

“Cultures of Excess: Fashion and Product Design through Modernity”

This weekly colloquium will examine the significance of “excess” in the history of fashion and product design, namely in the history of crafts rather than arts. This, however, raises the question of how and why this separation occurred and whether it is valid today. Topics discussed will analyze the relationship of “extravagance” to traditional art historical narratives. Research will be based on examples drawn from modern times, from 1750 to the present day.

By examining the work of designers who have been left out of the prevalent narrative of design history (think of Jacques Dunant or Joseph Frank) or disciplines that acquired academic status only in the last twenty to thirty years (think of fashion) or product categories that are difficult to treat within the museum setting (think of jewelry), our discussions will focus on how our Modern aesthetic has influenced the way we look at material culture and how this has resulted in considering moments of “excess” in design history as anomalies.

What can we say about their power to propel our culture forward?

Students will assume the role of the art historian in synthesizing methods of research from the weekly assigned readings.

GOALS:

- A. To use traditional art historical methodologies and evaluate items of material culture that have been understudied within the context of art history.
- B. To develop critical skills in assessing the importance of both technique and concept in the creation of new products.