

Engagement with Classical Archaeology and the Ethics of Contemporary Clothing Production

Exploring the Interface of Citizen Engagement Through Technologies at the London Bloomsbury Festival 2020

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Setting the scene

The Atelier Tammam Sustainable Couture Roving Fashion Show in London presented a catwalk of sustainable fashion, in October 2020. This was part of the Bloomsbury Festival, an annual showcase of culture in an area of central London. The Tammam show combined various aspects: sustainable fashion practice, engagement with heritage and the environment of London, the models wore face masks which were part of the collection, essential in the era of COVID. Online text written in anticipation of the event states the route was 'selected to pass some of Bloomsbury's iconic heritage sites' including 'the British Museum where ancient textiles and draped statues have all given influence to Tammam's couture practice' (OnlyTheBestEvents, 2020). The photograph Figure 1 documents the show outside the British Museum. Tammam promotes ethical practice and, through publicity at the time, invited interested people to follow the process of ethical clothes production through Instagram. People were encouraged to upload their photographs of the show. After the show, documentation was posted on social media, including the Tammam, and Bloomsbury Festival digital platforms. A short film documenting the models walk through the streets of London featured on the Bloomsbury Facebook channel (Bloomsbury Festival, 2020). This film featured use of technologies- cameras, mobiles etc. by models, and citizen participants/ observers. The event and related media showcased a colourful collection. A photograph of a model wearing a draped dress in grey silk outside the British Museum featured in a Tammam Instagram post. The caption described the garment: 'cool steel #peacesilk chiton', the 'fabulous silk skims the body like water' (houseoftammam, 2020), see the photograph Figure 2. A type of classical garment, Koda wrote that a chiton is a 'chemise-like shift ... Constructed of two rectangles of fabric ... seamed together' (Koda 2003, p. 219).



Fig. 1. Atelier Tammam Sustainable Couture Roving Fashion Show (2021) (© C. Frampton).

The Creative Process

In an interview after the event, Ms. Tammam said that the initial idea was for the show to take place in the British Museum, however this was dropped because of the lockdown. About the creative process of taking inspiration for the design of new garments from historical eras, she spoke about her influences including 1940s vintage; she developed her sustainable fashion practice through working with historical methods. She said that ‘the idea of Greek draped dresses... came from this idea of zero waste pattern cutting which obviously is... one way to be very sustainable’. She had learnt about the Greek chiton style and recognised this in classical sculpture. About the contemporary use of historical methods, she said that:

‘I think there’s a lot to be said for how clothing was made in the past, as opposed to very mass-produced fast fashion ... the way we try and make clothes is going backwards into the time when things were made for you as an individual... In terms of sustainability, it makes so much more sense in terms of supporting the crafts people who are making it ... I actually think it’s the future’ (Tammam, 2020).

About the relationship of her practice to a canon or history of fashion inspired by classical sculpture, Ms. Tammam said that ‘Fashion is cyclical, it goes round and round’, in the 1930s Greek style draped dresses were in style. The 2020 festival brochure included a photograph of a showcase of models posing on a staircase wearing white dresses with classical design influence (BLOOMSBURY FESTIVAL 2020, p. 15). It was from a Tammam roving couture fashion show 10 years ago, taken at

St. Pancras station, London. This referenced the Tammam archive and gave a taste of Tammam style (Tammam, 2020). About the 2010 show, its documentation and photographic archive, Ms. Tammam said that interaction through social media such as Twitter wasn't significant, photos were stored on a hard disc, at that time there wasn't an online archive (Tammam, 2020).



Fig. 2. Atelier Tammam Sustainable Couture Roving Fashion Show (2021) Bloomsbury Festival (© Stuart Keegan).

To quote recent related academia, an essay 'Material form and the dynamic archive' discusses ideas about historical archives of photographs, proposing to 'stop thinking of photographs and their archives simply as passive "resources"', rather 'as actively "resourceful" – a space of creative intensity, of ingenuity, of latent energy, of rich historical force' (Edwards 2019 p.528). With the reuse of an archival photograph to promote a recent show, and the encouragement of photography with social media, Tammam facilitated dynamic engagement with its' house archive, also with historic reference to classical influence on fashion, through digital technology.

Citizen engagement, part of the Bloomsbury Festival

About citizen engagement, Ms. Tammam said the annual Bloomsbury Festival is ‘very much about engaging the local community’. The encouragement of engagement with the show through technologies related to the development of understanding about Tammam and its locale; including QR codes and being able to link to the festival site (Tammam, 2020). A short retrospective film on the Bloomsbury Festival YouTube channel, *2020 Festival Snapshot*, featured a clip of the fashion show with the models walking past a red telephone box – a classic symbol of London. This allowed the viewer to appreciate the show within the context of the festival which included a range of art forms. Text at the end of the film states that the festival was successful despite the challenging times (Bloomsbury Festival, 2021). A page with information about the Festival Report on the festival website features statistics about records of participant engagement including digital engagement for the whole festival, for instance records of ‘11,106 Social media followers’ (Bloomsbury Festival, 2020).

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