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## UK: IFFTI Conference Report – Fashion and Well-Being

<brochure pic> Hosted by London College of Fashion, UK 2–3 April 2009

The IFFTI conference 'Fashion and Well Being' proved an inspirational and uplifting experience that presented a breadth and depth of fashion and textile research from members of the foundation. As an annual global event, it brings together academics from some of the world's leading institutions in fashion and textile education. It provided a great opportunity to network, exchange ideas and share research in relation to the global fashion industry. It was also a very supportive and friendly environment in which to both present and discuss ideas and attend presentations. This year it was hosted by London College of Fashion (LCF), University of the Arts, London.

The two-day conference was sub-divided in parallel sessions into the related themes of: Designing for the Future; Identity; Health; Sustainability; Ethics; Technology and Retail. All papers were peer reviewed at both abstract and paper submission stages and the 55 papers presented were stimulating and varied in terms of subject matter. Delegates were able to select the presentations they wanted to view. The highlights from presentations I attended were Sophie Woodward's paper 'Fantasy dressing and its relation to mainstream fashion: an international and cross-cultural exploration' which explored the relations between individuals dressing up for specialist clubs or private events and how this relates and conflicts with visual presentation of self in their professional lives. There was a fantastic presentation: 'Textile design and print in the digital age' which investigated the future of print and colour in fashion in relation to digital technology and emphasised key designers at the forefront of the technology. Other interesting papers were 'Imagine being peeled: the sublime ecstasy of fur in fashioning well-being....', 'Textiles with the healing touch', 'Fashionitis: can the colours we wear affect our health', 'Fashion, work and disability', 'Design for ageing and well-being: integrating arts and technologies' and 'Encapsulating physical and emotional well-being in fashion clothing'.

There were also some exciting and interesting key-note speakers who added their own commentary around the core theme of the conference. These included talks by Prof. Frances Corner (head of LCF) and Caryn Franklin (writer and broadcaster), a conversation with design duo Boudicca, and a lively and vibrant debate to end the conference with a panel that included Caroline Cox (fashion historian), Irene Shelley (editor of *Black Beauty and Hair* magazine) and Anne-Marie Solowij (freelance beauty writer). The conversation was themed 'Positive visualisations of beauty' which elicited much discussion about the future of fashion from both a technological and cultural perspective. A central theme emphasised that we were on the brink of a major, much needed and healthy revolution in terms of design. Throughout the early 2000s fashion has been extremely bland. The media-obsessed, footballers wives culture of magazines such as *Heat* and TV make-over programmes with Trinny and Suzanna and Gok Wan, have promoted a conservative, perma-tanned, hair-straightened generation that blanks out individuality and expression. The current recession was identified as an environment ripe for underground subcultures and do-it-yourself fashion to break forth with a cultural revolution. This could radically alter our perceptions of design and fashion. Similar to punk in the 1970s which exploded from a youth dissatisfied with recession, strikes and unemployment, the exact visual form of this revolution was not identified but the zeitgeist (spirit of the times) indicates its imminence. This was particularly supported by Prof. Frances Corner, as well as Caryn Franklin, who is well qualified as a barometer of cultural change; her talk emphasised her years as editor of *ID Magazine* which emerged from the ashes of punk.

The highlight of the conference was the evening reception held at the [Wallace Collection](#). This comprised of an evening of fascinating talks, tours of the museum collection and the award ceremony. The first talk was from Dame Rosalind Savill, the director of the Wallace Collection and covered the collection of French 18th century painting, furniture

and porcelain, emphasising how the collection has been used as a source of inspiration by fashion designers such as Vivienne Westwood. This was followed by a talk from Prof. Christopher Breward (acting head of research at the Victoria and Albert Museum) on cities and fashion. The award ceremony presented eight awards for best paper, five for junior faculty and three for post-graduate students. I was delighted to win an award for my paper 'You have to suffer for fashion' which investigated how the body has been distorted through the cut and construction of fashionable clothing and discussed the health and discomfort issues that relate to this. The work involved a comparative study of archival garments from the costume collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum and graduate collections from final year fashion students.

Ultimately the conference provided a great opportunity to explore how fashion can affect well-being. There has been much contemporary discussion around the themes of sustainability, ethics and health related issues such as Fashion Targets Breast Cancer, that concern the fashion industry and the diversity of research consolidated much debate. Surprisingly there were few papers that addressed issues such as eating disorders, drug addictions and exploitation and fair trade which have obviously been topical concerns that directly relate to contemporary fashion and textiles. This could indicate a need for a more specialised conference that specifically addresses the theme of fashion and health.

*Kevin Almond*

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