



Marie Antoinette Style Conference

Full Programme



12 -13 February 2026

Hochhauser Auditorium, Learning Centre,

Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Day 1, Thursday 12 February

Marie Antoinette Style in her Own Time

10.00-10.30 Registration and Coffee

10.30-10.45 Welcome and opening remarks By Dr Melissa Buron,
Director of Collections and Chief Curator, V&A

Session 1 Marie Antoinette – New Research

10.45- 11.15 H el ene Delalex, Ch ateau de Versailles. The restoration of the Queen's private apartments at Palace of Versailles. The queen's taste and the question of a "Style".

11.15-11.45 Prof. Catriona Seth, All Souls College, Oxford. 'I have not a moment to myself, what with the people I must see, letters and the time I spend with my children'. Marie Antoinette's correspondence: an ongoing project

11:45 -12.15 Alice Minter, Senior Curator, Gilbert Collection, V&A. Snuff Boxes and Nicole d'Oliva: Luxury, Deception, and the Diamond Necklace

Questions 12.15-12.30, chaired by Dr Spike Sweeting

Lunch Break, 12.30-14.00



Session 2, 14.00-16.20 The Fashion World and Style of Marie Antoinette

14.00-14.30 Dr Sarah Grant, Senior Curator, Prints, V&A. Marie Antoinette's lost diamond necklace and a V&A portrait

14.30-15.00 Dr Silvija Banić, Curator of Textiles before 1800, V&A. 'More is more': Marie Antoinette's court dress depicted in her portrait by François Hubert Drouais

15.00- 15.30 Zara Kesterton, PhD candidate, Queen of Roses: Marie-Antoinette's influence on the artificial flower industry

15.30-16.00 Helena Cox, Exhibition Research Assistant, V&A. The Befeathered Queen: Plumes, Fashion and Fantasy

Questions 16.00-16.20 Chaired by Amber Kim

Break 16.20-16.50

Session 3, 16.50-18.00

KEYNOTE: Global Perspective on Marie Antoinette

16.50-17.40 Prof. David McCallam, Sheffield University. Jean Amilcar, Marie-Antoinette's Adopted Black Boy: Childhood and Race in Revolutionary France

Questions 17.40-18.00 Chaired by Sarah Grant

Closing remarks, Dr Spike Sweeting 18.00-18.15

Drinks reception at Hintze Gallery 18.30-19.45

CLOSE 19.45



Day 2 Friday 13 February 2026

The Legacy of Marie Antoinette's Style

10.00-10.30 Registration and Coffee

10.30-10.45 Opening remarks by Dr Spike Sweeting, RCA/V&A

Session 1, 10.45-12.30 Fashion Reinventions and Revivals

10.45 - 11.15 Dr Susan North, Curator of Fashion before 1800, V&A. Marie Antoinette and Victorian Fancy Dress

11.15 - 11.45 Ruby Hodgson, Curatorial Operations Co-ordinator, V&A, Romantic Revivals: Marie Antoinette in the 19th Century

11.45 - 12.15 Amber Butchart, London College of Fashion. Queens on Screen: History as Spectacle in the Costuming of Marie Antoinette

12:15 - 12:30 Q&A chaired by Dr Spike Sweeting

Lunch Break, 12.30-13.30

Session 2, 13.30-15.30 Marie Antoinette Today

13.30 - 14.00 Oriole Cullen, Senior Curator, Textiles and Dress, V&A. Fashion's muse: Marie Antoinette in haute couture

14.00 - 14.30 Dr Serena Dyer, De Montford University. The Makers' Hand: Recreating the Practices of the Eighteenth-Century Mantua Maker



14.30 – 15.15 Hannah Sutherland, Senior Conservator, Textiles, and Lauren Quinn, Senior Costume Display Conservator, V&A. Secrets of the Studio: Preparing fashion and textiles for Marie Antoinette Style

