What is Fashion?

Friday 10 October 2025

University of Westminster,
Northwick Park,
Harrow HA1 3TP

What is Fashion is a one day, in person conference that examines fashion as system, symbol and practice. The programme tests working definitions, surfaces contradictions and maps how fashion operates across culture, industry and technology. It brings together scholarship and practice to show what fashion does in the world now and how its study can respond with precision, evidence and method. Discussion is grounded in cases, materials and making, while remaining alert to theory and history. The aim is straightforward: to leave with clearer frameworks, usable methods and a sharper language for teaching, research and practice.

The programme interrogates definitions, operations and stakes across six strands:

- **Theory and method**
  Concepts, models and research approaches that explain how fashion functions, circulates and acquires meaning. Attention to evidence, rigor and the limits of our tools.

- **Global contexts and power**
  Fashion's uneven geographies and infrastructures. Trade, labour, extraction and soft power across the global South and global North, and how these shape design and consumption.

- **The body, identity and politics**
  Dress as an embodied practice that mediates gender, class, race, sexuality and belief. How bodies are read, disciplined and expressed through clothes in everyday and institutional settings.

- **Digital realms and virtual making**
  The impact of digital design, virtual environments and AI on authorship, craft, labour and value. Practical questions about workflows, pedagogy and the integration of digital with physical making.

- **Representation and resistance**
  Fashion as a medium that frames inclusion and exclusion, visibility and voice. How images, institutions and markets shape who is seen, heard and served.

- **Practices of fashion, including materials, craft and production**
  Fabric, process and technique as sites of knowledge. How materials, studios and supply chains organise what can be imagined, sampled and produced.

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Draft schedule

Time	Forum	
09:30 – 10:30	Registration and coffee	
	LG.01 - Auditorium	
10:30 – 10:45	Welcome and opening remarks - Location: Auditorium	
10:45 – 11:30	Keynote - Lynn Wilson, Designer, Researcher, and Circular Economy Specialist in Fashion and Textiles - Location: Auditorium	
	Track A **LG.27 - Lecture Theatre 2**	**Track B** **LG.30 - Lecture Theatre 3**
11:30 – 13:00	Session 1 Track A: Defining Fashion	Session 1 Track B: Fashion in Global Contexts
11:30 – 11:50	Rosie Findlay - "Archival Fashion – Or the collision of celebrity, fashion branding, prestige and image on the red carpet"	Diya Wang and Emily Baines - "From Fashion Leader to Moral Outcast: the Role of the Marginalised Women in China"
11:50 – 12:10	Adriana Hill - "More is More, Less is a Bore: Rethinking Sustainable Fashion through Instagram's Maximalist Fashion Personas"	Karen J. Spurgin and Jonathan Butler - "How can garments dyed with barkcloth derived extracts contribute to a new definition of luxury"
12:10 – 12:30	Aurélie Van de Peer - "It's just too pedagogical: Keeping the Door Closed on Sustainability in Artistic Fashion education"	Laura Perez - "Reimagining Femininity through fashion: The Role of the Maja in Transforming Female Identity in Late Eighteenth-Century Spain"
12:30 – 12:50	Zara Korutz - "The Virgil Abloh Effect"	Liliana Sanguino - "Millones de Maneras: Rethinking Fashion and Aesthetics from the South Up"
12:50 – 13:00	Q&A	Q&A
13:00 – 14:30	**Lunch - Location: Forum.** **Archive tours in small rotating groups; Workshop: Colbey Reid - "How to Build a Process Archive"**	
	Track A **LG.27 - Lecture Theatre 2**	**Track B** **LG.30 - Lecture Theatre 3**
14:30 – 16:00	Session 2 **Track A: Fashion and the Body**	Session 2 **Track B: Digital Realms**
14:30 – 14:50	Kate Wallace - "The Fashion Alibi: Cultural hegemony in the fashion system"	Gwyneth Holland - "Tactile Futures: Roughness and Smoothness in Futuristic Clothing"

