

Critical Luxury Studies in the 21st Century

A Research Symposium

Winchester Luxury Research Group

Winchester School of Art
University of Southampton
11th July 2019
West Side Lecture Theatre

- 9.30 Coffee and Registration
- 10.00 Welcome and Introduction
Joanne Roberts
- 10.30 Luxury Brands, Contemporary Art, and Everyday Life
John Armitage
- 11.00 Luxury in the Airport: Travel Retail & Duty Free
Debbie Pinder
- 11.30 Discussion
- 12.00 Lunch Break
- 13.00 Fur as Forbidden Luxury in the 21st century: Sensation,
Subterfuge and Shame
Jonathan Faiers
- 13.30 Children and Luxury Consumption
Yasmin K. Sekhon Dhillon
- 14.00 Discussion
- 14.30 Coffee
- 15.00 Critical Luxury Studies: Whither Inequality?
Joanne Roberts
- 15.30 Discussion
- 16.00 Close

Abstracts

Luxury Brands, Contemporary Art, and Everyday Life

John Armitage

Today visual consumers live in an increasingly luxury brand inundated atmosphere. And luxury-branded visual representations produced by contemporary artists are all about them. Visual consumers see glossy magazine photographs of Jeff Koons, the American contemporary artist, collaborating with luxury BMW cars; they watch television reports wherein Yayoi Kusama, the Japanese contemporary artist, is revealed as also a designer of Louis Vuitton handbags; visual consumers view Chanel purse “unboxing” reveals on YouTube; and they witness internet and social media accounts of Damien Hirst, the Young British Artist (YBA), collaborating with luxury French glassmaker Lalique. What does this mean for visual consumers’ everyday lives? According to certain contemporary artists and critics, the transformations are huge. The boundaries between contemporary art and luxury-branded visual representations produced by contemporary artists are being breached, it is contended. Visual consumers live in a world of luxury-branded contemporary art; in a world where luxury-branded visual representations produced by contemporary artists appear more contemporary and creative than contemporary art itself.

I will discuss this issue earnestly, but I will maintain that the transformations are not that extensive. Visual consumers’ everyday life atmospheres are being transformed and they do fill an ever-increasing part of their existence with luxury-branded visual representations produced by contemporary artists. However, luxury-branded visual representations produced by contemporary artists are still understood in real, and, increasingly, virtual, local places and global spaces, visual consumers blend their comprehension of luxury-branded visual representations produced by contemporary artists with additional everyday life practices, and most visual consumers do still understand the difference between luxury-branded visual representations and contemporary art. In this presentation, I will consider how visual consumers appreciate luxury-branded visual representations produced by contemporary artists, and I will examine the diverse roles that luxury-branded visual representations produced by contemporary artists play in contemporary art. I will examine, also, how semiotics and luxury-branded visual representations produced by contemporary artists are blended in everyday life. Lastly, I will examine whether visual consumers live in a world of luxury-branded contemporary art.

Biographical note:

John Armitage is Professor of Media Arts at Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton, UK. He is author of *Luxury and Visual Culture* (Bloomsbury, 2019), and co-editor, with Joanne Roberts, of *The Third Realm of Luxury: Connecting Real Places and Imaginary Spaces* (Bloomsbury, 2019).

Luxury in the Airport: Travel Retail & Duty Free

Debbie Pinder

The world's first duty-free shop was established at Shannon Airport, Ireland, in 1947 (Pond, 2014). With rudimentary facilities and a limited range of products, it was designed to provide a basic service for Trans-Atlantic airline passengers travelling between Europe and North America. Today, duty free shops are present in almost all international airports. This presentation addresses a topic that has received little attention from scholars of luxury by investigating the development of luxury retailing in the airport from its origins through to the establishment of specialist duty free retailers like Duty-Free Shoppers (DFS) Group and World Duty Free Group (WDFG), and up to the present-day luxury brand stores located in major airports across the globe. The evolution of luxury retailing in the airport has followed the growth in air travel resulting from globalization, the privatization and deregulation of air transport and the rise of low-cost airlines. In 2018, there were approximately 1.3 billion global travellers (UNWTO 2018) who, through their engagement with travel retail, generated almost 50% of global luxury purchases (Deloitte 2017). Airport retailing serves a resilient global luxury market and it is an important source of sales for luxury brand companies (Global Blue, 2014). Moreover, global luxury brands have recognized the commercial significance and public relations value of being located in an international airport where they create a sophisticated sense of place using iconic design features, products, logos and iconography, building a luxury visual language that promotes their global brand identity. Currently, luxury goods are distributed in international airports through luxury brand stores and multi-brand duty free outlets. In this presentation I will discuss the evolution and the significance of airport luxury retail, along with the distinctive business models of distributing luxury Travel Retail and Duty-Free in the airport. Various airport concessionaire approaches will be discussed and consideration will be given to the future of luxury in the airport.

Biographical note:

Debbie Pinder is the Programme Leader and Senior Teaching Fellow for the MA Luxury Brand Management course at Winchester School of Art.

Debbie has extensive luxury brand experience, both in senior marketing positions within global luxury brands and also as a luxury brand consultant. Her corporate experience fuelled her desire to seek a more complex level of knowledge in luxury, and consequently her PhD has led her on a journey through the evolution and theories of luxury retail in aviation. Debbie's other areas of expertise include luxury branding, brand architecture strategy, luxury boutiques, consumer behaviour, digital luxury and the luxury supply chain.

