

Global Perspectives on Colour - Speakers' Titles, Abstracts and Biographies

Dr Jenny Balfour-Paul (Exeter University) - Keynote Speaker

Title:

Indigo: Much More Than A Colour

Abstract:

Indigo is a unique dye. The world's oldest and only natural blue dye, it has an exotic history and an exciting future. Its fascinating story spans the arts and the sciences. From the time of the Ancient Egyptians it provided the world's only source of blue dye of every hue until synthetic dyes took over in the late nineteenth century, and it was also indispensable for creating a glorious range of other colours when combined with other natural dyes. Whether produced from plants by a process akin to alchemy or in its synthetic form, indigo has a unique chemistry that renders it compatible with all natural fibres as well as other substances such as leather. It has therefore been the dye of luxury garments as well as the hallmark of practical clothing (hence 'blue-collar worker'), not least blue jeans, the most widespread fashion item of all time. Indigo was also used as a paint pigment; a testament to its outstanding durability is demonstrated by modern finds from recovered shipwrecks of the seventeenth century. Indigo's intriguing colour echoes the infinite richness of the sea, the midnight sky, the shadowy dusk and early dawn, and the elusive seventh colour of the rainbow.

Biography:

Jenny Balfour-Paul, an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Exeter, is a Fellow of The Royal Geographical Society, the Explorers Club and the Royal Asiatic Society, and partner in 'Silk Road Connect' - an educational initiative launched by cellist Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road Project in New York in 2009. A traveller, researcher, artist and writer, she lectures and broadcasts internationally, notably on subjects related to travel, history, indigo, the art and science of colour, and aspects of textiles. She was consultant curator for the Whitworth Art Gallery's 2007 touring exhibition *Indigo: A Blue to Dye For*, has twice exhibited her Arab textile collection and is involved in planning for a 2014 festival of Arab arts. She was consultant for the American documentary film *Blue Alchemy: Stories of Indigo*, released in 2011 by New Deal Films Inc.

Jenny's classic, revised *Indigo: Egyptian Mummies to Blue Jeans* was re-launched by British Museum Press in 2011 (Firefly in USA in 2012) and her *Indigo in the Arab World* was published by RoutledgeCurzon. Her forthcoming book relates her adventures by land and by sea with a Victorian traveller. Jenny has published numerous articles and reviews, is a contributing editor for *Hali* journal of carpets, textile and Islamic art and is currently guest editing a special edition on natural dyes of Asia for *MARG*, the major Indian arts magazine. Current projects include collaborating with shipwreck experts on recovered textile and dyestuff cargoes, and encouraging worldwide revivals of sustainable natural dyes.

Dr Hanna Hodacs (Warwick University)

Title:

Eight Shades of Blue: Eighteenth Century Chinese Silk on the European Market

Abstract:

Chinese silk textiles imported to Europe in the 18th century came in a wide variety of colours. Silk pieces could be Sky Blue, Dark Blue, Middle Blue, Light Blue, Mazarine Blue, Milan Blue, Mourant Blue, or Turquin Blue, just to mention one set of shades. Different qualities of silk, such as Chinese Damask or Satin, could arrive in more than twenty different colours. This variation reflects the fact that silk is a fibre which absorbs dyes like maybe no other. The colours of the assortments and how they changed over time do however also offer insights into the role of Chinese silk in Europe. In this paper I am going to discuss how we can use colours and colour nomenclature to illuminate markets and fashions in 18th century Europe.

Biography:

Hanna Hodacs is currently working on two post-doctoral projects, one as part of 'Europe's Asian Centuries - Trading Eurasia 1600-1830' at the University of Warwick (researching early modern Eurasian trade and the Scandinavian East India Companies) and the other at the Center for History of Science, Royal Swedish Academy of Science, Stockholm, where she is working on a project on Swedish naturalists in late 18th century London. She has previously worked on natural history teaching and travelling in 18th century Sweden as well as on evangelicalism and Anglo-Swedish contacts in the 19th century. The latter was the main topic of her doctoral dissertation (2003, University of Uppsala, Sweden).

