



fashion fancies

Textiles from the Moon Collection

DCC Permanent Collection Exhibition

Fashion Fancies:

Textiles from the Moon Collection,
DCC Permanent Collection Exhibition

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DEVONPORT
REGIONAL
GALLERY



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In late 2011, work began on the Devonport City Council's new purpose-built storage facility. The lengthy process of approving, designing, building and re-allocating the entire Permanent Collection finally came to an end in June this year. In 2013, once the building was complete and specific areas fine-tuned to accommodate best museum practice, a small team, consisting of two part-time staff and volunteers, began relocating the Collection from the old building it was stored in. The relocation has been carried out with the utmost care and in a most professional manner under the supervision of Dunja Rmandic, Curator of Collections.

Prior to the relocation, Gallery staff, Andrew Worsley and Georgia Hyde, worked with Roving Curator, Veronica Macno, on re-labelling textiles in the Moon Collection – carefully sewing cotton labels onto each garment and other cloth items. It was in the process of inspecting collection items prior to the relocation that Dunja first came across the Moon Collection, which was bequeathed to the Devonport City Council's Art Collection as two separate donations in 1975 and 1980. The quality of many of these items, and their potential to be showcased in an

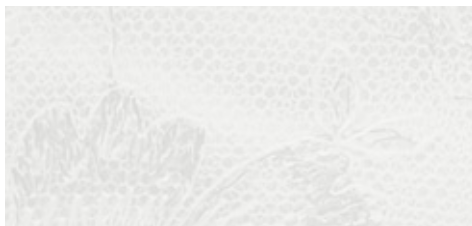
upcoming exhibition, motivated Dunja to research the Moon family and their eclectic collection. Many of the textile items were in good condition, however a selection of the garments required extensive conservation work due to their age and the conditions they had been stored in.

This exhibition is the first Collection exhibition to be displayed since the completion of the new art storage facility and relocation. It highlights the skills in design and dressmaking from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whilst also presenting the viewer with items and objects indicative of a local Devonport family's passion for overseas travel and collecting.

Acquiring, storing and displaying collection items is an important aspect of our commitment to the community and visitors to the region, however at the heart of a good collection is the way it is maintained. The Devonport City Council is to be applauded for its vision and discernment in commissioning the purpose-built art storage facility, which, if properly maintained and managed, will provide great pleasure and knowledge for future generations.

Ellie Ray, Director

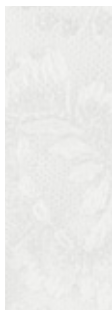
2014



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Devonport Show: Fashion's Fancies.

At Devonport's Annual Show. (by 'Onlooker')

After the winter months, with their somber garb, Dame Fashion welcomes the brightness and gaiety of spring and summer, which enable her to display her delight by the incongruities with which the feminine mind is so replete. Devonport's annual show carnival was the opportunity for La Vogue to appear in all her glory.

The Advocate

Thursday 9 November 1922, page 7

The year 1922 was no different to any other with 'La Vogue' a regular visitor to Devonport, regardless of the season. Balls and parades were an integral part of the city from very early on in its history, usually serving as fundraising events for the community. These gatherings were meticulously described in the local papers - from who wore what to how tables were decorated and who received a special mention during the evening's festivities. Organised for war veterans and servicemen, the hospital or fire department, Apple Harvest Day and various church charities, they were common

and popular. Philanthropy was a crucial part of the North-West region, but so was appearing in public and taking pride in your latest outfit.

As well as the philanthropic galas, there were debutante and dance balls, annual racing carnivals and sports events that gave ladies and their partners an opportunity to dress their best and show off their contribution to the latest trend, the latest mode. These events took place not just in Devonport but also in Ulverstone, Burnie, Latrobe and surrounding towns.

The Moon Family

The Moon family lived in this vibrant society. Originally from Fife in Scotland, George Moon arrived in Australia around 1880 and set up his business and household first in Don and later in Forth. George had four sons and three daughters, who continued living locallyⁱ. As a business family, the Moons were very active in the community and, after the death of George, the children continued their involvement with local and philanthropic eventsⁱⁱ.

