scholarship, we have not collectively developed nor agreed upon methods for peer review. As a result, curatorial work is often not considered in tenure-review processes, despite fashion exhibitions meeting the core principles of disseminating scholarship beyond the academy. A recent article in the *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, “Fashion Exhibitions as Scholarship,” challenged members of our field to implement peer review of fashion curation as a way to encourage and elevate this important form of scholarship (Green, et al., 2019). In this experimental salon session, we built upon Green et al.’s (2019) work by using the innovative salon session format as a juried venue for presenting fashion exhibitions rooted in rigor and research. Five fashion exhibitions were presented and discussed during the session.

Curatorial Presentations and Authors

Storied Lives: Women and Their Wardrobes – Research Focused on an Exhibition in the Goldstein Museum of Design

Marilyn DeLong, Barbara Heinemann, Caren Oberg, University of Minnesota

One American Family: A Tale of North and South

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History through Things: Exhibiting Fashion in Playing Dress Up: Growing up and Going out in 1960s Nebraska

Claire Nicholas, Veronica Jemkur, Anna Kuhlman, Adria Sanchez-Chaidez, Alyssa Smith, Melisa Spilinek, Heather Striebel, Amythest Warrington, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Peruvian Textile Traditions: A Living Heritage

Astrid Vidalon, Central Washington University

Is It Spelled Kanga or Khanga?: A Critical Self-Reflection on Curating and Inclusivity

Katie Knowles, Colorado State University

Storied Lives: Women and Their Wardrobes – Research Focused on an Exhibition in the Goldstein Museum of Design

Marilyn DeLong, Barbara Heinemann, Caren Oberg, University of Minnesota

We often create personal attachments to designed products that we value, establishing meaning through our lived stories with these products. We give meaning to items of clothing because of our sensory experiences when wearing them — the textures against our skin, the colors interacting with our coloring, how they make us feel as we go about our lives. Sophie Woodward, in *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (2007), noted that choosing what to wear is always particular to each individual woman as her sense of self is conveyed through her clothes as reflected through her social position. How people create their identities through clothing occurs in the context of their personal history. But we don't often share these intimate stories about our clothing.

This exhibition, drawn from the collections of the Goldstein Museum of Design (Figure 1), focused on the stories that women tell about experiences with their clothing. Interview questions included motivation for selecting items, what they valued when they wore them, and those practices and experiences of wearing these specific items that made them memorable. We transcribed the interviews and returned the transcription to the interviewee for verification and any additional input.

We initially selected three women whose extensive donations had already formed significant collections in our archives. We interviewed the three women whose clothing would be featured in the exhibition with the objective of eliciting stories about their donations. These women were local professional women who were well known in their respective fields: retailer; journalist; occupational therapist. To ensure the potential of specific stories to be used on text panels, we interviewed them with their actual clothing present as a focus and reminder. In this way, their donations were fresh in their minds as they examined anew each clothing item to recall their experiences and how they valued their clothing in their professional and personal life.

As we planned the exhibition, we decided to extend our research beyond the three women. Keeping with the criterion of well-known local professional women, we selected eleven women to interview. These additional women served to broaden the exhibition format because they were selected to represent diversity in occupation and ethnicity. We started with three museum directors in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota and proceeded to set up additional interviews. Because our criteria for selection did not require donations, we asked these women to select personal photographs and tell stories about their experiences with what was in their wardrobes. This resulted in extending our exhibition to feature a more diverse population: 3 African American women; 1 Indian woman, and more diverse careers such as a prominent lingerie designer, an author, 3 academicians, an affordable housing specialist, and a CEO of a Fortune 500 company. These eleven women were featured on the entrance panels with their wardrobe stories. To encourage visitor interaction, a blank white board asked: "Have a story about your clothing? Post it here or online at #storiedlives."

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This research that accompanied the exhibition was fruitful beyond the delightful stories that appeared on the text panels for the exhibition. Since the exhibition closed, we have written several papers for publication based upon the abundant information gleaned from the research.