Time	Track A	Track B
14:50 – 15:10	Yara de Vries - "Reclaiming Agency Through Wardrobe Archives and Podcasting"	Aditi Mishra - "The role of technology in fashion no longer remains a gimmick limited to high fashion"
15:10 – 15:20	Q&A	Q&A
15:30 – 16:00	Workshop - Yunpei Li - "Between Exposure and Withdrawal: Inflatable-Wear as a Mediator of Negotiation"	Workshop - Yilu Li - "Reimagining Fashion Through Digital Embodiment"
16:00 – 16:15	**Coffee break** - Location: Forum	
16:15 – 17:30	**Track A** **LG.27 - Lecture Theatre 2**	**Track B** **LG.30 - Lecture Theatre 3**
	Session 3 **Track A: Representation and Resistance**	**Session 3** **Track B: Practices of Fashion**
16:15 – 16:35	Tian Hao - "'Ain't I Passing Enough?': Gender, Fashion, and the Politics of Dress in Chinese Ballrooms"	Colleen Hill - "Curiosity, engagement, and inclusivity: A case study in fashion curation"
16:35 – 16:55	Berit Eis - "The Fabric of Liberation: Fashioning Identity Beyond the Criminal Justice System"	Matthew Coats - "Fabric First: Mapping Fashion's Epistemic Infrastructures through Material Intelligence"
16:55 – 17:15	Reda Merzoug - "Brands Want You to Consume Activism, Not Engage with It"	Kirsten Scott, Emma D'Arcey, and Clare Lopeman - "Radically Local: excavating and reconstructing heritage aesthetics, fibres, colours and textiles for postgrowth fashion futures"
17:15 – 17:30	Q&A	Q&A
17:30 – 18:30	**Drinks reception - Location: Forum**	

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Aditi Mishra
Aditi is a textile designer with seven years of experience. A graduate of NIFT Delhi, her practice spans weaving and narrative-led collections. During the pandemic she moved into fashion technology, becoming Design Head at an AI firm, which reshaped her creative process. She is completing a master's in digital Fashion Innovation at Arts University Bournemouth, focusing on how technological tools support sustainability and future-facing design.

Adriana Hill
Adriana is a master's student in Fashion Studies at Parsons Paris, The New School. She holds a Bachelor of Design in Fashion Communication from Toronto Metropolitan University. Her research

examines fashion history and theory in relation to cross-cultural identities, analysing how art, fashion and popular culture express hybrid identities in global and institutional contexts.

Dr Aurélie Van de Peer
Aurélie is a philosopher and cultural sociologist specialising in the temporal analysis of fashion. Her FWO-funded postdoctoral research examines shame in the fashion industry and in sustainability movements. She lectures in Fashion Sociology at KU Leuven. Her work has appeared in Fashion Theory, Cultural Sociology, International Journal of Fashion Studies and Dialogues in Sociology.

Berit Eis
Berit is a lecturer at University of Westminster, teaching across UG & PG in Fashion Business Management. Driven by Scandinavian values in her academic work Berit applies her industry experience and societal data knowledge to encourage students to create positive impact and challenge the role of data in society. As an early-career researcher Berit has led collaborative research projects with students from different disciplines. Her research focuses on people with lived experience, the role of uniforms in society and social justice

Clare Lopeman
Clare is a British Fashion Designer, Researcher and Educator with over 20 years of pedagogical and professional experience both nationally and internationally. She is a graduate of Central Saint Martins and The Royal College of Art and a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Clare is a Senior MA Fashion Tutor at Istituto Marangoni London and Visiting Lecturer on the Master of Research at The Royal College of Art. Previously, Clare established and led the first transnational BA (Hons) Fashion Design Degree in Moscow, Russia, developing a prolific, globally facing fashion department within complex and challenging socio-political conditions. She is best known for her dynamic, graphic collections that explore the creative tensions and intersections across cultural histories, archives and political ideologies. Clare's current PhD (RCA) and practice-based research proposes Fashion Counterintelligence as an artisanal, embodied form of empowerment and resistance within a future fashion system.

