

Reclaiming Norwegian Fashion Heritage: Cultural Expression in Arts and as a “Whole Way of Life”

Keywords: Fashion, design, culture, heritage

This proposed talk builds on an ongoing research project on Norwegian fashion histories, conducted in collaboration with the National Museum of Norway. It argues for reclaiming fashion as cultural expression beyond its dominant industrial framing—engaging both with fashion as “art and culture” and with culture as everyday lived experience. The presentation explores histories of Norwegian fashion through exhibitions and performances in art contexts, beginning with the 1952 fashion exhibition at Kunstneres Hus (Rasch 2007), and through vernacular fashion practices such as knitting, weaving, and home sewing.

Drawing on Raymond Williams’ notion of culture as “a whole way of life,” the talk challenges hierarchical distinctions between high and low culture. Norwegian fashion histories emerge not only through artistic display but also through domestic labor, regional traditions, and intergenerational knowledge. Reclaiming fashion as culture thus involves recognizing its dual dimensions: as aesthetic and artistic practice, and as embedded, lived heritage. This perspective foregrounds fashion’s capacity to unsettle boundaries and contribute to broader cultural narratives—making fashion not only a site of artistic expression, but a vital part of social foundations.

The format of presentation will be a 20 min talk with a rich visual material. The disciplinary field is difficult and interesting as fashion tends to fall in the gaps between design /visual arts and material culture.

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Synne Skjulstad holds a Ph.D. from the Dept. of Media and Communication at the University of Oslo. Her research is transdisciplinary, often combining academic and artistic methods. Working with photography and visual/material methods, she has developed projects such as *Seabling*. Currently she is interested in relational design in past and present horse cultures, integrating visual methods with scholarly inquiry. Currently, Skjulstad serves as project leader for the research project *Norwegian Fashion Histories* and previously led the project *Norwegian Fashion: Cultural Production and Aesthetic Mediatonal Practices*. She has published in journals including *Fashion Theory* and the *International Journal of Fashion Studies*.