

Upcycling Kashmir and Paisley

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Apparel Design

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Kashmir and Paisley shawls feature prominently in the history of dress, international trade, and cultural appropriation throughout the 19th century, but fell out of fashion in the 1870s. Little is known about their ongoing use to create various refashioned garments. While refashioning of garments was common practice throughout history, researching refashioned garments is challenging because skilled seamstresses leave minimal evidence of transformation. Garments made from shawls are unique because the original form is known. As with all upcycling projects, making a new garment from an old shawl rather than new fabric involves weighing economic, environmental, and aesthetic factors. This material culture study investigates garments made from Kashmir and Paisley shawls between 1865 and the present day to determine how historic makers considered these factors in creating contemporary garments. Following the object-based “observe, reflect, interpret” method originated by Mida and Kim, each garment is analyzed regarding construction methods, linings and embellishments. The shawl garments are compared to similar contemporary garments to determine how they incorporate desirable elements for fashion. Knowledge of historic practices can inform current methods of upcycling to make fashion more sustainable.



Image 1: Coat, c. 1923-1925, Goldstein Museum of Design 1966.005.006.



Image 2: Jacket, c. 1925, Goldstein Museum of Design 1981.003.004.



Image 3: Tea Gown, c. 1891, Metropolitan Museum of Art 1985.39.3.



Image 4: Suit by Cifonelli, c. 1960, Museum at FIT 90.149.32.