The Moons had a personal collection of antiques which expanded after 1949 when George's sister, Annie, bequeathed her estate to his three daughters Annie (Nancy), Elsie and Christina (Tina). The sisters travelled to Scotland to take over Annie's possessions, with which they returned to Devonport. The dresses in the Devonport Regional Gallery Permanent Collection were acquired from the Moon family after the death of the three sisters. While it is impossible to unequivocally date the garments, or say who wore them – as dresses were generally passed down between generations and altered with each new wearer – their approximate historical context can be determined and tells us enough about the epoch in which they were worn.

Early Fashion in Australia

The history of fashion in Australia is an interesting mix of aesthetics, social factors and political statements. Since Europeans first arrived in Australia, what was perhaps a need for continuity with their previous life manifested itself through fashion. Whatever the new trend was in England or Paris – o'mutton sleeves or high bustles – the ladies in Sydney and Melbourne were only one ship

voyage from having the same. While the Parisian dames of the 1850s strolled down Champs Elysees in Charles Worth dresses, Sydney ladies strolled down George Street in the very same stylesⁱⁱⁱ.

Although largely dependent on European trends, Australian styles quickly emerged. The summer dress worn in London, where the average temperature for that season is 22 degrees, would hardly be suitable for a lady living in Brisbane where the average summer temperature is 30 degrees. The realities of farm life for many women also dictated the style of dress worn, as buying fabrics and having a dress made was of utmost luxury. Most women in the nineteenth century had two or three day dresses, two work dresses, two evening dresses and a wedding dress. To parade down Collins Street in Melbourne on a fine Saturday afternoon in a new dress communicated wealth and status, leisure and class.

Four of the earliest dresses from the Moon family collection date back to the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, and are fine specimens of the types of garments that ladies wore depending on the occasion. It is most likely that they came from Misses Moon's mother, Christina Henry, or their aunt Annie. The ball gown – embossed with sequins and pearls, and pleated on the inside with the finest cream silk – is the most elaborate and intricate garment in the collection. The 'day' and 'evening' dresses demonstrate the standard body type at the time, which was defined by an extremely narrow waist that accentuated the feminine S-shaped figure. Day and ball dresses tended to be colourful, while black dresses, like the one in the exhibition, were

reserved for what were often long periods of mourning. This dress was most likely worn by either George's wife Christina or his sister Annie after his death in 1904. These remarkable dresses denote the importance of the dress as costume for every occasion.

Devonport Fancies

In Devonport, social happenings and their promotion were of the utmost importance. If society ladies had guests visiting from other towns or the mainland, they would present them at a small function for friends, a gathering that would be covered by the local paper. Birthday parties would warrant a column or two, with the highlights noted as well as a list of the most important guests – the space would not permit, a common line reads, to note all the attendants. For the community at the time, the local paper served the role that social media serves today. The whole town would know that Miss Smith from Devonport was in Sheffield visiting her cousins for a week, or that Misses Moon took the boat to the mainland on Sunday. And just as importantly, the whole town would know that Miss Joy Read wore a brilliant red satin coat over a black frock.

The city's busy social calendar provided the ladies with opportunities to show off a new outfit, and they certainly did not go unnoticed. Papers had reporters – who called themselves 'The Onlooker', 'Pollyanna', 'La Donna', 'Grapho' and so on – attend events and report on outstanding dresses. These articles indicate the extent to which fashion was part of the social core. Significantly, the ladies of Devonport were not lagging behind the contemporaneous fashion of larger Australian cities. At most,

they might have been a few weeks behind, but certainly the fashion seasons were well observed and the finest garments displayed at the next big outing.

The light, netted summer dresses in the exhibition are intertwined with the city's social events of a bygone era, and come closer to the mode the local papers would have reported on in the first half of the twentieth century. Each one of them would have been worn for an annual event, for fundraising, debutante or Rotary Club balls, for a special celebration or a musical performance. Each one of them was cared for until the next opportunity. The costumes from the Moon collection attest to an active social life, to attention paid to the notions of beauty, elegance and vogue, as well as to the 'brightness and gaiety' that 'Dame Fashion' demanded. They allow us a glimpse into a society and history that was ruled as much by fashion as ours is today.