Dr Colbey Emmerson Reid
Colbey is Professor of Fashion Studies and Director of the School of Fashion at Columbia College Chicago. Her research focuses on theories of style and their impact on consumption, technology and the posthuman.

Dr Colleen Hill
Colleen is Senior Curator of Costume at The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology. She holds an MA in Fashion and Textile Studies from FIT and a PhD from the University of the Arts London. Since 2006 she has curated eighteen exhibitions, including Fashioning Wonder 2025, Statement Sleeves 2024, Reinvention and Restlessness: Fashion in the Nineties 2021, and Fairy Tale Fashion 2016. She has authored or co-authored eight books on fashion.

Emma D'Arcey
Emma has over 25 years' experience as a textile designer and maker in the luxury fashion and interior industries. Her expertise in sustainable, circular design took root during her MA at Central Saint Martins. She co-founded ao textiles, a project-driven sustainable design consultancy, focussing on natural dyes for commercial production. www.aotextiles.com Alongside her practice, she has cultivated a strong presence in education, lecturing at leading universities across the UK, running creative workshops in high profile venues, a research assistant in circular design at UAL and currently a part-time senior lecturer and researcher at Istituto Marangoni London. Her current research delves into

the extraction of natural dyes from bio-waste and agricultural by-products sourced from British trees. As a regenerative colourist, Emma is dedicated to advancing accessible research and developing design solutions that drive the transition towards a regenerative textile industry. She is a founder member of The Dyers' Circle.

Hao Tian
Hao is a PhD student at Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton. Funded by the AHRC, his doctoral project examines gender performance and dress in Chinese ballroom cultures. His interests include fashion culture, gender and media.

Dr Emily Baines
Emily is a Senior Lecturer at De Montfort University specialising in textile and fashion history, material culture theory, sustainability and industry strategy.

Gwyneth Holland
Gwyneth is a Lecturer in Fashion Marketing at the University of Westminster, specialising in consumer cultures and foresight. She has consulted for leading brands, trend agencies and institutions for two decades. Her research focuses on futurity in fashion, trend forecasting and queer style cultures. She is co-author of Fashion Trend Forecasting.

Karen J. Spurgin
Karen is a Senior Lecturer at Istituto Marangoni. With a background in textile design, she has worked internationally across fashion, film and theatre. She co-founded ao textiles, a research and design consultancy focused on natural dyeing and sustainable production practices.

Kate Wallace
Kate is a designer and creative director with two decades of international industry experience. She has worked with Club Monaco, Derek Lam 10 Crosby, DKNY and Rebecca Taylor across Europe, Asia and the United States. She holds an MS in Sustainable Fashion from IE University and an MA in Fashion Knitwear from Central Saint Martins. Her teaching and research address fashion's cultural role and its capacity to drive systemic and sustainable change.

Dr Jonathan Butler
Jonathan is a Senior Lecturer in Microbiology at Manchester Metropolitan University. His research addresses antimicrobial resistance, including molecular mechanisms, and the pathogenicity, detection and control of Campylobacter species.

Kirsten Scott
Kirsten is Head of Research at Istituto Marangoni London. Her research explores traditional ecological knowledge systems relating to fashion and textiles to inform post-growth, sustainable clothing. She is a founder of the Barkcloth Research Network, a multidisciplinary research group comprising artists, environmentalists, farmers, scientists and designer in the UK, US and Uganda. Her PhD in Constructed Textiles (RCA) focused on the potential of local, natural fibres in Uganda for sustainable fashion product development, in creating income streams and capacity building for women in a remote region of the country. A passionate maker, Kirsten's research asks questions about the meaning and value of the hand-made in this post-digital era and interrogates the paradigm of luxury today. Previously, she was Programme Leader for MA Fashion Design, also at IML.