15:15 – 15:30 Q&A chaired by Helena Cox

Break 15.30-15.45

Session 3, 15.45-17.00 Media, Celebrity, influence

15.45-16.15: Prof. Agnès Rocamora, University of the Arts, London. Digitisation and change in the field of fashion media

16.15-16.45 Dr Spike Sweeting, V&A/RCA, 'Politicians as fashion icons: Some historical reflections'

16.45 - 17.05 Dr Liz Tregenza, London College of Fashion, 'Dressing Dangerously: Historical fashion and the museum'

17.05 - 17.20 Questions chaired by Amber Kim

17:20 – 17:30 Closing Remarks by Joanna Norman, Head of V&A Research Institute

CLOSE 17.30



Speakers' Abstracts and Biographies

Day 1

Session 1, Marie Antoinette – New Research

Hélène Delalex

The restoration of the Queen's private apartments at Palace of Versailles. The queen's taste and the question of a "Style"

Hélène Delalex is the Senior Heritage Curator of Decorative Arts at the Museum and National Estate of Versailles and the Trianon, where she is in charge of furniture bronzes, clocks and lacquer collections. She also oversees the Petit Trianon and Marie-Antoinette's private apartments, for which she directed the restoration and refurnishing. Hélène Delalex has curated several exhibitions in France and abroad, including *Marie Antoinette by Sofia Coppola. From film to myth* (2026, Palace of Versailles), *Louis XV: Passions of a King* (2022, Palace of Versailles) and *Versailles & the World* (2021, Louvre Abu Dhabi). Delalex teaches art history at Sorbonne University (Paris IV), and she is the author of several historical works, including *Marie-Antoinette's Style (In Fine, 2026)*, a new biography of the queen, *Marie-Antoinette: Lightness and Constancy* (Perrin, 2021), and is preparing the publication *In the Queen's Intimacy: Marie Antoinette's Private Rooms* (2027).

Catriona Seth

'I have not a moment to myself, what with the people I must see, letters and the time I spend with my children'. Marie Antoinette's correspondence: an ongoing project

Marie Antoinette is often seen as a reluctant letter-writer and yet correspondence was at the centre of some of her most crucial relationships. From official exchanges which were required by etiquette to confidential notes for friends and allies, as well as long ciphered missives worthy of a spymistress, she wrote many letters. Whilst some are purely formal, others reveal her character, her desires and her fears. A major international project is seeking to locate all Marie Antoinette's surviving correspondence (and to weed out the fakes).

Catriona Seth, FBA, MAE is the Marshal Foch Professor of French Literature at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of All Souls College. She has worked extensively on eighteenth-century literature and culture. Publications relevant to the conference topic include *Marie-Antoinette. Anthologie et dictionnaire* (2006) and *Marie-Antoinette, Lettres inédites* (2019). In 2006-7, with Elisabeth Maisonnier, she curated the *Marie-Antoinette. Femme réelle, femme mythique* exhibition at the Bibliothèque Municipale in Versailles.



With Marie-Eve Celio, she is currently preparing a small exhibition (October 2026-February 2027) at the MAH in Geneva, which will offer the first opportunity to see the correctly reattributed childhood portrait of archduchess Maria Antonia by Liotard.

Alice Minter

Snuff Boxes and Nicole d’Oliva: Luxury, Deception, and the Diamond Necklace

Snuffboxes or gold boxes are quintessential to eighteenth-century lifestyle. They encompass the conspicuous consumption of that century, when daily life objects became luxury accessories. Alice Minter will present her latest research about snuffboxes during Marie-Antoinette's life and how one example became linked to the biggest scandal of the time: The Necklace affair.

Alice Minter joined the V&A as curator of the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection in 2018. A specialist in sixteenth to nineteenth centuries Decorative Arts, Minter's latest research focuses on French diplomatic boxes during the eighteenth century.

