
Children's clothing collections, problems and perspectives

A case study of French and British Museums

Les collections de vêtements d'enfant, problèmes et perspectives. Une étude de cas de musées français et britanniques

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- 1 In November 2022, the Museums Association, the most established and influential network of museum practitioners in Great-Britain, based their annual conference¹ on the radical actions of museums with regard to diversity and inclusion, leading to debates on making collections more accessible to diverse sections of the population: ethnic and religious minority groups, persons with disabilities, and LGBT+ people. In this same conference, where forward thinking reflections on cultural heritage and identity were discussed, the major absence from the discussions was children: more than thirty years after the United Nations demonstrated the importance of including children in our society and invited its members to acknowledge this by endorsing the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), children's material culture and cultural participation is overlooked by museums which claim inclusivity. This contrasts with current research in childhood studies which emphasises the role of children as citizens²; this conflicts with children's education, which, in the Global North, prioritises a child centred approach to learning. Despite the importance given to children's voice in the current debates on societal and environmental challenges³, their agency in the design and *patrimonialisation*⁴ of their material culture seems to be ignored by the museums sector. While this context might be expected to affect museums' approaches to collecting and interpreting the heritage of childhood, children's clothing and fashion is further marginalised within this area of research.
- 2 Within European children's clothing history, sparse but insightful publications mostly by French and British museum curators and dress historians play a specific role in unveiling this marginal topic in fashion studies. Therefore, this paper will focus particularly on the history of children's fashion collections on both sides of the

Channel. It will draw on the authors' careers in French and British fashion museums, and their longstanding expertise in the collection and study of children's clothing⁵. Based on case studies of the most significant (though still limited) children's clothing collections in these two countries, this paper will question the lack of interest in the history of children's clothing and its effects on our understanding of children in society. Exploring current museum and heritage strategies on the collection of children's clothing, and measuring the potential changes in the approach to this topic in museums, the authors will consider the benefits of a more inclusive and participative approach to children's culture. To evaluate the extent of these reflections, case studies of the collecting policies for children's clothes of the Victoria & Albert Museum, the National Trust (England) and the musée de la Mode et du Textile in Cholet (France) were carried out. The selection of these museums was made based on their role in pioneering collections specialising in children's clothing and revealing children's material cultures as opposed to fashion museums where children's clothing is not subject to strategic collection⁶. This investigation was done through written and oral interviews with curators, and, where available, through the examination of institutional collecting policies. The outcomes of this field work provided insights into the contribution of historic clothing to debates on the role of children in society.

Historiography of French and British children's clothing heritage: sparse knowledge and marginal interest

Children's clothes collections in British Museums: the pioneering delineation of a research topic

- 3 Studies of children's clothes in Britain emerged from the analysis of collections of surviving garments; in 1953, the earliest publication on children's fashion history was the work of a private collector who staged "fashion parades" with historic adults' and children's garments⁷. Subsequent studies from the 1960s to the early 2000s were authored by current or former museum curators and based on research in museum collections⁸. This close attention to object-based research led to a focus on the haptic properties of children's garments, and to an engagement with personal narratives of the wearers. This personal angle was reinforced by the development from the 1980s onwards of a popular interest in family and "peoples' history". At this time, oral transmission and autobiography initiatives, were prioritised, as well as improved public access to resources such as the National Census, and television programmes and magazines⁹. One indicator of the level of interest in the history of childhood was the reworking of a 1991 academic text by Hugh Cunningham into a series of broadcasts for national radio with an accompanying book (2006)¹⁰. The material culture of childhood has also proved a potent visitor attraction, with specialist museums run by the Victoria and Albert Museum (London) and the National Trust (Sudbury) as well as the Museum of Childhood (Edinburgh) and the Highland Museum of Childhood (Strathpeffer)¹¹. The problem underlying this apparently healthy interest is the disjunction in social levels between the two strands: the appeal of family histories rests on their claim to uncover the experiences of the poor majority, while most museum collections are dominated by the aesthetically striking possessions of the wealthy elite. This approach also sidesteps

crucial questions of definition: not only the definition of childhood as a state but also the ways in which childhood is socially constructed.

