Exhibition: The Re-Birth of Venus: Fashion & the *Venus Kallipygos*

Opening reception: May 3, 2013, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.
Free and open to the public.


Research: Anne Bissonnette, PhD, Sarah Nash, Loretta Yau.
This exhibition is part of the course "Material Culture & Curatorship" (HECOL 668).
Exhibition Summary

The exhibition explores the influence of art on fashion through the study of Venus Kallipygos, a statue from the National Archaeological Museum in Naples, Italy, and its pervasive influence on dress. Unlike other statues, this goddess exposes herself without a hint of modesty. The research investigates the artifact in terms of genre, production and cultural significance. We observe what this Venus is wearing and, as importantly, how it is worn and how it may have influenced late 18th century neoclassical fashion and late 19th and early 20th century dress behaviors.

In his book New Picture of Paris of 1800, Louis-Sébastien Mercier mentions how a wide range of Parisian fashionistas did their best to resemble the Venus “with the beautiful buttocks.” With her tunics raised high to expose her lower body, the statue’s popularity may have led to the hastening of the legs’ and derriere’s outline after centuries of abstraction under voluminous petticoats. The statue’s rendition of the tunic’s clingy pleated cloth belted below the bust also contributed to a paradigm shift where “natural” breasts free of corsetry became the new ideal.

The exhibition links fashion and Greco-Roman culture through elements of dress such as colors, silhouettes and use of fabrics as well as the corporeality of clothing through gestures and clothing construction.

A highlight of the exhibition, and unseen in Edmonton before, is a Fortuny “Delphos” gown on loan from a private lender in The Netherlands. Providing an example of a unique fabric process patented in 1909, this pleated silk gown mimicked one of Ancient Greece’s most popular statue, the Charioteer of Delphi. It creates what became an artistic tea gown that clung to the body and accentuates its curves. Also on exhibition is a bias-cut evening gown by designer and Edmonton native Michael Kaye, and a ca. 1808 white muslin gown with silver dots that will please Jane Austen fans. With permission from The Museum of London, the reproduction of a “merveilleuse” and “incroyable” fashion print from 1796 might shock contemporary viewers with its depiction of skin-tight attire. Fashion plates from 1798 to 1809 from the Journal des Dames et des Modes will also serve to illustrate the rise in popularity of the “natural” breasts and delineation of the buttocks that influence fashion to this day.

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**Gallery hours:**
Monday to Friday: 8:30 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Saturdays: 12:00 noon - 4:00 p.m.
Sundays: 12:00 noon - 4:00 p.m.
Holidays: please call 780-492-3824 for this information as it varies.

**For more information or for visuals, please contact:**
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