Session 2, The fashion world of Marie Antoinette

Sarah Grant

Marie Antoinette’s lost diamond necklace and a V&A portrait

This paper will detail new research on the V&A Museum’s portrait of Marie Antoinette by François-Hubert Drouais. In particular, it will connect the extraordinary diamond parure worn by Marie Antoinette in the portrait, long assumed to be a generic representation of court jewellery, with a specific necklace and set of jewels owned personally by the queen, whose history can be traced in archival documents. Diamonds play a central role in Marie Antoinette’s story and were pivotal in bringing about her downfall. Jewels were an essential accessory for court life and during the queen’s reign innovative new cuts enhanced the stones’ sparkle as never before. This paper will shed new light on the queen’s collection of jewels and contribute to our understanding of the function and status of jewels at eighteenth-century European courts.

Sarah Grant is a Senior Curator in the Department of Art, Architecture, Photography & Design at the V&A and the lead Curator of Marie Antoinette Style. Sarah holds a doctorate in eighteenth-century French art from the University of Oxford and a Masters in eighteenth-century French decorative arts from the Courtauld Institute of Art. Her books include *Marie Antoinette Style; Female Portraiture and Patronage in Marie-Antoinette’s Court; Toiles de*

Jouy: French printed cottons 1760–1830 and Style and Satire: Fashion in Print 1777–1927. Her exhibitions include *Marie Antoinette Style*, *Modern Masters: Matisse, Picasso, Dali & Warhol* and *Fashion Fantasies*.

Dr Silvija Banić

‘More is more’: Marie Antoinette’s court dress depicted in her portrait by François Hubert Drouais

As the chief portrait painter of Louis XV, François Hubert Drouais (1727 – 1775) portrayed most of the leading figures at the court, including the king, Madame de Pompadour and Madame du Barry. In 1773, he painted in Versailles the bust portrait of Marie Antoinette, then the 17-year-old Dauphine, showing the princess in a court dress. Drouais, celebrated for his skill to realistically capture the intricacies of the aristocratic fashion, employed these abilities to the fullest when depicting Marie Antoinette’s lavish attire. In this talk, centred around this painting that was bequeathed to the V&A in 1882, the focus will be on her accessories and the trimmings of her bodice, sumptuously embroidered and garnished with French lace.

Dr Silvija Banić is Curator of Textiles before 1800 in the Performance, Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Department at the V&A. She specializes in woven and non-woven textiles made in Europe during the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and the Early Modern period.

Zara Kedleston

Queen of Roses: Marie-Antoinette’s influence on the artificial flower industry

In 1774, Marie-Antoinette met a fashion merchant who would change her life: Marie-Jeanne (later known as Rose) Bertin. Marie-Antoinette’s lady in waiting, Madame Campan, recalled that Bertin considerably influenced the young queen’s interest in fashion, making it ‘her principal occupation’. From then on, Campan wrote, ‘everyone wanted immediately to have the same outfit as the queen, to wear the same feathers, the same garlands of flowers to which her beauty lent an infinite charm.’

As Campan suggests, Marie-Antoinette and Bertin had a significant impact on the wearing of artificial flowers at court. Drawing on extensive analysis of Bertin’s credit records, this paper argues that the pair helped to shape the blossoming fabric flower industry in eighteenth-century France. The queen’s personal style, botanical preferences, and life events influenced the kinds of flowers that Bertin sold, thereby affecting the wider consumption of artificial flowers across France and beyond. Wearing flowers combined

two of Marie-Antoinette's greatest passions: fashion and gardens. Furthermore, the taste for artificial flowers was more than purely aesthetic. Artificial flowers as fashion accessories offered ways for women to demonstrate and to cultivate their botanical knowledge. The queen's support of this nascent industry turned flower-making from a small and little-practised craft to a source of national pride and economic power in the century following Marie-Antoinette's reign.