- 4 An overview of some of the major museum collections of children's clothing throughout Britain was carried out by Clare Rose during 1987-1988, and a more focussed study of boys' dress dated c.1840-1900 was conducted as part of her PhD in 1999-2000¹². These studies revealed some striking gaps in British collections: not only were most items from socially elite families, they were also items worn for special occasions such as weddings. The garments worn by the majority of the population in their everyday life were not represented.

Children's clothes collections in French Fashion Museums: following British pioneers

- 5 A similar state could be expressed for the development of children's clothing collections in France – which has been studied by Aude Le Guennec in her PhD on the educational and socialising role of children's clothing from the 19th century onwards (2016)¹³ – with the added comment that the interest of the museum community in this topic was inspired and shaped by the pioneering research on children's fashion history in Great-Britain¹⁴. This was also influenced by the role played by the historian Philippe Ariès in establishing a French approach to childhood history and his effort to partner with British social historians in the late 1960s. Indeed, in 1969, he was invited by the *Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Culture* to present his analysis of the emergence of the concept of childhood based on the study of children's clothing and their representation in sculpture, painting and funeral arts. Ariès' research, based mostly on rare examples of Royal children's garments, demonstrated the role of dress codes in acknowledging the position of the child in the context of the upper classes of European 18th century society¹⁵. Therefore, this first attempt to include clothing as a source for the understanding of past childhood was limited by the constraints of the representation of the child in a well delineated social group. This led to the idea that childhood could only be acknowledged socially when children were represented in art, and their identification reinforced thanks to the assignment of a specific dress code. As this was only apparent towards the middle of the 18th century, it was seen as evidence of a late recognition of young people as part of society. However, this conclusion overlooked the subtle clothing distinctions between children and adults existing through history although not always apparent in the dress codes described through the images or texts.
- 6 Ten years later, in 1979, Madeleine Delpierre, curator of the well-established musée de la Mode et du Costume de la Ville de Paris¹⁶, presented an exhibition on the history of upper-class children's fashion which was an attempt, after a small event in 1958, to establish the importance of children's clothing collections in fashion history¹⁷. However, children's fashion remained a rather marginal topic in the fashion museums of the time. The lack of interest was reflected in the organisational structure of the most established Parisian fashion museums¹⁸ with an absence of curators specialising in children's clothing¹⁹. This *état de fait* has persisted until today, as well as the lack of a strategic and systematic collecting policy for children's garments. It was not until 2001 that another exhibition, this time supported by a publication reflecting the highlights as well as the gaps in the collections, was presented again at the Galliera Museum by

Catherine Join-Diéterle and Françoise Tétart-Vittu²⁰. Still, these exhibitions and related publications were strongly influenced both by the British pioneering approach to children's clothing, and by the definition of childhood and delineation of children's dress code in the grounding work of Ariès. Perpetuating pre-conceived ideas regarding the role of clothing in French childhood, this research overlooked dress codes as revealing social discrepancies and establishing the position of children in society as well as the functional and design specificities of children's clothes. Furthermore, the gaps in collections gathered through donations from bourgeois families, given and documented by adults, resulted in a partial knowledge of a topic considered as anecdotal in fashion history.

Children's clothing in fashion museums: case studies

- 7 Museum collections and displays of children's clothing operate within practical constraints that are common to all institutions. One is the expense of creating bespoke display mannequins modelled on historic body shapes. The lack of research on children's morphology through history sometimes leads to inaccurate presentations and interpretation of the objects. There is also the prohibition on physical interactions with the historic exhibits (unless reproduction items have been made) which can affect the ability of visitors in general and young people in particular to learn through their senses. For all visitors, but especially for children, the lack of physical manipulation (children's preferred approach to learning)²¹ creates a barrier to understanding of objects used in the past. Institutions have proposed different ways of overcoming these limitations.