Fur as Forbidden Luxury in the 21st century: Sensation, Subterfuge and Shame
Jonathan Faiers

This presentation will discuss some of the concepts and issues surrounding fur that I have been exploring whilst researching my forthcoming book *Fur: A Sensitive History* (Yale University Press 2020).

Fur, once the ultimate vestimentary signifier of social and economic status has now become literally unspeakable and is absent from nearly all studies of contemporary luxury consumption. However, as a luxury material it is unparalleled in terms of economic value, rarity, the specialised artisanal skills essential to its transformation into garments and other products and requires specialised knowledge and connoisseurship on the part of producer and consumer. Philosophically fur promises transformation, offers a supremely tactile experience in the increasingly immaterial world of luxury, and is imbued with an emotional, immersive intensity absent from our contemporary navigation through the world of things. Fur's power has meant that historically it has been the subject of concentrated legislation, both official and unofficial and although the days of sumptuary legislation have passed, fur remains uniquely proscribed and quarantined. Running parallel to its narratives of exploration, technological innovation, and desire, are voyages of colonialism, decimation and subterfuge. Because of these uncomfortable journeys, contemporary attitudes to fur mean that its economic, political, psychological and indeed, fashionable significance is largely forgotten. Fur's history and current status interrogates many of the assumptions promoted by today's luxury industry and its forbidden significance is sensationally relevant to the field of critical luxury studies.

Biographical note:

Jonathan Faiers is Professor of Fashion Thinking at Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton, UK. He is the founder and editor of the journal *Luxury: History Culture Consumption* (Taylor & Francis). His chapter 'Luxury and Design: Another Time Another Place' was included in the recently published *Companion to Contemporary Design Since 1945* (Wiley Blackwell 2019) and 2020 will see the publication of his monograph *Fur: A Sensitive History* (Yale University Press).

Children and Luxury Consumption

Yasmin K. Sekhon Dhillon

This talk will discuss possessions and well being from a young consumers' context, demonstrating how different factors influence children's luxury consumption and how consumption impacts identity, well being and happiness. This work stems from Dr Sekhon's area of expertise, namely consumer research. Initially the research was funded by the University of Southampton's Adventures in Research scheme. This study "Possessions and well-being, a study of young consumers across cultures" explored the role of possessions in children's lives, investigating the meaning and experience of luxury as well as the factors influencing decision-making. In addition, the study explored the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by children in making luxury consumption and brand choices as well as the role of peers in these choices and its impact on personal and social identity. The research was conducted by Dr Sekhon at Kings' School, Winchester, UK (1,657 students) and The British International School Istanbul, Turkey (200 students). There was a two-stage approach to the research with visual collages developed by children and then focus groups undertaken. The findings of the research revealed how attitudes towards consumption, luxury brands and the media environment influence identity, happiness and well being amongst children. Yasmin continues to work with local and international schools in contributing to PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) sessions on her research.

Biographical note:

Dr Yasmin Sekhon is an Associate Professor in Luxury Marketing at the University of Southampton (WSA), United Kingdom. She is co-director of the Winchester Luxury Research Group. She gained her doctorate at the University of Birmingham investigating consumption choices in a cross-cultural context. A key area of Yasmin's research focuses on children, luxury consumption and identity. Yasmin explores the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by children in making luxury consumption and brand choices as well as investigating the consumption journey of children. Yasmin continues to publish in a number of academic journals from *Luxury: History, Culture, Consumption to Consumption, Markets and Culture Journal*. She is also on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Market Research*. Yasmin enjoys researching luxury brand consumption, children and luxury, materialism as well as cross-cultural luxury consumption. She has given invited talks at a number of universities nationally and internationally, as well as presented her research at international conferences.

Critical Luxury Studies: Whither Inequality?

Joanne Roberts

The production and consumption of luxury has been recognized as a stimulus for economic growth since the 18th century. Today, luxury is a major international business that serves a €1.2 trillion global market (D'Arpizio, et al. 2017:5) and contributes to welfare through the employment of hundreds of thousands of individuals across the world. Yet, the consumption of luxury is also associated with inequality; indeed, it is dependent on inequality for if luxury was available to all it would lose its allure. The consumption of luxury has always been a means of signalling difference, most commonly in terms of position in social hierarchies. This presentation adopts a critical luxury studies approach (Armitage and Roberts, 2016) to explore the relationship between the expanding demand for luxury and the growth of inequality of income since the late 20th century. It is argued that the widespread adoption of neo-liberal policies since the late 1970s, which have bolstered the numbers of the super-rich to the detriment of the middle classes and the poor, is responsible for the rise in demand for luxury goods and services. Nevertheless, catering to the demands of the super-rich can produce positive impacts for society through promoting economic growth, innovation, cultural enrichment, improved quality of the built environment and environmentally sustainable business practices. However, the dangers of growing income and wealth inequality, on which the expanding demand for luxury depends, raises the risk of greater social fragmentation and challenges to democratic governance. Hence, this presentation argues for a need to balance the benefits of luxury production and consumption against its costs and, in particular, the consequences of growing inequality. Luxury consumers and producers together with policy makers need to recognize the social costs and political dangers of the continued neglect of the super-poor in national and international contexts.

Biographical note:

Joanne Roberts is Professor of Arts and Cultural Management and Director of the Winchester Luxury Research Group at Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton, UK. She is co-editor, with John Armitage, of *The Third Realm of Luxury: Connecting Real Places and Imaginary Spaces* (Bloomsbury, 2019) and *Critical Luxury Studies: Art, Design, Media* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016).