Alexandra Loske (University of Sussex)**Title:**

"Boldly carved, silvered and tinted...": The Use of Silver As Architectural Colour in the Royal Pavilion, Brighton

Abstract:

This paper will examine the use of silver in European interiors between ca. 1700 and ca. 1850, with particular focus on the Royal Pavilion in Brighton (Henry Holland/John Nash, 1786-1823). Whereas silver objects feature prominently in the history of decorative arts, silvered surfaces in historic interiors are much rarer. The main reasons might have been the predictable tarnishing process of silver and a general preference for gilding in the 18th and 19th century. However, during the Baroque and Rococo periods some European architects and designers embraced silvering in interiors, with little regard for the short-lived visual effects of the design schemes. In this paper the speaker will present a short overview of the large-scale use of silver in some continental interiors and compare these to much less conspicuous examples of silvering in Britain. The Royal Pavilion presents an exception in this context. Its late-Georgian interiors include what might be the most daring, varied and experimental silver interiors in the country. The speaker will explain how a current restoration project in one of the principle rooms of the building is dealing with the challenges of restoring silvered surfaces and conclude the paper by presenting likely reasons for the significant use of silver in the Royal Pavilion.

Biography:

Alexandra Loske is an art historian, editor and curator with a particular interest in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century European art and architecture. She has been working at the University of Sussex since 1999, where she now teaches in the department of Art History and is currently completing a doctorate.

Alexandra obtained an MA in Linguistics from Humboldt University Berlin in 1997 and ten years later added an MA in Art History from the University of Sussex. She then received a D.Phil. scholarship from the AHRC and is now investigating the use of colour in early nineteenth century interiors. She is particularly interested in the work of Mary Gartside, George Field, Humphry Repton and Mary Philadelphia Merrifield. Her research is based at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton, where she is currently preparing an exhibition on Regency colour theory.

Akaiza Mota (RCA)

Title:

Investigating Cultural Heritage Through Colour (Sao Tome, Lisbon and London)

Abstract

My family is from Sao Tome and moved to Lisbon, Portugal and then, as third generation diaspora, to the multicultural modernity of London. I wonder how these journeys have influenced the meaning and the experience of culture? From an immeasurable complexity of cultural influences I will set out to investigate this question more specifically through the designer's 'colour sense'. I explore whether the specialist 'eye' for colour is a characteristic I have learned through education and training or if it is something 'inherited' through my genetic and cultural heritage from the peoples that inhabited the Sao Tome & Principe Islands off the coast of West Africa.

I am especially interested in the phenomenon I have observed in past visits to Sao Tome, according to which respondents report that they themselves have a good appreciation of colour whilst others from 'Other' islands seem to exhibit no constraints and have 'no taste', being susceptible to excessive use of colour in their personal adornment. I question what is deemed 'excess' in colour? I wonder why it is always 'others' who exhibit 'excess'? I investigate if it is possible to record the way that this excess of colour is described. Mark Bornstein in his research on the influence of visual perception on culture (Oct 2009), argues that "Cultural differences in basic colour categorization or nomenclature have been variously explained by biological evolution, linguistic relativism, or semantic evolution".

I believe this study will contribute to a better understanding of cultural heritage and colour in modern societies.

Biography

Akaiza Mota has been working as a textile designer for the Paul Smith fashion house since graduating as a textile, weave specialist at the RCA in 2004. As a professional designer working within the strictures and discipline of the fashion industry, Akaiza is aware of the balance between industrial constraints, possibilities and limitations that influence decision making as a creative designer. Her specialist training as a colourist for weave textiles began early in her schooling in Portugal and was further developed in undergraduate and Masters' degree training in art schools in London. As a Masters' student Akaiza won the Marianne Straub travel scholarship to travel to Sao Tome & Principe Islands to find the homelands of her grandparents and to document the uses of colour in textiles, and domestic architecture (interiors and exteriors). For her work exhibited at the RCA graduation show (in 2004) Akaiza was awarded the Althea McNish Prize for the use of colour in Textiles and the Art Book Prize from Thames & Hudson.

As a textile designer employed in the culture of contemporary, western, industrial modernity she was especially conscious of the differences amongst the embodied experiences of the rural and small town cultures of the current inhabitants of Sao Tome, the parental culture and the urban culture of Lisbon, Portugal, and the verbally expressed responses of those living in London.