British case studies: the Victoria and Albert Museum and The National Trust

- 8 The Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) – directly funded by the British government since 1852 – holds the national collection of Decorative Arts dating from the end of the Roman Empire to the present. Its main site in South Kensington, London, has displays and curatorial departments organised both by materials (Furniture, Ceramics, Textiles, etc.) and by cultures (Islamic World, Japan, Indian Subcontinent). The V&A established a secondary site in Bethnal Green, a working-class area of London, in 1868; in 1974 this was transformed into a specialist Museum of Childhood (V&A MoC), with specialist curators, collections storage, and support staff²². This has proved extremely popular with visitors, both individuals and groups of school children for whom there is a specialist booking system. In 2020 the MoC closed for extensive work on the building and galleries and reopened in 2023 as “Young V&A” (YV&A). During this period the childhood collections were not on display, with the exception of one or two items included in thematic displays at the main V&A site. The Museum of Childhood's clothing collections were featured briefly in an illustrated visitor guide in 1987. A selection of items were discussed in more detail in a book by the curator, and much of the collection is included in the V&A's publicly accessible online database²³.

The National Trust

- 9 The National Trust, founded in 1896, is an organisation which receives funding from its members, and from the British government, both directly (to support the conservation of historic buildings and landscapes) and indirectly (in tax relief from legacies). During 2021-22 it had 5.7 million members and received 20 million paid visits. It has a collection of over two hundred houses which are presented not as museums but as preserved interiors, often using furnishings and clothing associated with the original owners²⁴. Following its controversial *Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery* (2020) the National Trust has launched initiatives to encourage visits from members of ethnic minorities, and children and young people²⁵.
- 10 One National Trust property, Killerton House near Exeter, has been used since the late 1970s for the display of a private collection of historic children's clothes, supplemented by other donated garments²⁶. Since 1974, there has also been a Museum of Childhood at the National Trust property Sudbury Hall, Norfolk, originally established in partnership with the county authority. This has recently been redesigned to "celebrate the escapades and challenges of childhood across the centuries", using clothing, toys and other items of material culture from across the National Trust's collections²⁷. A property acquired in 1990, Mr Straw's House, came with a complete archive of papers and garments (including children's clothes) used by a family of small-town shopkeepers²⁸. Responsibility for children's clothing is shared between the curators for individual sites (notably Sudbury Hall and Mr Straw's House) and the curator of costume collections for the entire National Trust, making it hard to maintain consistent collecting policies. Selected items of children's clothing from the Trust's collections have been published, and more are included in their online database²⁹.
- 11 The interview with National Trust curators was conducted via email. The respondents included the curator responsible for Costume (clothing) for the whole of the Trust and the curator with responsibility for the site of Sudbury Hall.
- 12 Answering a series of questions on the constitution of the children's clothing collections, the National Trust confirmed that the main collection of garments was held at Killerton House, Devon: these had come from two private collectors in the late 1970s – early 1980s and had no connection with the house. The collections had been built up on the basis of the aesthetic interest of the items, and were described by the curator as: " 'best' and party dresses, fancy dress, page-boy, bridesmaid and confirmation dress. It's mainly middle to upper-class clothing, but we do also have some Quaker dress and the dress of children workers³⁰".
- 13 A very different approach can be seen at another Trust property, Mr Straw's House, a modest suburban villa in Worksop, Nottinghamshire. The Straw family archive includes a number of early 20th century garments that do not normally survive in museums such as mass-produced boys' underwear and machine-knitted wool sweaters showing signs of wear and repair [fig. 1]. These everyday items from the past are now rarer, and more important to researchers, than the 'party dresses' that fill museum stores. There are also numerous newspapers, photographs and other documents, making it possible to investigate how and where the Straw family purchased these garments, and how and when they were worn³¹. At Sudbury Hall the historic children's garments have been kept as a closed collection with no further acquisitions, but have informed the

interactive Children's Country House gallery which includes reproduction clothes for visitors to try on³².