Figure 1. Overview of *Storied Lives, Women and their Wardrobes*. Photo courtesy of Goldstein Museum of Design, College of Design, University of Minnesota

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One American Family: A Tale of North and South

Linda Welters, Rebecca Kelly, Susan Jerome, University of Rhode Island

This exhibition was the culmination of a multi-year project that began with graduate student Rachel May's examination of three quilt tops that once belonged to a family that had donated hundreds of objects to the university's historic textile and costume collection. This family, which had deep roots in New England, became intertwined through marriage with a family from Charleston, South Carolina. The student, a doctoral candidate in English, became so enamored of the quilt tops, two related swatch books, and the story behind the artifacts that she continued her research for several years, finally publishing a book titled *An American Quilt: Unfolding a Story of Family and Slavery* (2018). The book is based on documentary research, but imagines the lives of the quiltmaker, her family, and the slaves she came to own during the antebellum period.

To commemorate the publication of the book, the university mounted an exhibition in its small two-room textile gallery. Students in a graduate class worked with their instructor and the collections manager to select objects and prepare them for the exhibition, which opened in April 2019. All students read the book. The exhibition they mounted included the three quilt tops, the swatch books, sewing tools, clothing worn by family members including the quiltmaker and her daughter, photographs, and watercolors painted by family members. Students learned about mounting techniques and the latest exhibition practices by visiting regional exhibitions on textiles and clothing as well as attending a conference on exhibiting fashion. For the first time, a new mounting technique involving earth magnets was used. A large screen-printed backdrop of a port scene provided context. Text accompanied by graphics explained the northern branch of the family's shipping and retail businesses and the southern family's involvement in the professions (e.g., medicine, customs official), and the trade in cotton and lumber. Another explanatory text showed the Triangle Trade, which linked southern Atlantic ports with those in New England and Africa to exchange Caribbean sugar cane for New England's rum to use for purchasing slaves. The exhibition was up from April 22 until December 6, 2019.

The department uses the changing gallery exhibitions to offer events that educate students and the public on the context surrounding the exhibited artifacts. For this exhibition, the opening celebration featured short lectures by faculty and students on both history and conservation techniques. Eighty-five students, faculty, staff, and community quilt enthusiasts attended the opening. A one-day symposium on September 28, 2019, co-sponsored by five organizations both on and off campus, focused on the contradictions posed by the interconnectedness of northern industry and southern slavery in nineteenth-century America. Presenters included historians, textile scholars, and leaders from the black community. Approximately seventy people attended.

Evaluations of the symposium, which included a gallery visit, were very positive.









History through Things: Exhibiting Fashion in *Playing Dress Up: Growing up and Going out in 1960s Nebraska*

Claire Nicholas, Veronica Jemkur, Anna Kuhlman, Adria Sanchez-Chaidez, Alyssa Smith, Melisa Spilinek, Heather Striebel, Amythest Warrington, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

This paper presents the research, design, and outcomes of the exhibition, *Playing Dress Up: Growing Up and Going Out in 1960s Nebraska*. Building on the work of Green et al. (2019) and Marcketti et al. (2011), the discussion also explores the implications of fashion curation for “doing history” (Bissonnette, 2015; Riello, 2009), and what case studies of project-based learning (Christel, 2016; Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006; Krauss & Boss, 2013) from material culture and fashion studies curriculum might contribute to educational research.

Playing Dress Up features American designer children’s clothing from the early to mid-1960s, alongside period photographs, advertisements, and props evoking a playful 1960s atmosphere. The exhibition’s core ambition is to explore what it meant and felt like to be a child during the 1960s, and to connect this with local and national consumption patterns and key cultural references. The exhibition oscillates between local and national aspects of social and cultural history, while highlighting the relationship of designer children’s wear to the American fashion industry. A series of thematic vignettes imagine how a child of the ‘60s would have experienced dressing up and going out in Lincoln, Nebraska. Themes include a family trip to the Lincoln Children’s Zoo (1965 opening), winter holiday gatherings (and the trend for “Mother-and-Me” or “Look-a-Like” matching outfits), Arbor Day play dates (a Nebraska holiday), Fourth of July patriotic ensembles, and a nod to German cultural heritage in a fashion forward dirndl, a style popularized by the 1965 release of *The Sound of Music*.

Playing Dress Up was researched, designed, and installed as part of the Spring 2020 graduate seminar, Museums: Theory & Practice. The team consisted of the instructor and seven students, of which six are material culture, apparel design, or merchandising degree seekers. Students began by completing condition reports of objects selected from a donation to the department’s historic dress collection of approximately 30 designer children’s garments worn by siblings of a prominent Lincoln family, dating from the late 1950s to early 1970s. Each student then developed an individual exhibition proposal, later presented during a “pitch day.” The group drew on elements from different proposals to develop a unified exhibition concept, and each student conducted secondary or primary research on one of seven collectively determined topics related to the overarching concept.

