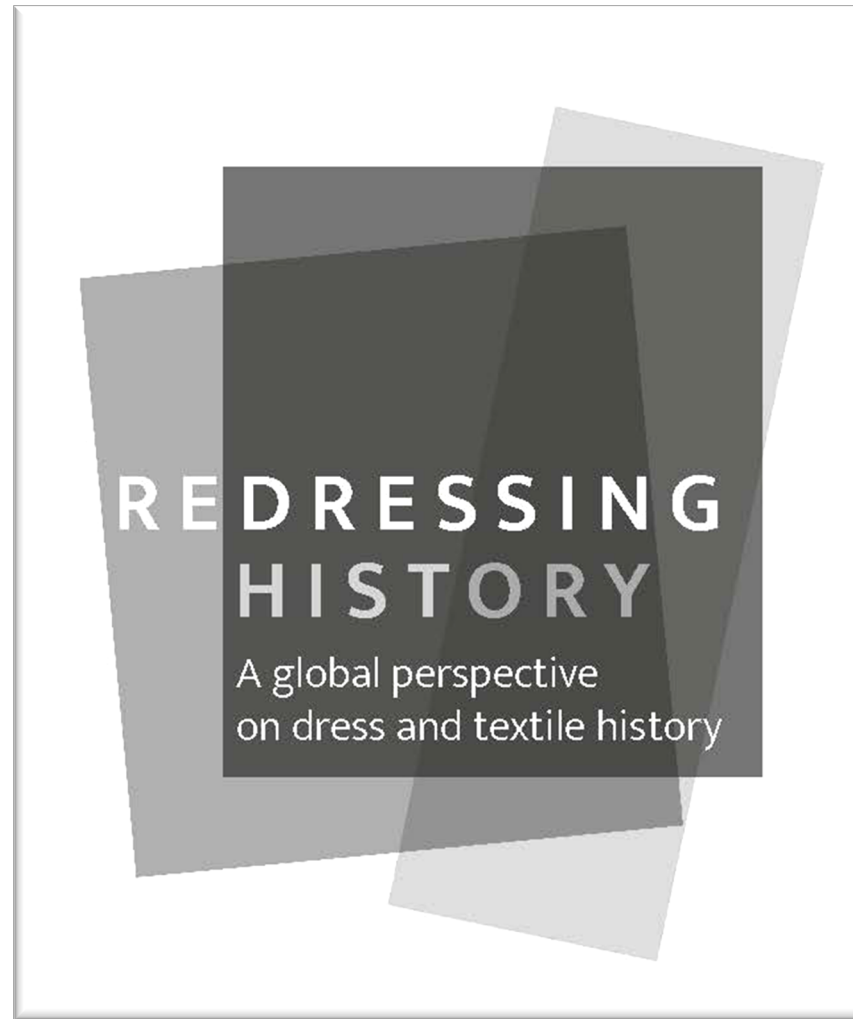


## If dress histories were actually global - would they look different?

Redressing histories podcast series seeks to foreground the work of African diaspora researchers whose work and histories are currently underrepresented and often overlooked in publications, academia, museums, and the media.



This visual essay accompanies the interview with Dr Christine Checinska, Curator of African and African Diaspora Fashion at the Victoria and Albert Museum by Techne funded, University of Brighton PhD student Kate Debono. It focuses on the Curatorial role and draws on Christine's current work on the July 2022 Africa Fashion Exhibition.



Image of Dr Christine Checinska. Lauren Fleishman for The New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/29/style/museums-fashion-racism.html>

*My role is in part about reanimating the holdings that we do have but then also collecting the contemporary and looking for new objects, new acquisitions that will tell a boarder story about a **broader we**\* that incorporates everyone and doesn't leave certain cultures out.*

Dr Christine Checinska

\*all **bold** font used in this visual essay has been added by Kate Debono to give emphasis

*In the small group of high-culture institutions that venerate the art of fashion, Black designers have been largely overlooked.*

Vanessa Friedman, New York Times, September 2020

I first became aware of Christine Checinska's role at the V&A when I read the article, *The Incredible Whiteness of the Museum Fashion Collection* by Vanessa Friedman in the New York Times September 2020. This article has influenced the direction of my PhD research.

Christine was my first choice of curator to interview for the Redressing Histories podcast series not only because of her role at the V&A but also because her successful careers as a fashion designer and in academia give her a unique perspective on the intersection between fashion, creativity, research, identity and the curatorial role.

Kate Debono



Image (Detail) Haywood Magee. A crowd of 700 West Indian immigrants in the customs hall at Southampton. 1956. Image courtesy of Getty Images. Used to promote *The Arrivants* one of Christine's projects.