Figure 1



A boy's jumper in machine-knitted wool, Britain, c1910. Probably worn by either William Straw (born 1898) or Walter Straw (born 1899). Preserved at Mr Straw's House, Worksop, Nottinghamshire, England (object number 748608).

© John William Brown / National Trust.

- 14 The current collecting policy document for the Trust sets out four criteria for acquiring items, the first three being that the objects are associated with or depict a specific Trust site or its residents; failing that, the items should be “in sympathy with the spirit of place of a property³³”. This clarifies the discrepancy in approach between Killerton and Mr Straw's House; it also suggests that any future acquisitions will be directed by local rather than national criteria.

Victoria and Albert Museum

- 15 The interview by the authors with Katy Canales, Victoria and Albert Museum's curator for children's clothes, was carried out on video in September 2022, with responses recorded for accuracy³⁴. This was accompanied by an exchange of documents which clarified changes in V&A collecting policies, and in V&A Museum of Childhood (MoC) application of these, between 2001 and 2019. A document from 2001 set out clearly the tension between the museum and its parent organization: “The museum's role in the field of childhood, although now established both historically and by reputation, can cause an awkward, although not impossible, “fit” within the V&A's collecting criteria of Aesthetic, Technical, Historical and Documentary”³⁵. This document also identified one of the strengths of the childhood collections as its representation of the everyday

rather than the exceptional, and its close connection with the stories of individuals. This reflects the origins of these collections in offers from private donors who have preserved items that they think are important (as is the norm in most British museums). The 2002 collecting plan presented a step away from the previous policy of accepting donations from individuals to a focus on deliberate acquisition of innovative examples of contemporary design for children³⁶ [fig. 2]. However, the 2010 Collecting Policy reiterated that “collecting priorities will be focused on social history, visual arts” alongside contemporary collecting³⁷. In 2019 the V&A MoC was preparing for a major redevelopment and rebranding as YV&A, and the revised collecting policy reflected this with a distinct shift in emphasis:

We will continue to collect in certain of our traditional areas, prioritising 20th and 21st century human-centered design which is locally and globally relevant... The children's clothing collection will continue to be developed, but the priority for it will be to improve its quality in late-20th century and early-21st century examples which strongly demonstrate considerations to the child-user, and/or through innovative use of materials³⁸.

- 16 There is also a stated aim to collect material highlighting the practices of child designers.

Figure 2



A girl's "disposable" dress and headscarf made from non-woven, non-washable cellulose sheet with screen-printed pattern, "Dispo Kid" (Meyersohn & Silverstein Ltd), London, 1967. Some large retailers refused to stock these garments because they were dangerously inflammable. Designed by Diane Meyersohn; presented to the V&A by the designer, preserved at the Young V&A (object number MISC. 23&A-1988).

© Unknown photographer / Victoria & Albert Museum.

- 17 The interview with the YV&A curator confirmed that the emphasis has now shifted to children's engagement with design practices rather than with objects, and that any

items collected would have to reflect this. Historic garments were envisaged as a source of design inspiration rather than of intrinsic interest.

The musée de la Mode et du Textile, Cholet (France): a singular attempt to create a children's clothing collection in French museums