Secondary research themes included the history of children’s clothing (with an emphasis on gender norms and dress) (Carter et al., 2017; Cook, 2011; Gordon, 2018; Gordon & Marcketti, 2018; Paoletti, 2012), and socio-economic history related to American consumption habits and family structure (Meyer & Sullivan, 2017; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Some students located primary sources related to local cultural heritage, immigration, local holidays, and the zoo. The donor’s daughter also shared information about the family’s history. This research was used to develop didactics and guide the selection of final display garments and

staging. Installation was completed immediately preceding campus closure, but outcomes include the physical exhibition, exhibition photography, and a video tour shared via social media and university communication channels.







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Peruvian Textile Traditions: A Living Heritage

Astrid Vidalon, Central Washington University

The purpose of this exhibit was to showcase Peruvian textile art and their significance to different ethnic groups in Peru, from the Andes Mountains to the Amazon rainforest. In Peru, textiles have played an important political, social and religious role over the last 8,000 thousand years to a degree not exceeded by other societies in the world (Anawalt, 2010). Textiles remain the principal expression of ethnic identity in Peru and its textile cultures are among the most splendid and enduring traditional cultures in the world (Oakland, 1997).

The deep textile traditions of Peru and the variety of its ethnic dress demonstrate a cultural commitment to communicating meaning through fiber and cloth. The theoretical framework of the exhibit was based on the work of Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992). Dress is part of the formation of identity and communication of meaning during social interactions within a cultural context. For Peruvian ethnic groups, the principles of their world are woven into the fabric of their dress (McCracken, 1988, p.60). To this day, Peruvian weavers continue to create vivid textiles using ancient techniques in a modern world.

Textiles are very important in rituals and festivities, both as a way to teach social/ethnic values and as a resistance to modernization and foreign influence (Heckman, 2010). This is a reflection of the importance of authenticity in terms of a commitment to their ethnic values in a modern era (Erickson, 1995).

When setting up the exhibition, the criteria developed by Serrell (2006) and adapted by Black and Cloud (2009) was taken into consideration to provide comfort level to visitors, and to be an engaging and meaningful experience that reinforces the content of the exhibition. The exhibit took place at the University's Museum from April 4th to June 18th, 2019. For the opening day, there was live Peruvian guitar music and refreshments. Other related events were developed throughout the duration of the exhibition: a workshop to learn Peruvian dances, a Peruvian guitar lecture, and a workshop to learn how to spin yarn.

The exhibit had 19 handmade textiles and 7 ensembles to showcase the diversity of Peruvian ethnic dress. Each object was extensively researched. The exhibition incorporated signs with information about the objects. Information such as the techniques and materials used in the making of the textiles, the meaning ascribed in its community of origin, and a map showing the geographical location of the textile/dress. The exhibit had an historic background explaining the evolution of the traditional Peruvian dress. Some of the dresses displayed belonged to a Peruvian traditional dancer, who was a primary source about the intricate making of her dance attires for different dance festivals. In addition, the exhibit had an area explaining the textile mastery of pre-Incan cultures, photos and a video showing how handmade textiles are made in the Andes, plus samples of different animal fibers used in weaving. Although there were some challenges such as the limited budget for getting better dress forms, the exhibit was well received by museum visitors and praised by museum administrators.



Figure 1. A trio of ponchos were displayed in the entrance of the exhibit. The poncho is the traditional garment for men in the Andes. Agriculture is an important economic activity for Andean communities and their textiles, including these ponchos, reflect that. In these ponchos, a viewer can see large diamonds, which represent fields; the shapes inside the diamonds represent different crops. The X's and crosses represent stars or constellations. Some of these crops are planted around a single or multiple stars—or *chaska* in Quechua. Looking at the stars was necessary for ancient farmers to decide when to plant and harvest, and the symbolism endures in weaving. The colors on the patterns represent the different harvest seasons. The smaller diamonds inside larger ones represent lakes or waterholes. The edge of the garment design—or *awapa*—represents the movement of the water (Del Solar, 2017).

Photography by L. Bethke.



