

ICOM COSTUME ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2023 CFP

All the Colours of Black

The theme of the 2023 ICOM Costume Committee Annual 'All the Colours of Black'. Black is not technically considered a colour; scientifically it represents the absence, or complete absorption of visible light. Yet black is a recurrent feature in the colour palette and language of fashion, in which its adaptability leaves it open to interpretation by the different groups of people that have adopted it. It is at once the colour of protest, of mourning and of melancholy; it is sinister – associated with night, death, sin and evil. It is both serious, connoting respect, diligence, and humility as in the black worn by religious orders, and rebellious as in the styling of punk and goth subcultures. Black is sophisticated yet charged with eroticism; it is both pious and perverse.

Black's paradoxical meanings have a long history in dress and textiles. Famously, it is a difficult colour to achieve, and its appearance in dress once connoted great wealth – it was first popularized throughout the courts of Europe, from Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (1396-1467) in mourning for his father after 1419, to the Spanish Emperor Charles V (1500-1558) and Catherine de Medicis (1519-1589), Queen Consort of Henry II of France (1547-1559). Black's symbolism goes far beyond sartorial trends too – in Ancient Egypt, for example, as in other parts of Africa and Asia, black was simultaneously symbolic of life and death, described by the celebrated Professor colour historian, Michel Pastoureau, as the 'colour of the bowels of the earth and the underground world'. Its interpretation in dress, textiles, and fashion therefore emphasises how our relationship to clothes is deeply personal, linked to our political, economic, and cultural materiality.

Papers on the following topics will be particularly welcomed, but submission is open to any research topics reflecting the use of black throughout history in conjunction with the development of new technologies, the influence of art movements, social or political events and changing taste:

- Religious and spiritual connotations of black
- Varying cultural symbolism of black
- The process and challenges of creating black dyes
- Gendered associations of black in fashion
- Black in relation to dandyism – in context as broad as the 19th century male dandy, the Black dandy and the importance of sartorial style to Black identity formation, or the female dandy
- Black as a colour of protest
- The role of black in histories of subcultural style
- Mourning dress and/or the etiquette of wearing black to observe rituals
- The role of royal courts in popularising black in fashion

Presentations should be around 15-20 minutes in length and preferably delivered in English (but any other official language of ICOM (French and Spanish) is accepted).

Abstracts of approximately 300 words should be submitted by 17th April 2023 to chair.costume@icom.museum and should contain the following information:

- Name
- Affiliation (with ICOM membership number for ICOM members)
- Email address
- Title and body of abstract
- Any special technological requirements (for example a Mac or PC for accompanying images, video)

Both the abstracts and the presentations will be in English (or in any other official language of ICOM, French and Spanish). As there will be no translation, please make sure that your presentation will be easy to follow for an international audience. The talks will be livestreamed but no remote speakers will be possible.

Acceptance of papers will be notified by the end of May 2023.



Jean Muir Ltd, British, 1966–1995. (Image © National Museums Scotland)