- 18 Interviewed by the authors in September 2022, Dominique Zarini, collection manager of the town Museums and exhibition curator at the musée de la Mode et du Textile in Cholet (France) since 2010, provided further insight into the constitution and the development of a fairly recent collection of children's clothes dated from the beginning of the 19th century onwards. Opened in 1995, this council-funded museum originally aimed at collecting the past of this area of 19th century textile industry. After the industry crisis of the 1980s, the region of Cholet specialized in children's ready-to-wear and became the cradle of global childrenswear brands. To reflect this evolution and to connect with the industry and higher education specializing in this sector, as well as to rejuvenate a museum which experienced a disconnect from local communities' development, and suffered from a lacked tourism appeal, the institution opened its collections to children's fashion past and present. The developing collections, and the active program of exhibitions, learning and publications, positioned the museum as the only French one specializing in children's fashion.
- 19 To illustrate the history of childrenswear in the region, the museum has prioritized acquisitions from the local fashion industry from the 1960s onwards. This consists mostly of prototypes created by reputable local brands such as Catimini³⁹, illustrating the creativity of contemporary children's fashion. Acquisitions from well-established fashion designers, for example Jean-Pierre Bretaudeau, creator of the cutting-edge label Trotinette⁴⁰, add to this collection.
- 20 This particular approach to fashion from the lens of retailers and creators is completed by a collection of more than 200 pieces coming from the stock of the retailer "Au bon coin" in Saint-Étienne (France), left unsold since 1900⁴¹. The constraints of such collections, despite the fact that they illustrate beautifully the history of children's fashion through pristine outfits, are precisely that they consist of unworn garments: why have they not been purchased? Is it because of over-production of this type of item? Is it because they didn't meet the taste of the time? Regarding the prototypes from the fashion industry, is it because they are not final garments which explains why they have been kept off the market and therefore away from potential purchase opportunities? The fact that they have not been worn also means that they do not hold the usual wear and tear documenting the way children appropriate, move in and use these garments. However, archives from the retail industry, for example sales catalogues, can contribute to the contextualization of these clothes. Finally, as with British children's collections (with the exception of Mr Straw's House), these acquisitions contribute to the creation of a history of children's fashion design, but don't put sufficient emphasis on children's everyday clothes [fig. 3].

Figure 3



Children's clothes from the 1930s, first room of the exhibition *Small Couture (2): Modèle enfant*, curator: Aude Le Guennec, musée du Textile et de la mode de Cholet, 2006. Presentation of garments from the collection acquired from Georges Chomette, owner of the store *Au Bon coin* in Saint-Etienne (France).

© Aude Le Guennec (Musée du Textile et de la mode de Cholet).

- 21 To mitigate this limitation, the museum has completed this unusual collection with donations from individuals, with careful attention to gathering their narratives. The complete wardrobes of children or siblings, spread over generations, supported by the stories and photographs documenting them, contribute to the unique aspect of the collections. However, these collections come mostly from wealthy families who have had the luxury to collect and keep these items in the attics of their bourgeois properties.
- 22 Furthermore, limited by the constraints of storage and exhibition spaces, the museum has to make radical choices in the collection of children's clothing history. This leads to a focus on children's dress codes, and the exclusion of comparative material showing adult fashion. Documents in the collections that show both adults and children, such as family photographs or retail catalogues, are not effectively used in the displays. This lack of contextualization of children's outfits in the galleries can be a constraint for a visitor who would like to understand both the narrative and the fashion landscape of the collections. This highlights the problems of this type of specialized fashion collections, which focuses on a category of users, without defining them in terms of a culture, a generation or a social background. An alternative approach is that demonstrated by Jo Paoletti, whose research has investigated the ways in which gender is expressed through clothing across age cohorts at a given time as well as across history⁴².

Towards comprehensive and inclusive children's fashion history: Reflections on findings and future directions