Zara Kesterton is a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge, supervised by Professor Ulinka Rublack. Her thesis explores the development of the artificial flower industry in France c.1700–1860. Zara holds master's degrees in Dress and Textile History from the University of Glasgow, and Early Modern History from Cambridge. She is a co-convenor of the international Women and Flowers network.

Helena Cox

The Befeathered Queen: Plumes, Fashion and Fantasy

The eighteenth century was a feathered world—from the plumed quills with which the queen wrote her letters, to the mattress of her bed, to the peacock-bedecked brocaded silk walls of her bedchamber at Versailles. Most memorable of all, and etched on the collective imagination since her death, is the sartorial accoutrement that has become synonymous with Marie Antoinette's image: her befeathered coiffures. These plumes were an integral adornment in Marie Antoinette's iconic styling and queenly self-fashioning, becoming a key ingredient in the art of the marchandes de modes, who made feathers central to their whimsical concoctions that sparked feather trends and a cacophony of coiffures and pouf hairstyles. Consideration will be given to the feather trade and its global networks as the wider context in which these luxury commodities circulated—networks shaped by colonialism and exploitation. While mindful of these serious critical issues the focus of this paper will be on the social and stylistic history of Marie Antoinette's passion for feathers within the context of court culture, fashion industry and trendsetting. From her dazzling entrance at the court of Versailles to her tricolour plumes during the Revolution—plumes turned against her in the libelles—to their eventual symbolic absence from the queen's parure, feathers that had once told tales of fashion and fantasy became symbols of the ancien régime on the brink of eclipse

Helena Cox is the Research Assistant for Marie Antoinette Style, with expertise in eighteenth-century court culture and fashion history. In conjunction with the recent exhibition, she led the V&A Learning Academy's online course Marie Antoinette Style. Helena has previously worked in the Impressionist and Modern Art department at



Christie's, King Street. She graduated from the University of Edinburgh with a First-Class MA in History of Art.

Session 3: Keynote: Global perspective on Marie Antoinette

Dr David McCallam

Jean Amilcar, Marie-Antoinette's Adopted Black Boy: Childhood and Race in Revolutionary France

In the Departmental Archives of the Yvelines in Versailles, there is a slim dossier of paperwork entitled 'Amilcar, petit indien élevé par Marie-Antoinette'. It relates to a Black slave boy 'gifted' to the Queen in 1787 by the Chevalier de Boufflers, the French Governor of Senegal. Baptized in Versailles, then placed in a boarding school in Saint-Cloud, the boy's education and needs were paid for by the royal household until 1792, after which time the boarding school's teacher, Quentin Beldon, adopted him and petitioned successfully for his charge to be recognized as a ward of the Republic. By late 1795, after further petitioning, Beldon secured a place for Amilcar in the prestigious arts college, the *École nationale de Liencourt*. Tragically, the boy fell ill there and died in May 1796, most likely from tuberculosis, aged only fourteen.

This paper will consider how contemporary constructions of both race and childhood determine Amilcar's place and function in society, from the last years of the Ancien Régime into the Revolution. It will also reflect on how the boy's perceived relationship with Marie-Antoinette informs his treatment under successive regimes.

Dr David McCallam is Reader in French Eighteenth-Century Studies in the School of Languages, Arts and Societies at the University of Sheffield, UK, and is a Fellow of the British Academy. He has published widely on eighteenth-century French literature and culture. His most recent book is *André Chénier: Poetry and Revolution 1792-1794* (2021), a critical study and new translation of the poet's last works. His most recently published articles relate to different aspects of the Marseille plague of 1720. He is currently an honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, where, among other things, he is working on the 'radical pastoral' in 1780s France.

Day 2

Session 1, Fashion Reinventions and Revivals

Susan North

Marie Antoinette and Victorian Fancy Dress



The Queen of France proved a popular figure for fancy dress in Victorian Britain. In addition to costumes imitating her elaborate court dress, a more macabre version of dressing up as Marie Antoinette on her way to the scaffold became surprisingly popular from the 1870s to 1900. Inspired by contemporary history painting, plays and tableaux-vivants, Marie Antoinette's 'prison dress' revealed underlying political concerns and Victorian sentimentality. It reflected her reputation in nineteenth-century Britain, which was very different from narratives about Marie Antoinette in later centuries.