Dunja Rmandic Curator of Collections

- i. See Faye Gadram, *Sawdust, Sails and Sweat: a History of the River Don Settlement, North-West Coast, Tasmania*, F. Gadram, Port Sorell, 1996, pp. 340-341.
- ii. George Moon was John Henry's partner in the very successful Don River Trading Company, whose two-storey premises stood in Rooke Street.
- iii. Charles Frederick Worth was an English-born designer who started in Paris as a salesman and a dress maker, quickly becoming a defining force of the nineteenth century fashion in Europe. He redefined bodice cuts and skirt shapes and designed for both private clients, like the Princess of Austria, and the general market. George Street in Sydney and Collins Street in Melbourne were known as 'the Block' in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and ladies taking a stroll were said to be 'doing the block'. See Alexandra Joel, *Parade: The Story of Fashion in Australia*, Harper Collins Publishers, Sydney, 1998

Ladies' Ball Dress

J. M. Easson,
Dundee, Scotland, 1892-1901

Skirt and bodice

Machine and hand stitched
Japanese silk, lace, silk
organza, glass and metal
beading and sequins, plastic
pearls, diamantes, cotton
lining, boning, eye hooks

1975.051





Ladies' Ball Dress

Dundee, Scotland, 1892-1901

Bodice (detail)

1975.051



Ladies' Day Dress

Scotland/Australia, c. 1915

Hand stitched

Silk, stiffened cotton lining,
netting, lace, eye hooks,
plastic stiffeners

1975.052



Ladies' Day Dress
Scotland/Australia, c. 1915

Hand stitched

(Back)

1975.052



Ladies' Evening Dress

Scotland/Australia, 1840-1860

Hand stitched dress and collar (detail)

1975.050



Ladies' Evening Dress
Scotland/Australia, 1840-1860

*Hand stitched dress
and collar*

Moiré silk, trestles, lace,
boning, silk and cotton lining,
eye hooks

1975.050

Ladies' Ball Dress

Australia, 1930-1940

White satin, lace, netting, tulle,
plastic pearl buttons

1975.054





Ladies' Ball Dress

Australia, 1930-1940

White satin, lace, netting,
tulle, plastic pearl buttons
(side view and back detail)

1975.054

Ladies' Ball Dress

Australia, 1930-1940

Pink satin, lace, silk ribbon,
netting, press studs
(front view)

1975.062





Ladies' Ball Dress

Australia, 1930-1940

Pink satin, lace, silk ribbon,
netting, press studs
(back view)

1975.062

Ladies' Dress

Australia, 1930-1940

Blue satin, cotton netting,
velvet, metal and cotton
embroidery, zip

1975.053





Ladies' Dress

Australia, 1930-1940

(detail)

1975.053

Ladies' Ball Dress

Franke, Stuart,
Melbourne 1940-1950

Pink satin, netting, floral
pattern flocking, zip

1975.059





Ladies' Ball Dress

Franke, Stuart,
Melbourne 1940-1950

(detail)

1975.059

**Ladies' Summer
Waist Jacket**

Australia, 1900-1910

Silk, silk netting, glass beads

2014.009



Ladies' Bodice

Australia, 1900-1910

Silk, black lace,
white collar lace, cotton,
eye hooks, boning

2014.006



Ladies' Ball Dress

J. M. Easson, Dundee,
Scotland, 1892-1901

Skirt and bodice

Machine and hand stitched
Japanese silk, lace, silk
organza, glass and metal
beading and sequins, plastic
pearls, diamantes, cotton
lining, boning, eye hooks