Dr Laura Perez
Laura holds a PhD in Early Modern History from the Complutense University of Madrid, with a thesis on

women's fashion and its social scope, 1750 to 1800. She is a Research Officer at the University of Nottingham and has held academic roles at Nottingham Law School and Nottingham Trent University. Her work examines fashion, gender and identity in eighteenth-century Europe. She is a committee member of the Association of Dress Historians.

Liliana Sanguino
Liliana is Associate Professor of Fashion Design and Social Justice at Parsons, The New School, and a PhD candidate at the Glasgow School of Art. Born in Colombia and based in New York, she co-directs Millones de Maneras, a collaboration with Indigenous Trans artisans from Karmata Rúa. Her practice integrates collection design, writing and curatorial work to advance decolonial, community-rooted approaches to fashion.

Dr Lynn Wilson
Lynn is the Adam Smith Research Fellow at the Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow. She holds a PhD in Management and an MRes from Glasgow, an MA in Fashion and Textiles from Nottingham Trent University and a BDes from the University of Dundee. Her research spans experimental methods, interdisciplinary practice and the transition to product circularity. She previously led circular textiles and manufacturing portfolios at Zero Waste Scotland, contributed to SCAP and the Love Your Clothes campaign, and founded Circular Design Synergy in 2022 to support business transition to circular practice.

Matthew Coats
Matthew is a Senior Teaching Fellow in Fashion Design at Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton. A former designer at Chanel under Karl Lagerfeld, his research-led practice bridges material experimentation, hybrid studio methods and sustainable systems. He is developing Studio Reframed, a project reimagining fashion education through narrative cloth, digital and analogue workflows and post-spectacle design. Current interests include CLO 3D pedagogy, the aesthetics of labour and alternatives to the final-year collection.

Reda Merzoug
Reda is a London-based writer, artist and knitwear designer whose work connects fashion, politics and cultural critique. A contributor to 1Granary and a 2024 Champion Creator, he focuses on endangered craft, regenerative textile practices and media literacy. His practice spans runway collections, visual arts and editorial work, with collaborations including Dior, Alexander McQueen and A-COLD-WALL*.

Dr Rosie Findlay
Rosie is Senior Lecturer in Media at City St George's, University of London. A feminist media scholar, she researches contemporary fashion media and the intersection of dress, feeling and culture. She is author of Personal Style Blogs: Appearances that Fascinate 2017, co-editor of Insights on Fashion Journalism 2022 and co-editor of the International Journal of Fashion Studies. Her work has appeared in Journal of Cultural Economy, Feminist Theory and Communication, Culture and Critique. She has two edited books forthcoming with Bloomsbury Visual Arts.

Yilu Li
Yilu is a PhD candidate at the University of the Arts London, London College of Fashion. Her research examines how immersive technologies such as virtual and augmented reality reshape relationships with clothing and digital embodiment, and how these tools can re-centre humans in digital worlds. She previously worked as a fashion designer and teaches digital garment prototyping using CLO 3D and Browzwear.

Yunpei Li

Yunpei is a PhD candidate at London College of Fashion and a member of the Performing Dress Lab. Her practice-based research investigates the transformative and affective potential of Inflatable-Wear, focusing on embodied experience, participation and spatial relations in shared settings. She has presented and exhibited in London, Maastricht and Borås, and her work appears in the Dialogical Bodies conference proceedings.

Zara Korutz

Zara is a PhD candidate at Massey University, School of Design. Her research examines the work of Virgil Abloh, 1980 to 2021. She holds an MA with Distinction in Fashion Critical Studies from Central Saint Martins. With over a decade in omnichannel global media, she combines editorial and strategy. She hosts The Unbiased Label podcast, described by the CFDA as a Voice of Change.