Dr Susan North is Curator of Fashion before 1800 at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Ruby Hodgson

Romantic Revivals: Marie Antoinette in the Nineteenth Century

This paper explores Marie Antoinette's enduring fashion legacy between 1820 and 1860, focusing primarily on Britain and France. Through an examination of nineteenth-century ladies' magazines, fashion plates, visual art, and surviving garments, it considers how Romantic-Era nostalgia reshaped the queen's image in the public imagination after the French Revolution. The paper investigates how eighteenth-century fashions were reworked, reimagined, and physically remade to produce new styles that were simultaneously modern and historically informed. Particular attention is given to the revival of design details, patterns, fabrics, and accessories associated with Marie Antoinette, including the reproduction of eighteenth-century silks and the adaptation of authentic garments to contemporary silhouettes. In tracing these practices, the paper highlights fashion's role in mediating nostalgia, historicism, and royal afterlives

Ruby Hodgson is the Curator of the Goldsmiths Textile Collection and the Curatorial Operations Coordinator at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Her research centers on eighteenth and early nineteenth century British fashion history, with focus on early industrialization, the historic reuse of textiles, and the constructions of class and gender through fashion. Her chapter, "Robe à la Grand-Mère: The Reuse of Eighteenth-Century Silks in Romantic-Era Fashion," appears in *Reading the Thread: Cloth and Communication* (Bloomsbury Academic). She was a contributor to *Silk: Fiber, Fabric, and Fashion* (Thames & Hudson)

Amber Butchart

Queens on Screen: History as Spectacle in the Costuming of Marie Antoinette



Amber Butchart is a curator, historian and broadcaster who specialises in the cultural and political history of textiles, dress and design. She has researched and presented documentaries for television and radio, including the six-part series *A Stitch in Time* for BBC Four that explored the lives of historical figures through the clothes they wore, which involved wearing a *chemise a la reine* recreated by historical costumier Ninya Mikhaila and her team. She is the history consultant and resident historian for BBC One's *Great British Sewing Bee*, and is an external adviser for the National Crime Agency as a Forensic Garment Analyst, working on cases that require investigation of clothing and textiles. She is currently a CHASE-funded PhD researcher in curating political textiles, and has curated exhibitions for the Design Museum, Fashion & Textile Museum, and the British Textile Biennial. Her books include *The Fashion of Film: How Cinema Has Inspired Fashion* (Mitchell Beazley, 2016).

Affiliations: I'm an Associate Lecturer at London College of Fashion (UAL) and a PhD candidate at the University of Essex.

Session 2, 13.30-15.30 Marie Antoinette today

Oriole Cullen

Fashion's muse: Marie Antoinette in haute couture

The legacy of Marie Antoinette as the eternal muse of French luxury is undeniable, within the fashion industry perpetual references abound. This paper examines this enduring inspiration in light of two of the major French haute couture houses, those of Christian Dior and Gabrielle Chanel. Investigating perceptions of femininity in French fashion, comparisons between Marie Antoinette's court dress and Christian Dior's postwar "New Look" reveal differing degrees of constraint and choice. Marie Antoinette's court fashion is framed as enforced political performance, while Dior's designs expose the ambiguity between desire and social pressure in modern femininity. The work of Gabrielle Chanel is presented as a counterpoint, redefining femininity through autonomy rather than overt display.