Dr Charlotte Nicklas (University of Brighton)

Title:

Nile Green, Mexican Blue, and Yokohama Grey: Language, Colour, and Consumption in Mid-Nineteenth Century Women's Fashion

Abstract:

The mid- to late nineteenth century was a period of great change in the field of dye chemistry, encompassing many developments in the production of colours across the spectrum. Textile manufacturers offered a wide variety of colourful dress textiles to middle-class female consumers in Great Britain and the United States. Using periodical texts and images, as well as surviving objects, this paper will explore the sophisticated language developed by authors in women's magazines to describe this rainbow of colours.

As colour scholars such as John Gage have observed, describing colour often poses a linguistic challenge. Most of the fashion information in mid-nineteenth century women's magazines had to be conveyed through black and white words. Colour thus presented a particular challenge and writers adopted a variety of strategies in their descriptive efforts. Authors delighted in the variety, subtlety, and beauty of available colours, often appealing to the reader's imaginative ability by using a great range of references.

Even today, most words used to describe colour are borrowed from the natural world, a practice very much in evidence in nineteenth-century fashion writing. Writers also used French words, geographical terms, political events, and famous people to name colours. For example, dramatic and exotic place-references appeared in fashion reports, such as "Nile-green," "terre d'Egypte," "Indian green," "Mexican blue," "Yokohama grey," "Vesuvius red", and "Marengo, a shade of purple almost black." By examining this wide range of allusions, this complex language of colour can be contextualised, revealing the tastes and cultural concerns of middle-class women.

Biography:

Dr Charlotte Nicklas is a lecturer in the History of Art and Design, School of Humanities, Faculty of the Arts, University of Brighton, where she has taught since 2006. Her main research interest is the history of dress and textiles, especially in the nineteenth century. She was awarded her PhD from the University of Brighton in 2010. Her thesis, titled 'Splendid Hues: Colour, Dyes, Everyday Science, and Women's Fashion, 1840-1875', examined the cultural contexts of the transition from natural to artificial textile dyes in the mid-nineteenth century.

While studying for her MA at the Bard Graduate Center, Charlotte worked in the Exhibitions Department at that institution, helping to organise exhibitions on a wide variety of design history topics, including *Marimekko: Fabrics, Fashion, Architecture* (2003-2004) and *Sheila Hicks: Weaving as Metaphor* (2006). She has also worked in the Department of Textile and Fashion Arts at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Charlotte has presented numerous papers at conferences and contributed exhibition reviews to *Fashion Theory*

and Textile History. Her chapter titled 'Light, colour and language in mid-nineteenth century women's fashion' will appear in the forthcoming publication *Surface Tensions* (edited by Glenn Adamson and Victoria Kelley, Manchester University Press, 2013).

Neil Parkinson (RCA)

Title:

Standards and Gems: The Colour Reference Library at the Royal College of Art

Abstract:

The Colour Reference Library at the Royal College of Art is one of the largest collections of published material on the subject of colour anywhere in the world. Spanning six centuries of studies, it supports research into the art and science of colour in numerous contexts. Neil Parkinson, Archives & Collections Manager at the RCA, will provide an introduction to the collection, outlining its scope, history and development. Drawing on some of its most notable holdings, which range from monumental works on colour theory by Newton and Chevreul to eccentric and obscure colour charts, the paper will also consider typical and unusual uses of the library in recent years.

Biography:

Neil Parkinson manages the various special collections at the Royal College of Art, including archives, rare books, photographs and the College's art collection. He is the author of several guides to special collections and digitisation projects, including *Poets & Polymaths: Special Collections at the University of Sussex* (University of Sussex, 2002).

Josephine Rout (RCA/V&A MA 2012)

Title:

Hyper Black: Colour, Class and Conformity in Japanese Uniforms

Abstract:

When it comes to dress, black is one of the most complex and contradictory colours. While its very classification as a 'colour' may be subject to scientific debate, on a material level it is a pigment with strong connotations: Death, elegance, modesty, rebellion and professionalism are just some of the many qualities black clothing is thought to symbolise. The work of designers such as Yamamoto Yohji and Kawakubo Rei has served to define Japanese fashion as dark and intellectual, yet the colour black has a more ubiquitous presence throughout the nation in the mode of the uniform. With a focus on masculine uniforms, this paper considers the role of black as a conforming agent in Japanese dress.

