

ICOM Solidarity Project 2021

CLOTHING THE PANDEMIC:

**Resiliency, Community & Unity Expressed Through an International Collaboration of the
Covid-19 Facemask Project**



Hidden Liotard IV (after Portrait of Joachim Rendorp by Jean-Etienne Liotard, 1757, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam), Photocollage by Volker Hermes, 2020©www.volkerhermes.de @volker.hermes

This research and digital exhibition project aims to document and contextualize the use of facemasks during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020-21. Facemasks have become the iconic object and symbol of the pandemic representing humanity's resilience, community and unity during this global tragedy. The project will connect international museums and curators working on this topic, and connect their collections virtually to a global public.

The stories of COVID-19 will be recorded in all the world's history books. In a similar way, this project intends to preserve and explore the iconic object of this challenging pandemic since its very beginnings: the facemask. These facemasks are implicated in a wide range of facets of society, from health, fashion, and art, to politics, identity, and sustainability. It is important for museums and the public to have a broader understanding of textile and dress collecting relating to the pandemic.

Parallel to health scientists, museum curators have been researching and working throughout the pandemic to study, understand and document the social dimensions of the pandemic. Around the world, many museums since

April 2020 have begun to collect facemasks and other dress items chronicling this period of time and exploring their meanings for the people who make and wear them.

The Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (Canada) is forming a mask collection sourced from around the world: the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Africa. The MUCEM, Marseille (France) put out a call for donations for objects related to the pandemic that brought over 600 proposals. Together, these masks speak to many medical, artistic, and social responses, such as the livelihoods of craftspeople, artists' responses to personal and societal challenges, as well as other global events of 2020, including the Black Lives Matter campaign. In other museums worldwide, Dress and Fashion departments have started to collect facemasks from fashion designers and local craftspeople and artisans. The curator of the Menswear Archive (UK) is documenting the British menswear response to the coronavirus and how the industry has turned to producing facemasks. All these varied initiatives and many more need to be recorded around the globe and brought together as a memory of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ICOM Costume Committee is spearheading this initiative and seeks to highlight and bring together these varied international efforts to document this moment in time through a joint virtual repository as a virtual exhibition and an international conference.

The aim of this project is to connect people and institutions (international curators and conservators, historians, museums, and the global public) at a time when we are all physically distant from one another, and many museums are closed. The project aims to make museums places of inspiration that embrace current events, and to make them more democratic and accessible by giving free access to collections to a much larger pool of visitors. The digital era brings us new and exciting opportunities, and this project will help to foster collaboration and research among museum professionals and to propose practical tools, solutions, and a set of resources to assist others to make collections of their own. This aim is realized by bringing together the following international and national ICOM committees to create a virtual exhibition of all aspects of the art, practice and culture of facemasks during the COVID-19 pandemic: ICOM Costume, ICME, ICOM CC, and National Committee ICOM Canada.

There will be three main project outcomes:

1. Workshop on "Documenting the Material Culture of the Pandemic: Strategies and Challenges". The workshop will be conducted by the Costume Committee in collaboration with the international committee ICME and the two coordinators of ICOM CC working groups "Textiles" and "Modern Material".

A Free Online Workshop co-organized with ICOM ICME, ICOM CC: a forum of expert panelists that will 1) discuss museum strategies and challenges in collecting, displaying and conserving data and material culture to document the COVID-19 pandemic, and 2) present the research project to date.

2. A Collaborative Virtual Exhibition of COVID-19 facemasks collected by the Royal Ontario Museum (Canada); the MUCEM (France); National Museums Scotland (UK); Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (New Zealand); The Menswear Archive, University Museum of Westminster (UK); Modemuseum in Antwerp, and Central Museum Utrecht (The Netherlands), and The Budapest History Museum (Hungary), The Rose and Textiles Fashion Archives at Shenkar (Israel) and the Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, BC (Canada). To this end, ICOM Costume will work in close collaboration with ICOM Canada.

3. An Online Conference to present the work and results of the project. This will result in an online publication of the summary of conference papers and a set of online resources to assist others to make collections of their own and to provide pedagogical resources for educators in order to discuss the pandemic through these international collections. Working closely with Costume, ICOM Canada, ICOM CC and ICME will be involved in presenting and publishing the results and providing access to the main audience.

Please let the International Committee Costume know about 'Covid-19 working group' in your museum and/or your 'Pandemic collect': corinne.thepaut-cabasset@chateauversailles.fr