<http://fadagallery.blogspot.com/2016/07/the-front-room-inna-joburg-arrivants.html>





*Museum collections are not just about objects but the stories around them*  
Dr Christine Checinska

Adire eleko cloth in the Ibadan dun pattern, indigo resist-dyed cotton, Ibadan, Nigeria, 1960s. Museum no. Circ.588-1965. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London - <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/adire-tied-and-dyed-indigo-textiles>

Some stories about objects associated with the Africa Fashion exhibition and the stories around research into them can be found on the V&A blog. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/projects/researching-africa-fashion-henry-samridi-and-tosin>



*How do we want to represent ourselves?  
What terminology would we use to  
describe an Iro for example? We  
wouldn't say "wrapper" we would say  
"Iro". It's really being mindful, of going  
back to the source.*

Dr Christine Checinska

Image of Luluyetha Howell's Great grandmother wearing Aso-Oke and Dupion lace to celebrate birth of her grand-daughter, 2 April 1960 from the blog post by Luluyetha Howell: *Africa Fashion: Aso-Ebi* April 8, 2021

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/museum-life/africa-fashion-aso-ebi>





Image showing contemporary production of Adire cloth

<https://guardian.ng/life/culture-lifestyle/a-short-history-of-adire/>

You can find out more about Adire cloth at:

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/adire-tied-and-dyed-indigo-textiles>

*I think with contemporary museum practice there is this acknowledgement that expertise comes in many different forms.*

Dr Christine Checinska

Christine acknowledges the expertise of designers, makers and wearers of clothes along with other more “traditionally” recognised views of expertise gained through scholarship and employment experience



*Centring Africa... you automatically start to challenge terminology, you automatically start to push against boundaries and boxes and you automatically begin to inhabit this world of a **broader we** if you like.*

Dr Christine Checinska

'Indigo' Couture, by Kofi Ansah, models: Narh & Linda, 1997, Accra, Ghana.  
Photograph © Eric Don-Arthur

<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2021/jul/07/va-exhibition-will-use-250-objects-to-highlight-creativity-of-african-fashion>





*I think things are definitely moving in the right direction. **Yes, there is more to do.** But I think that now there is an openness to these kinds of research projects and I think that people have to approach them in a creative way, because **these stories, these histories, these narratives have been missing, they have been hidden.***

Dr Christine Checinska

Untitled by Hamidou Maiga, 1973. Museum no. E.305-2012. Gift of Jack Bell Gallery, London. Copyright of the artist, courtesy of Jack Bell Gallery.

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/news/va-africa-fashion-call-out>



## **Referenced in the podcast:**

Friedman, Vanessa, Incredible Whiteness of Museum Fashion Collection

⇒ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/29/style/museums-fashion-racism.html>

Fashion and Race database

⇒ <https://fashionandrace.org>

Can the Museum be decolonized? Stuart Hall Foundation 7<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

⇒ <https://www.stuarthallfoundation.org/resource/can-the-museum-be-decolonised/>

Circulation Department at the V&A

⇒ <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/research-journal/issue-no.-4-summer-2012/room-38a-and-beyond-post-war-british-design-and-the-circulation-department/>

V&A Terminology Group – work to tackle racist language in collections documentation and labels

⇒ <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/blog/tackling-racist-language-in-collections>

## **Links to images used here and related to the Africa Fashion exhibition:**

⇒ <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/news/va-africa-fashion-call-out>

⇒ <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2021/jul/07/va-exhibition-will-use-250-objects-to-highlight-creativity-of-african-fashion>

⇒ <https://guardian.ng/life/culture-lifestyle/a-short-history-of-adire/>

⇒ <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/adire-tied-and-dyed-indigo-textiles>

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⇒ <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/projects/researching-africa-fashion-henry-samridi-and-tosin>

⇒ <http://fadagallery.blogspot.com/2016/07/the-front-room-inna-joburg-arrivants.html>

## **Selected links for Dr Christine Checinska:**

- ⇒ <https://iniva.org/library/digital-archive/people/c/checinska-christine/>
- ⇒ <https://www.shadesofnoir.org.uk/creatives/portfolio/dr-christine-checinska/>
- ⇒ <https://haute-fashion-africa.com/whos-haute-interview-with-vas-dr-christine-checinska/>
- ⇒ <https://2020.rca.ac.uk/collections/being-in-nature-when-me-becomes-we>

## **Selected publications by Dr Christine Checinska:**

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- Checinska, Christine, Reconfiguring Diasporic Identities, *Beyond Borders*, John Hutnyk (ed.), Pavement Books, 2012.



## **Further Reading:** Fashion as a Global phenomenon, Fashion History, Collecting Fashion, Curating Fashion

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- de la Haye, Amy. "A Critical Analysis of Practices of Collecting Fashionable Dress." *Fashion Theory* 22.4-5 (2018): 381-403. Print.
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- Taylor, Lou, *The Study of Dress History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002. Print.
- Welters, Linda, and Abby Lillethun. *Fashion History: A Global View*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Print.
- Wilcox, Claire. ""Who Gives a Frock?" Valerie D. Mendes, Jean Muir and the Building of the National Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum." *Fashion Theory: Collectors, Practices of Collecting and Collections* 22.4-5 (2018): 435-55. Print.

The logo graphic consists of three overlapping squares in shades of gray. The central square is the darkest and contains the text 'REDRESSING HISTORY' in white, with 'A global perspective on dress and textile history' in a smaller font below it. The other two squares are lighter and partially obscured by the central one.

# REDRESSING HISTORY

A global perspective  
on dress and textile history

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