Black goes from being a colour of court rank, symbolising wisdom, to that of the uniform, a colour of conformity. Despite the introduction of aniline dyes and the wider availability of bright colours, black becomes the only choice, not simply for men of the urban middle class, but a tool by which Japanese masculinity is standardised. While charting the development of the black school uniform from 1879 through to the contemporary period, the role of industry and brands in the production of this image will be considered alongside the student experience of wearing uniforms and sartorial subversion.

Biography:

Josephine Rout is a recent graduate from the Royal College of Art/Victoria and Albert

Museum History of Design Programme. Following her BA in Art Theory from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, Josephine taught in Japan as part of the JET Programme before moving to London. She has worked on numerous exhibitions, including *Kitty and Bulldog: The British Influence on Lolita Fashion* and *Tradition Transformed: Contemporary Korean Ceramics* both at the Victoria and Albert Museum. With a focus on Japan, her research interests include fashion and textiles, branding, national identity, cross-cultural aesthetics and the material culture of education. She has presented her research at SOAS, the University of Oxford and the University of Canterbury.

Liz Stanford (RCA/V&A MA 2012)

Title:

Explosive Colours: The Use of Colour in Indian Firework Ephemera

Abstract:

To many, India *is* colour; often referred to as the 'land of colour', providing inspiration for generations of photographers and designers. Home to Holi, the 'Festival of Colours', as well as the Pink City (Jaipur), Blue City (Jodhpur), Golden City (Jaisalmer), and White City (Udaipur); vibrant colour is an integral part of everyday life, from religious rituals and festivals, to clothes and customs, street graphics, films, and packaging.

This paper will explore the deployment of bright colour in Indian firework ephemera - particularly that produced by Standard Fireworks, based in Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu - as well as in Indian calendar, and popular art more generally. The technical, commercial and aesthetic considerations informing the use of such 'shouting' colours - so firmly associated with the 'Sivakasi look' - will be investigated, and spectatorial responses explored, alongside critical discourse on the 'attention-getting' nature of colour in Bollywood films, and popular 'god posters' used in worship.

This dramatic use of colour has been associated, by some, with commercialism, vulgarity, excess, and a lack of refinement or taste; problematics which have been addressed by David Batchelor in his seminal *Chromophobia*. Market-driven calendar art as a whole has also faced the same accusatory rhetoric and been labelled 'kitsch', a trend that has grown considerably, seemingly in direct correlation to an increased use of bold, saturated and intense colour.

Biography:

Liz Stanford is a recent graduate of the RCA/V&A MA in History of Design, studying the Asian specialism, with a focus on India. Her research interests encompass popular visual culture, printed ephemera and graphic design from the nineteenth century to the present. Her thesis, entitled 'Explosive Matters - The Lakshmi Cracker in Indian Firework Labels, Packaging and Posters from the 1960s to the Present' explored the many 'journeys' undertaken by the Lakshmi cracker - from design, production and consumption, to recycling, collection or destruction.

Whilst on the course she assisted on the forthcoming *India Design Now* exhibition, and the Clothworkers' Centre Cataloguing Project, both at the V&A. She was also asked to collect Indian matchbox labels for the museum on her recent research trip to India, which she has been researching and cataloguing for the V&A. In 2011 she was awarded the Clive Wainwright Memorial Prize, and a Gardner Travel Award.

Prior to her MA, Liz undertook a BA in Anthropology, as well as Art Foundation, and Photography courses before working as a researcher and assistant archivist at the Ashmolean Museum, as a photographer, and as a web content editor for a travel company.

Yuko Takeuchi (RCA/V&A and Osaka University)

Title:

The Importation of Colour Theory from Britain to Japan: Focusing on the Relationship Between Christopher Dresser and Kubota Beisen

Abstract:

Japanese officials, design promoters and theorists started to take special interest in colour theory in the early Meiji era. They received Western theories positively and published many books on colour from the 1890s. Japan put emphasis on colour harmony and coloration in order to improve art industries such as textiles and metalwork objects.