Oriole Cullen is a Senior Curator of Fashion and Textiles at the Victoria and Albert Museum and previously worked as Curator of Dress and Decorative Arts at the London Museum. She has curated numerous exhibitions on the subject of dress and fashion, most recently, the V&A's *Chanel. Fashion Manifesto* (2023-24). With a focus on the Contemporary, she oversees the V&A Fashion in Motion series, showcasing the work of fashion creatives through live events within the Museum. She is currently curatorial lead for the Museum's major refurbishment of the permanent Fashion Gallery.



Dr Serena Dyer

The Makers' Hand: Recreating the Practices of the Eighteenth-Century Mantua-Maker

The making of fashionable women's dress in the eighteenth century necessitated an inordinate amount of manual labour. The progressive clamour towards industrialisation may have subsumed the production of textiles by the mid-century, but the transformation of those textiles into garments continued to be a manual, haptic, and handcrafted process. If we are to grasp the tacit knowledge wielded by the maker's hands, which is absent from the archival record and yet so culturally ubiquitous, then we must apply our own hands. Making as a means to knowing offers a phenomenological route to understanding the complex ways in which sartorial labour was experienced, understood, and impacted upon sartorial culture. This paper explores how these recreative, embodied methods can elucidate on the labour, skill, and abilities of the sartorial hand, specifically in relation to the making of fashionable garments in the eighteenth century. Following making methods gleaned from object-based research, this paper follows the making of an 'English Gown' or Robe a l'Anglaise. This recreation demonstrates the logic, efficiency, and innovation expressed by the maker's hand. Yet the responsiveness and creativity of the sewing hand, the needs of the body it clothed, and the uniformity prized by industrial manufacture were fundamentally at odds. Mantua-making acts as a microcosm of eighteenth-century fashionable and commercial life, wedding the importance of external appearances with the financial pressures of a consumer society. Stitching wrought more than gowns, it fashioned in textiles the cultural and operational structures of sartorial cultures.

Dr Serena Dyer is Associate Professor of Fashion History at De Montfort University. She is the author of *Material Lives* (Bloomsbury, 2021) and *Labour of the Stitch* (Cambridge UP, 2024). She writes and presents the English Heritage digital series, *Fashion Through History*, and was PI on the AHRC-funded *Making Historical Fashion* project.

Hannah Sutherland and Lauren Quinn

Secrets of the Studio: Preparing fashion and textiles for Marie Antoinette Style

This presentation outlines the role of textile conservators and costume mounters within the exhibition workflow. By tracing the progression of objects through the conservation studio, the talk examines the decision-making processes involved in assessment, treatment, and structural support. In this shared presentation Hannah and Lauren will discuss the varied interventions and bespoke display solutions required to meet both



aesthetic goals and long-term preservation standards for the Marie Antoinette Style exhibition.

Hannah Sutherland joined the V&A as a Textile Conservator in 2020. Prior to this appointment, she held positions at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and Historic Royal Palaces, London. Recent projects have included *Marie Antoinette Style*, *Fashioning Masculinities* and *Re:Imagining Musicals*, as well as items for the Young V&A redisplay. She is now ACR, Senior Textile Conservator

Lauren Quinn is a Senior Costume Mounter at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. She holds a BA in Costume Production and an MA in History and has previously worked in the theatre industry for 12 years before turning her unique skills and knowledge to the world of Costume Mounting. Over her 5 years at the V&A she has worked on many large-scale exhibitions, including *Dior: Designer of Dreams*, *Mary Quant*, *Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser*, *Fashioning Masculinities* and *Marie Antoinette Style*.

Dr. Agnès Rocamora

Digitisation and change in the field of fashion media

The talk will reflect on the formation of the contemporary field of fashion media, focusing on changes related to the advent of digital and social media. Drawing on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and his notions of morphological, technological, social and economic factors of change, it will discuss the entry in the field of fashion of new fashion media players linked to the proliferation of digital platforms, namely: TikTokers, newsletter journalists, fashion brands and tech companies. In doing so it will identify significant transformations in the field of fashion media, commenting on its nature as a disperse, fragmented as well as centralised space.