- 23 Research for this paper has brought to light some surprising discrepancies. The first, in Great Britain, is that the V&A and the National Trust seem to be travelling in opposite directions in their collecting and exhibition policies. The Trust has established local considerations as paramount, and with Mr Straw's House, has taken on a property which appeals through its narration of provincial family life. Concurrently, the YV&A has turned away from its earlier remit of 'a representation of the history and culture of childhood' to a tight focus on design for and by childhood⁴³.
- 24 In France, specialist museums such as Cholet and well-established fashion museums address the scarcity of children's clothing collections by focusing on the way children's fashion has led to original designs. This is why despite an effort to embrace children's fashion collections more broadly, and for the funders and local authorities to acknowledge this direction in the strategic documents of the institution and in partnership with key stakeholders such as the fashion industry, the specialized collections of these museums remain tied to a certain approach to children's clothing. This point of view follows adults' and industry perspectives on the child and their culture. Thus, these museums turn their back on reflections on children's material culture and on an inclusive approach to children's fashion history. The focus on children's fashion, designers and contemporary retail, and not on children and clothing as such, leads to a different history and narrative which perpetuates the exclusion of children from the making of their history.
- 25 Therefore, while these approaches are legitimate, they leave unexamined some key themes in contemporary debates. One is the way in which childhood is defined and constructed by society, and how this is addressed in dress codes: for example, the age at which young people are deemed capable of paid employment, of sexual consent and of criminal responsibility can differ strongly between countries and cultures as well as over time, leading to political, social and moral debates underpinned by clothing considerations. The relationship between garments worn by children and those permitted for adults has also fluctuated over time: children's clothing has sometimes acted as a laboratory for experimenting with new styles, like boys' trousers in the 1780s, or girls' short dresses in the early 1960s. In addition to this dialogue between children and adult styles, children's dress codes could also help in questioning the social construction of gender, especially relevant at a time when increasing number of individuals are identifying themselves as non-binary or gender-fluid, and gender dysphoria is carefully considered in contemporary paediatrics and in education⁴⁴. Garments from periods when gender was expressed incrementally (with boys in skirts to the age of six or seven) have the potential to challenge and open up received ideas. These topics are embodied in the historic garments which are already in museum collections, and could be highlighted through display and interpretation.
- 26 Both the National Trust and the V&A have stated that they want to reflect the diversity of contemporary British life in their collections and exhibitions, and to welcome a wide cross-section of the public⁴⁵. However, their forward-looking celebration of creative ingenuity risks obscuring the power of objects to create bridges to the past, and

provide emotional continuity⁴⁶. The display of items referring to loss or lack might provide a welcome point of reference for visitors living through less-than-ideal childhoods⁴⁷.

- 27 Furthermore, displays create expectations in the visitors of what museums will find interesting, and establish the norms of 'suitable' donations. Collecting policies are meaningless if they are not evident in the public face of the institution, and changing public understanding often requires a dedicated effort.
- 28 In this museological context, research projects such as "S'habiller pour l'école" ("Dressed for School", June 2023-March 2024) [fig. 4 to 7] led by the French National Museum of Education (musée national de l'Éducation - Munae, Rouen)⁴⁸, reveal the necessity of exploring the role of clothing as a socializing tool for children. Fostering areas of growth for specialized museums, and demonstrating the legitimacy of clothes in all children's culture, this project investigates the creative power of dress for children; and how they inspire their imagination while developing their understanding of the world, and of society. Clothing is not just anecdotal; it is a daily aspect of users' lives and of their material culture. Therefore, allowing for the exploration of clothing as a social medium is crucial in the construction of inclusive dialogues in museums.

Figure 4



Children's fashion at school from the 1930s to the 1960s in France. Photograph taken on 23rd June 2023, in the exhibition *S'habiller pour l'école* [Dressed for school], at the musée national de l'Éducation, Rouen (France), June 2023-March 2024. See the online exhibition: <https://my.octopus3d.com/tour/shabiller-pour-lecole> [link valid in March 2024].

© Aude Le Guennec / Musée national de l'Éducation.

Figure 5



Waterproof puddle-suit worn by a 4-year-old child for outdoor learning at St Peter's Primary School, Galashiels, Scotland, Autumn 2022. Presented in the exhibition *S'habiller pour l'école* [*Dressed for school*], at the musée national de l'Éducation, Rouen (France), June 2023-March 2024. See the online exhibition: <https://my.octopus3d.com/tour/shabiller-pour-lecole> [link valid in March 2024].

© Aude Le Guennec / Musée national de l'Éducation.

Figure 6



School overalls from the collections of the musée national de l'Éducation, Rouen (France), dated from the beginning of the 20th century. Presented in the exhibition *S'habiller pour l'école* [Dressed for school], at the musée national de l'Éducation, Rouen (France), June 2023-March 2024. See the online exhibition: <https://my.octopus3d.com/tour/shabiller-pour-lecole> [link valid in March 2024].

© Aude Le Guennec / Musée national de l'Éducation.