The Victorian designer Christopher Dresser played a role as a catalyst of change. He made visits to Japan in 1876-1877, when Japanese high-ranking officials asked him to inspect Japanese crafts. It led them to understand British design theories. Through this interchange, they got to know Dresser's colour theory.

Aside from the design promoters, Kyoto painter Beisen Kubota also noticed Dresser's theory. Beisen improved artistic crafts as a designer and theorist. In this sense, Dresser and Beisen were mediators between 'art' and 'design'. However, there are interesting differences between them which originated from British and Japanese attitudes towards the arts.

This research aims to examine the reception of Dresser's colour theory as well as its significance through analyzing Beisen's quotations from his writings, and it compares the development of colour theory in Japan and Britain during the 19th century.

Biography:

Yuko Takeuchi is a Visiting Fellow at the Graduate School of Letters, Osaka University in Japan. She is currently a visiting researcher at the Victoria and Albert Museum and Royal College of Art History of Design Programme at the Royal College of Art until March 2013. She completed her PhD dissertation entitled, 'A study of Christopher Dresser: the Formation and Development of His Design Principles' at Osaka University in 2009. For her dissertation, she presented the following research: 'Ornament and Design: Some Interrelated Ideas of Christopher Dresser', at the Proceedings of the 6th International Conference of Design History and Design Studies, ANOTHER NAME FOR DESIGN: Words for Creation, ICDHS 2008 OSAKA, 2008.

Her research field is History of Design, in which she explores the recent history of cultural exchanges between Japan and Britain. In 2011, she was awarded the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, and conducted research entitled, 'A Study on the Relationship between Christopher Dresser and the Arts in the Kansai District during the Meiji Era'. Her recent articles include 'The Art and Design Theories of Richard Redgrave', *Philokalia*, Osaka University, vol.29, 2012. Her professional career outside of academe includes freelance writing for online art magazines.

Akiko Yamada (V&A and Osaka University)

Title:

Dilute To Taste: Japanese Fashion for the British Market at the beginning of the 20th Century

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to examine trends in the choice of the colour of kimonos for the Western market at the beginning of the 20th century and to suggest a way to date such kimonos using the perspective of colour.

As is well known, there was a significant Japanese influence on Western art in the 19th century. However, my research suggests that, in terms of fashion, the strongest influence was between 1900-1920. During this period, large numbers of kimonos, specially designed for the Western market, came into Britain, and they were sold in shops and department stores in and around London. My focus is on one of the largest Japanese manufacturers who traded in kimonos with Britain, Iida Takashimaya. I clarify how their business worked with British stores, as well as showing how British stores promoted kimonos in Britain, to help us understand how significant a phenomenon 'kimono fever' was in British fashion history.

Secondly, I explore what kinds of colours were used for kimonos intended for the Western market. In the 19th century, women dressed in red kimonos were often painted by Japanophile artists in Western countries. Does this mean that red kimonos were the most popular among actual British women? I examine changes in the colour trend of Westernized kimonos as reflected in the trade between Japan and Britain. This also suggests one possible way to date Westernized kimonos which are now stored in British museums.

Biography:

Akiko Yamada is a PhD candidate at Osaka University, and a visiting researcher at the Victoria and Albert Museum for the Osaka University research project: 'Art and Design in Asia: Comparative Studies for the 21st century from British and Japanese Perspectives'. She is also a joint research fellow at Bunka Fashion Research Institute in Japan and leads the research project, 'Modernization of the Kimono and the Manner of Wearing it from the 1910s to 1930s in Japan - Focusing on the Bunka Gakuen Costume Museum's Collection'. She received a BA and a MA in Comparative Literature from Osaka University.

Her current research interest is Japonisme and Fashion. She is preparing her PhD thesis entitled 'Japonisme in British Fashion at the Beginning of the 20th Century'. She has presented papers at Kyushu Sangyo University, Scripps College, USA, and at the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto in 2011, and at Bunka Gakuen University, and at Osaka University in 2012.