Dr. Agnès Rocamora is Professor of Social and Cultural Studies at the London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London. She is the author of *Fashioning the City: Paris, Fashion and the Media*. Her writing on the field of fashion and on the fashion media has appeared in various journals, including *Fashion Theory*, *Journalism Practice*, *Sociology*, *Sociétés*, and the *Journal of Consumer Culture*. She is a co-editor of *Thinking Through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*, *The Handbook of Fashion Studies*, and of *Fashion Media: Past and Present*, and has contributed to various books including *The Routledge Handbook of Lifestyle Journalism*, *Fashion's World Cities*, *Critical Luxury Studies*, and *The End of Fashion*.

Liz Tregenza

Dressing Dangerously: Historical fashion and the museum

In 1957, the BBC broadcast a colour television series 'Men, Women and Clothes' narrated by historian and collector Doris Langley Moore, showcasing her extensive collection of historical fashion. What is striking about the series is that live models, many of them leading society figures of the day, are seen wearing the historical garments. This approach reflects a markedly different attitude to the care, interpretation, and use of historic fashion than is common in museums today.

Many historical garments in museum collections were accessioned after years spent languishing in dressing-up boxes or used as artists' props in studios. However, once a garment enters a museum today, it is expected that it will never be worn again, instead carefully preserved in layers of tissue within a specialist box. This has not always been the case, as the Doris Langley Moore example is testament to. In the twentieth century, private collectors and museums alike allowed historical garments to be worn and animated through use.

Using several key case studies from the twentieth century, this paper asks what was learnt from these experiences and how can museums might attempt to recreate or communicate the experience of wearing historical clothing within the contemporary gallery space, without compromising conservation standards. Overall, it aims to consider the embodied experience of wearing historical clothing alongside the relationship between bodies and fashion within the museum.

Dr Liz Tregenza is a fashion historian. She is a Lecturer in Cultural and Historical Studies at London College of Fashion and runs her own business selling vintage clothing and accessories. She is the author of *Wholesale Couture: London and Beyond, 1930-1970* (2023) and co-editor of *Everyday Fashion: Interpreting British Clothing since 1600* (2023).

Spike Sweeting

Politicians as fashion icons: Some historical reflections

The connections between fashion and politics provides ways to understand our enduring fascination with Marie Antoinette. In her time, politics and fashion were the preserve of a similar group associated with the court at Versailles. Although political structures have changed considerably since then, not least in female property rights, enfranchisement and education, it is not obviously the case that society is more equal. Turning to the women celebrated in Eleanor Lambert's International Best Dressed List (Est. 1940), this paper argues that the ties binding early modern fashionistas together were alive and well during a formative period of the modern fashion system. Winners of this prize have, like Marie Antoinette, inherited vast wealth, formed dynasties and provided vital contributions to the institutions underpinning national and international politics throughout the



twentieth century. Concentrated, visible and relying heavily on inherited cultural and economic capital, they have defined fashion in lifestyle, print and their bequests to museums. If asked why we're still interested in Marie Antoinette, this paper suggests that many of the attributes that made her great are still feted in public fashion discourse.

Spike Sweeting is a Lecturer on the V&A Museum/Royal College of Art's History of Design Programme. His expertise lies in eighteenth-century economic and social history with a particular focus on textiles and dress.

About the organiser

Amber Kim

Amber is a Research Events and Communications Coordinator at V&A Research Institute, National Art Library and Archives. She facilitates the effective management and delivery of V&A's diverse portfolio of research events and associated public programming, as well as internal and external communication of project outputs and other activities arising from the cross-departmental collaborations. She has organised the Restitution, Repair and the Memory Wars lecture, Great Mughals Conference, Go for Kogei Symposium, and Great Expectations Conference at the V&A. Through V&A/RCA MA History of Design, she investigated the role of cultural institutions in educating the public about environmental and social sustainability through fashion exhibitions and learning programmes.