Figure 7



Prototypes of functional school clothes designed by students from the École nationale supérieure des arts appliqués et des métiers art (ENSAAMA) for their final Diplôme Supérieur des Arts Appliqués. Presented in the exhibition *S'habiller pour l'école* [Dressed for school], at the musée national de l'Éducation, Rouen (France), June 2023-March 2024. See the online exhibition: <https://my.octopus3d.com/tour/shabiller-pour-lecole> [link valid in March 2024].

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- 29 As presented in Cholet, children's fashion is isolated, with its own channels, creators and commercial rules. This highlights the distinction between design for adults and children, with the voice of child users absent from the design culture. Redressing this exclusion of children is the mission of the international network Designing for Children's rights (D4CR)⁴⁹ which ensures the ethical compliance of design for and with children. Since 2020, this reflection has also led to the creation of the International and interdisciplinary network for the research on children and clothing (IN2FROCC)⁵⁰. This group gathers historians, anthropologists, sociologists, ethnologists, museum curators, childhood practitioners, designers, and the industry in an investigation into children's clothes across the globe, across time and social ecosystems. As part of their programme, research on children's clothing collections as well as children's interactions with history has been prioritised, leading to innovative insights into the concept of child-led heritage.
- 30 This echoes some initiatives where museums are trying to engage directly with young people [fig. 8]. Helen Charman, Director of Learning at the V&A, has highlighted the "understanding [of the way] early-years childhood development [can] intersect with museum learning"; this is translated into education programs where the focus remains on the creative inspiration that objects can foster in young people⁵¹. This includes workshops with school groups from ethnically and socially diverse areas of London⁵². The in-depth observation of the aesthetics of contemporary design can increase the

emotional bond with their heritage and objects that surround them⁵³. However, this approach reduces historic clothing to a design catalyst rather than a means of expanding children's sense of identity, belonging and history [fig. 9 and 10].

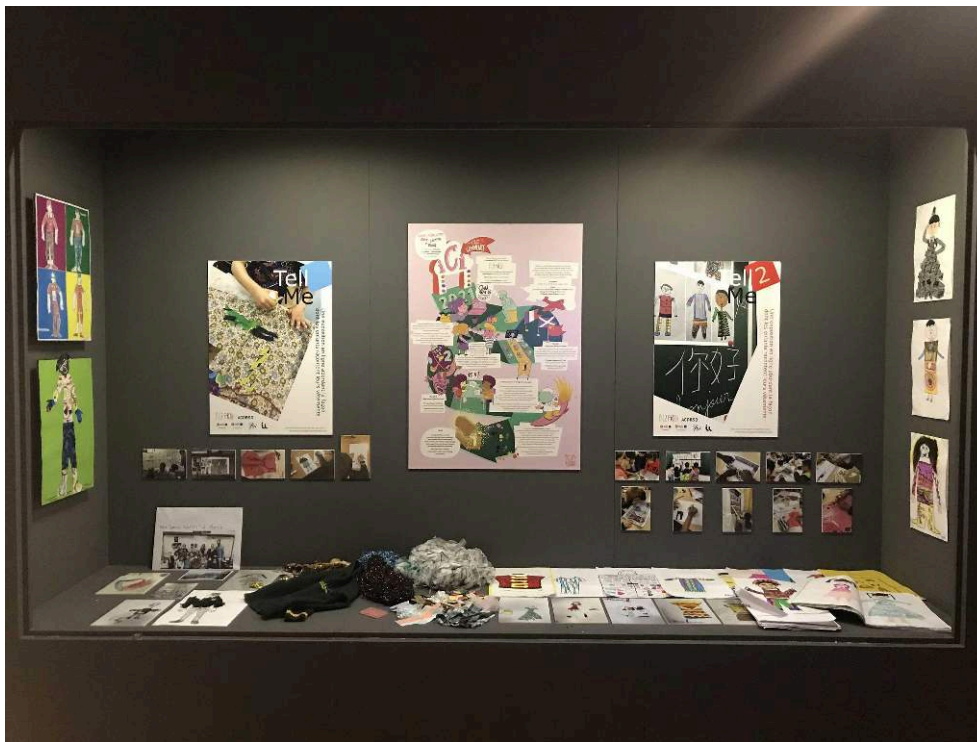
Figure 8



Children in the Fashion galleries of the musée de la Mode et du Textile, Cholet (France), November 2022.

