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Kathryn Norberg and Sandra Rosenbaum, eds. *Fashion Prints in the Age of Louis XIV: Interpreting the Art of Elegance*. Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech Press, 2014. xxxi + 270. 83 B&W, 41 color illustrations, 2 tables, notes bibliography, and index. \$45.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-89672-857-8; (eb) ISBN 978-0-89672-858-5.

Review by Donna Bohanan, Auburn University

Scholars of early modern fashion and material culture have long been familiar with the fashion prints produced during the reign of Louis XIV. These images comprise a singular primary source for those interested in how elites dressed and those wanting to chart the sartorial shifts that fueled the furnace of fashion. They, however, have rarely been analyzed as historical subjects in their own right, a void now filled by the visually rich and highly informative collection of essays, *Fashion Prints in the Age of Louis XIV: Interpreting the Art of Elegance*, edited by Kathryn Norberg and Sandra Rosenbaum.

The book was inspired by an exhibit of fashion prints at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the papers delivered during the spring and summer of 2005 over the course of two symposia held concurrently with the exhibition. In 2002 the Museum acquired *Recueil des modes de la cour de France*, a bound volume of 190 prints, most of which addressed fashion. Produced by several engravers during the period 1678 to 1692, the prints were collected piecemeal and probably bound as a collection by 1704. An unusually generous sample of these prints has been beautifully reproduced as color plates in *Fashion Prints*; others appear in black and white. These illustrations alone distinguish the volume.

Fashion Prints in the Age of Louis XIV contains fourteen essays organized around three major themes. The first examines the prints as artifacts, that is, their production and history. In her essay explaining the ambiguous nature of the prints, Françoise Tétart-Vittu makes clear that, for various reasons, they are not wholly reliable as evidence of the evolution of fashion trends. In describing the production process, she reveals the considerable powers of the designer, the engraver, and the print merchant to manipulate the images, both from the outset and over the course of multiple strikes. The prints were neither photographic in nature nor stable over time.

A number of the prints featured prominent aristocrats garbed in the latest attire and posed in a manner that suggested an inherently fashionable character. Kathleen Nicholson describes and explains the historical meaning of these “fashion portraits.” The portraits, despite an often less than accurate depiction of the subject, promoted the idea of celebrity, and their affordability allowed all to participate vicariously in fashion trends and therefore enjoy the liberating effects offered the individual.

The *Recueil* also includes a number of hand-colored prints known as the *cris de Paris*, a series of “stock figures of ambulant vendors differentiated by the goods they sell” (p. 55). These images are the subject of an essay by Paula Rea Radisich, who argues that they contributed to the construction of national identity. The graceful depiction of the French food vendor makes clear that fashionability was not limited to the sword nobility. For Radisich the inclusion of the *cris* establishes this volume about fashionability as an expression of imagined Frenchness. This significance is made greater when linked to

France's reliance on venality and history of social mobility.

Marcia Reed's comparison of the LACMA *Recueil* to collections of prints at the Clark Library and the Getty Museum explores both their production and consumption, and is particularly focused on marketing and collecting. The appeal of fashion prints included the possibility of masquerade and the imagining of new identities. Her essay puts forth the idea that the social value of fashion prints, whose production proliferated during the period, was the propagation of an audience, a "Republic of Fashion."

The essays in the second part of the book seek to clarify and explain the contemporary context of the fashion print. William Ray addresses fashion as concept and ethic. He writes about the period's critique of fashion and maintains it served as a means for the individual to engage in a dialectic between conformity and dissent with the community. Ray rejects interpretations that see fashion as strictly a matter of imitation and emulation that served to buttress traditional power structures. Rather the polemics of the period as well as the prints themselves suggest the individual's possibility of critical autonomy. Ray concludes that fashion as a cultural and social force did not produce an atomized society of disconnected critics, but led instead to the emergence of a "sociological critique" that ultimately "welded people more deeply to the community, by aligning the collective mind around a commonly shared set of issues, polemics, changing styles, and social decisions" (p. 106). The ethics of fashion are also considered by Malina Stefanovska who writes about Saint-Simon and his perception of the concept. As he commented on so many aspects of court life under Louis XIV, so he wrote about the attire of courtiers. Ever the conservative and traditionalist in these matters, Saint-Simon's observations and opinions reflected his "anxieties about order and disorder, stability and change, authority and innovation" (p. 129).

Louis XIV's role in promoting France's identity as the center of western fashion is the subject of Kathryn Norberg's informative essay. Historians of dress have always placed Louis atop the great tidal wave of fashion that began in his reign, yet his actual role in this process, other than to preside over the court at which it was based, has never been clearly described. Norberg takes up this topic and examines Louis' own sartorial evolution, his response to fashion trends, and his encouragement of the industry. She asserts a more complex relationship. Louis' wardrobe was certainly no testing ground for fashion innovation, and Norberg makes clear that the Sun King was no trendsetter. Nor was he an enemy of fashion; he allowed it and promoted it indirectly and sometimes inadvertently. His mercantilist policies and sponsorship of the fashion press certainly advanced France's image as fashion icon.