1975.051

Ladies' Evening Dress

Scotland/Australia, 1840-1860

Hand stitched dress and collar

Moiré silk, trestles, lace,
boning, silk and cotton lining,
eye hooks

1975.050

Lace Stole

Scotland/Australia, 1840-1860

Lime green lace

1975.093

Ladies' Day Dress

Scotland/Australia, c. 1915

Hand stitched

Silk, stiffened cotton lining,
netting, lace, eye hooks,
plastic stiffeners

1975.052

Pair of Stockings

Australia/Scotland, 1880-1900

Grape coloured cotton
knit, hand-stitched, hand
embroidered flowers in yellow,
red, white and aqua

1975.045

Pair of Stockings

Australia/Scotland, 1840-1900

Cream silk, machine-made

1975.046

Ladies' Undershirt

Australia/Scotland, 1880-1900

Silk, cotton lace

2014.016

Ladies' Singlet Bodice

Australia/Scotland, 1880-1900

Silk, cotton, netting, velvet,
metal sequins, beads, metal
tokens

2014.014

Ladies' Bodice

Australia, 1900-1910

Hand stitched

Silk, black lace, white collar
lace, cotton, eyehooks, boning

2014.006

Ladies' Waist Jacket

Australia, 1900-1910

Hand stitched

Silk, tasseled cords, eyehooks,
boning

2014.007

Ladies' Summer Mourning Cape

Australia, 1900-1910

Hand stitched

Silk, lace, glass beads,
eyehooks

2014.008

Mourning Dress

Australia, 1900-1910

Stomacher and tails

Silk, lace, cotton, eyehooks,
boning

1975.066

Mourning Cape

Australia, 1900-1910

Felt, silk, embroidered
appliqué, cotton, beads,
hessian reinforcement

1975.092

Ladies' Summer Waist Jacket

Australia, 1900–1910

Silk, silk netting, glass beads

2014.009

Ladies' Summer Waist Jacket

Australia, 1900–1910

Silk, lace, cotton

2014.010

Ladies' Summer Mid-length Jacket

Australia, 1900–1910

Silk lace, silk collar ribbon,
tassels

2014.011

Ladies' Summer Mid- length Jacket

Australia, 1940–1950

Silk organza, clear and white
beads on horizontal ruffles

2014.012

Ladies' Full-length Blouse

Australia, 1940–1950

Silk, beads

2014.013

Ladies' Ball Dress

Australia, 1930–1940

White satin, lace, netting, tulle,
plastic pearl buttons

1975.054

Ladies' Dress

Australia, 1930–1940

Blue satin, cotton netting,
velvet, metal and cotton
embroidery, zip

1975.053

Ladies' Ball Dress

Franke, Stuart, Melbourne
1940–1950

Pink satin, netting, floral
pattern flocking, zip

1975.059

Ladies' Ball Dress

Australia, 1930–1940

White satin, cotton netting,
coloured glass diamantes

1975.055

Ladies' Ball Dress

Australia, 1930–1940

Pink satin, lace, silk ribbon,
netting, press studs

1975.062

Fabric Pieces

Australia, 1930–1940

Blue satin and netting

Historic part of Ladies' Ball
Dress, 1975.063

1975.065.1–2

Ladies' Ball Dress

Australia, 1930–1940

Amended

Blue satin, lace and netting

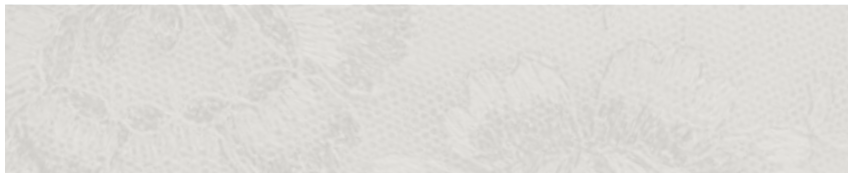
1975.063

Bolero

Australia, 1930–1940

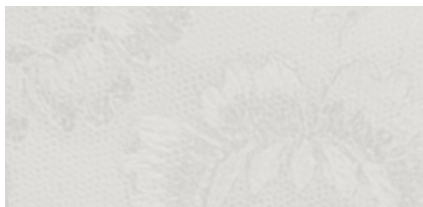
White satin

1975.064



Acknowledgements

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