Figure 2. A variety of traditional Peruvian dresses that incorporate machine and handmade embroidery (from left to right): a dress from the Mantaro Valley in the Andean highlands; a Morenada dance dress from the Puno Region, especially made for the *Virgen de la Candelaria* Festival, 2018; a Dress from the Arequipa Region in the Andean highlands; a Shipibo-Conibo dress from the Ucayali Region in the Amazon rainforest; a Dress from the Cusco Region in the Andean highlands; The dress on the wall is for dancing Marinera, from the Lambayeque Region in the Northern coast of Peru. Photography by author.



Figure 3. Text giving an historical background about the traditional Peruvian dress. On the right side of the picture is a featured Marinera dance dress. For the making of the skirt, 16 meters of fabric were used and it is completely embroidered by hand (F. Serra, personal communication, April 2, 2019). Photography by L. Bethke.



Figure 4. A visitor studying the exhibit on opening day. Photography by author.



Figure 5. The video to the left shows the process of traditional textile fabrication. It starts with the selection and spinning of the fiber; then the dyeing of yarns with plants, insects and minerals; and finally the process of weaving in a backstrap loom, the same method used by Pre-Incan cultures. On the right side, visitors could read about the mastery of ancient Peruvian weavers, giving historical context as to why textiles are so important in Peru to this day. Textiles importance to Pre-Columbian cultures were demonstrated by an Incan Empire census (1438-1533), where textiles were listed as the third most important commodity after humans and camelid livestock, and before precious metals and food (Murra, 1982). Photography by L. Bethke.



Figure 6. Two examples of weaving techniques. The one on the right, from the Cusco region, was made in a back-strap loom. The textile on the left side is from San Pedro de Cajas, in the Junin Region, and it is the only textile in the exhibit made using the treadle loom. Most handmade Andean weaving is done on a back-strap loom or a four-stake loom, both used by pre-Columbian Peruvian societies. The Spanish introduced the treadle loom shortly after their conquest of South America. Photography by L. Bethke.



Figure 7. Shipibo-Conibo textile from the Amazon rainforest. The textile has an illustration of a shamanic ceremony with the hallucinogen Ayahuasca. Photography by L. Bethke.



*Figure 8. Kené is a geometric design characteristic of the Shipibo-Conibo textiles. Kené is embroidered or painted onto fabric. Shipibo-Conibo women use bright threads to embroider on white or dark backgrounds using natural dyes. Although some *kené* may appear similar, every design is different and unique. *Kené* has a positive and negative repetitive pattern that gives the impression that it expands infinitely beyond the surface it covers. It represents the duality of the world and is a window to the infinite and eternal. The tension between the positive and negative aspects creates harmony and balance (Heath, 2002). *Kené* is an expression of the Shipibo-Conibo pursuit of balance with their environment and their perception that everything is interconnected and interdependent in the Amazon (Mujica, 2002). Photography by L. Bethke.*



Figure 9. Kené also has a musical dimension. Each *kené* is a song with healing purposes for the well-being of the person. The energy of the ayahuasca inspires and guides the singer to interpret the song of the *kené*. This is an expression of the synesthetic power of ayahuasca and *kené* (Belaunde, 2009). Under the hallucinogenic effect of ayahuasca, *kené* can be seen, sung, touched, and smelled by the shaman and the participants of a shamanic session. Today, only a few women know the traditional meanings and how to sing the designs they create. Most of their handicrafts and textiles are for the tourist market, so the consumer does not know about the healing and musical power of *kené* (Belaunde, 2009; Heath, 2002). Photography by author.



Figure 10. Institutional Instagram post of the exhibit with comments of attendees. On the left side is featured the exhibition poster. Photography by author.

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Is It Spelled Kanga or Khanga?: A Critical Self-Reflection on Curating and Inclusivity

Katie Knowles, Colorado State University

The exhibition, “‘Armed with Proverbs’: Khanga Cloth in Africa” (Aug 27, 2018 – January 18, 2019), featured twenty kanga from the permanent collection of a university historic clothing and textile museum. Kanga is a colorful printed fabric typically including a Swahili proverb, and is used mainly by women in East African countries as clothing, a carrying cloth, or for home decoration. The museum’s curator, also a tenure-track faculty member, was the sole curator of the exhibition. During early research for the exhibition, the curator learned of South African activist Fezekile Ntsukela Kuzwayo (1974-2016), also known as Khwezi, and her 2008 poem, “I am Khanga.” The main title for the exhibition came from a line in the poem, “Armed with proverbs, I am vehicle for communication between women,” capturing the social function of kanga as a method of self-expression and social identity through the proverbs printed on the fabric. This became the central theme of the interpretative text for the exhibition, which incorporated diasporic black feminist theory alongside applied research on global textile traditions of making and use in order to decenter white, non-African perspectives.