The influence of the oriental aesthetic on French fashion is the subject of Mary Schoeser's essay. She explores the role of textiles from the Mughal, Persian, and Ottoman Empires on European design and manufacture. Historians have long been aware of the great "chintz craze" that shaped European tastes and production, but Schoeser expounds on the variety of ways in which these civilizations changed fashion in France. The merchant adventurers who brought to France foreign materials, and with them foreign customs, introduced a greater informality in dress in addition to a more cosmopolitan perspective.

The third and final section of essays addresses the fashion print as a historical document of style itself. While acknowledging the limits of the prints as the basis for any complete narrative of fashion trends, Sandra Rosenbaum sets forth precisely what the prints do tell us about fashion. They supply a visual and written record (the captions are essential) of how the elements of fashion were put together and worn. They portray how the remnants of period fashion, the odds and ends that exist today in museums, were actually used.

Soko Furuhashi's essay discusses the technical aspects of the paper and coloring used in the production of these prints. She takes special interest in whether the prints were, in fact, made at the time indicated by the dates on the engravings or later, and if they were hand-colored later, a common practice. An expert

on the science and history of papermaking and painting, Furuhata guides the reader through the process of identifying watermarks, countermarks, and colorants. Her technical and scientific analysis of materials leads her to conclude that the prints were indeed produced in the late seventeenth century.

Symposium attendees had the rare treat of viewing a costume and observing its movements as period dancer, Susan Gladstone, performed to the music of Lully. Elaborating on this theme, theatre historian Michael Hackett writes about the importance and meaning of performing fashion. The ability to observe the costume in motion revealed the purpose of details that had been “almost hidden in the LACMA plate” (p. 217). For Hackett this display was especially important given the performative nature of the French court and the Neoplatonist implications of performance. Professor of Dance, Emma Lewis Thomas, choreographed these dances and shares a description and explanation of Gladstone’s rendition. Costume historian, Maxwell Barr, retired director of the Costume Shop at UCLA, was responsible for the recreation of the costume based on apparel depicted in Plate 14, “Dame en Robbe.” He describes the very intricate and fascinating process of constructing this period costume based on the image depicted in the *Recueil*. Concluding this section, Catherine McLean, Susan Schmalz, and Sandra Rosenbaum describe the lengthy and involved project in which a team of experts at the LACMA studied a nineteenth-century costume and found its root garment to be a seventeenth-century mantua, which was carefully reconstructed by reference to the fashion plates in the *Recueil*.

Fashion Prints in the Age of Louis XIV appears as a volume of prime importance for a number of reasons. Its authors critically examine historical documents that have traditionally served as the basis of costume history for the period; they elaborate the production process and distribution of the prints, and elucidate the intended purposes of the fashion print in the seventeenth century. They problematize, complicate, and expand our understanding of these documents. By depicting their larger significance in the period and delineating what they tell us about the seventeenth century and its society, these authors have made the fashion print a much more useful historical source. By bringing together this expertise and by their inclusion of a tremendous sample of images, Norberg and Rosenbaum have given us an invaluable resource. *Fashion Prints* is a treasure for historians of dress, material culture, and seventeenth-century society.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Françoise Tétart-Vittu, “The Fashion Print: An Ambiguous Object”

Kathleen Nicholson, “Fashioning Fashionability”

Paula Rea Radisich, “The *Cri de Paris* in the LACMA *Recueil des modes*”

Marcia Reed, “Fashions in Prints: Considering the *Recueil des modes* as an Album of Prints”

William Ray, “Fashion as Concept and Ethic in Seventeenth-Century France”

Malina Stefanovska, “The Fashion Run Seen from Backstage: Saint-Simon’s Memoirs of Louis XIV’s Court”

Kathryn Norberg, “Louis XIV: King of Fashion?”

Mary Schoeser, “Oriental Connections: Merchant Adventurers and the Transmission of Cultural Concepts”

Sandra L. Rosenbaum, “The LACMA *Recueil des modes*”

Soko Furuhata, "Fashion Illustration from the Reign of Louis XIV: A Technical Study of the Paper and Colorants Used in the LACMA *Recueil des modes*"

Michael J. Hackett, "Performing Fashion"

Emma Lewis Thomas, "Recreating an Entre, a Minuet, and a Chaconne"

Maxwell Barr, "Recreating a *Grand Habit*"

Catherine McLean, Sandra L. Rosenbaum, and Susan Rebate Schmalz, "A Seventeenth-Century Gown Rediscovered: Work in Progress"

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