The exhibition was installed for visitors to move counterclockwise through the gallery. The introductory section included a historical overview of the development of kanga, its basic form, and the social meaning of the Kiswahili proverbs printed on kanga. Visitors then moved through sections discussing the uses, making, and selling of kanga. The final section provided examples of the social function of kanga using the themes of dignity, pride, and emotion. A binder in the gallery contained large print versions of the labels for accessible reading, translations from Kiswahili to English of all of the kanga in the exhibition, a list of terms in Kiswahili with English definitions, a brief biography about Khwezi, and the complete text of her poem, “I am Khanga.”

In this paper, the curator reflects on successes and missteps when presenting an inclusive exhibition for this museum’s typical visitor: middle and upper-class white American women over forty years old. The spelling of the word kanga/khanga is one example of the importance of applying inclusive curatorial practice throughout exhibition planning, development, and implementation. Deadlines for printed promotional material resulted in an early curatorial decision to use the spelling “khanga” in the exhibition title. While conducting further research, the curator learned that the spelling “kanga” is more appropriate in relation to Kiswahili, the language most common to those in East Africa where kanga originated and is still used. At this stage, there was still time to change the spelling before printing gallery labels and additional promotional materials. However, the curator chose to maintain the first spelling to assist the museum’s primary audience in properly pronouncing this textile term, thus prioritizing the needs of white, non-African people. The paper will also analyze the use of inclusive language, sensitivity warnings regarding content about violence against women, the translation and presentation of terminology in Kiswahili and English, and additional examples of curatorial decisions for inclusive interpretation and installation.

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Figure 1. Introductory labels and case installation of a pair of kanga in the southwest corner of the gallery. The entrance is on the west side, immediately to the right of this photograph.



Figure 2. Installation of the south and southeastern gallery with kanga pinned on fleece-covered slant boards behind Plexiglas and interpretive labels regarding the form and use of kanga.



Figure 3. Four kanga mounted on two mannequins to exhibit the versatile options for wearing kanga installed on the eastern side of the gallery, directly opposite the entrance doors. The exhibit title is hung in front of the Plexiglas surrounding the floor case and interpretive labels are mounted on each side of the case. Benches and the gallery binder with accessible labels and additional interpretive information can be seen in the foreground placed in the center of the gallery.



Figure 4. View of the northeast gallery cases showing kanga mounted on slant boards, and a group of kanga folded on a pedestal in a section about the production and selling of kanga.



Figure 5. View of the north and northwest gallery cases showing the final section with interpretive

labeling exploring themes of self-expression through the proverbs printed on kanga.



Figure 6. Single kanga installed vertically in a slim case (also pictured in Figures 2 and 9) with accompanying label detailing parts of a kanga textile with a diagram and translation of terminology.



Figure 7. Closer view of east wall and northeast corner (also pictured in Figures 3 and 4) showing kanga mounted on mannequins and, in the background, on a slant board in a separate case.

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Elevating and Evaluating Curatorial Scholarship: Post Presentation Discussion Summary

We asked the following questions:

1. What are the barriers to the recognition of curatorial scholarship as important, rigorous, and equivalent to other types of scholarship?
2. What are the ways ITAA can help advance curatorial scholarship to communicate its importance, rigor, and equivalence to design scholarship and/or “traditional” scholarship to our departments and administrators?

What are the barriers to the recognition of curatorial scholarship as important, rigorous, and equivalent to other types of scholarship?

- Lack of understanding of this form of scholarship.
- Institutional location of many of our programs. This impacts where promotion and tenure committees are coming from (e.g. social science / natural science / education disciplines) where scholarly outputs other than peer-reviewed journal articles are the norm.

What are the ways ITAA can help advance curatorial scholarship to communicate its importance, rigor, and equivalence to design scholarship and/or “traditional” scholarship to our departments and administrators?

- Develop a curatorial scholarship committee.
- Open an ITAA conference track specifically for curatorial scholarship with a unique rubric, informed by Green et al.’s recent article in CTRJ.
- Organize a curatorial scholarship review team and funding for on-site peer-reviews of exhibitions.
- Prestigious awards for curatorial scholarship similar to the [Richard Martin Award](#) at Costume Society of America.
- Dedicated space in CTRJ for exhibition reviews.