© Bérengère Fall / Association des Amis du Musée du Textile, Cholet.

Figure 9



"Tell me", a child-led project, presented in the exhibition *S'habiller pour l'école* [Dressed for school], at the musée national de l'Éducation, Rouen (France), June 2023-March 2024. See the online exhibition: <https://d4crscottishchapter.wordpress.com/gallery/> [link valid in March 2024].

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- 31 This insight into children's clothing collections on both sides of the Channel demonstrates the complexity of childhood material culture, particularly clothing, in reflecting and shaping society. In the present world of increasingly globalized cultures, where it becomes hard to sustain a sense of belonging and history, the position of the child needs to be taken into consideration. This analysis of children's historic clothing in museums indicates that the appropriation of a three-dimensional and inclusive material culture requires both the comprehensive development of museum collections and the integration of the child's perspective on the making and interpretation of their heritage.

NOTES

1. Museums Association Conference, 3-5 November 2022, Edinburgh, online: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/conference-2022-content/#> [link valid in March 2024].

2. SINGLY François de, "L'enfant n'est pas qu'un enfant...", *Les Grands Dossiers des Sciences humaines*, vol. 8, n° 9, 2007, p. 3.

3. EINARSDOTTIR Johanna, "Children's perspectives on play", in BROOKER Liz, MINDY Blaise and EDWARDS Susan (ed.) *Play and Learning in Early Childhood*, London, Sage, 2014, p. 319-330.
4. By the French word "patrimonialisation", the authors refer to the making of heritage as a process.
5. ROSE Clare, *Children's Clothes Since 1750*, London, BT Batsford, 1989; ROSE Clare, *Making, Selling and Wearing Boys' Clothes in late Victorian England*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2010; ROSE Clare, "Continuity and Change in Children's Clothing, 1885-1920", *Textile History*, vol. 42, n° 2, 2011, p. 145-161; LE GUENNEC Aude, *Le vêtement d'enfant ou l'entrée dans l'histoire*, thèse d'histoire de l'art sous la direction de Pierre-Yves BALUT, Paris, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2016; LE GUENNEC Aude, "Du musée à la thèse: vers un modèle d'étude du vêtement de l'enfant", *Tétralogiques*, n° 23, 2018; online: <http://www.tetralogiques.fr/spip.php?article90> [link valid in March 2024].
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ABSTRACTS

Children's fashion remains a marginal museological subject in the contemporary museographic landscape and in particular in the institutions that should be in charge of this topic: fashion and local history museums. Reflecting the late interest in childhood history, children's fashion has rarely been the subject of strategic collection and coherent documentation in these institutions. Moreover, generally based on random family donations, the collections do not document everyday clothing and dress codes across society. Because of the disappearance of this heritage, museums neglect children's clothing practices and prevent young people from accessing the history of their material culture despite this being one of their fundamental rights (United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child). Through three case studies of French and British museums associated in different ways with the collection and study of the history of children's fashion, this article analyzes the current state of children's clothing heritage and the effect the marginalisation of children dress history has on our understanding of the socialization of children. It explores the advantages of a strategic approach to preserving the memory of childhood clothing, understanding the interactions of children with their culture, and considering the perspectives that this approach could bring to young people in terms of education and social participation.

La mode enfantine reste un sujet muséologique marginal dans le paysage muséographique contemporain et principalement dans les institutions qui devaient en avoir la charge : les musées de mode et musées de société. Reflétant l'intérêt tardif pour l'histoire de l'enfance, la mode enfantine a rarement fait l'objet d'une collecte patrimoniale et d'une documentation cohérente dans ces institutions. Par ailleurs, reposant généralement sur des dons familiaux aléatoires, les collections ne montrent pas la réalité et les usages des vêtements du quotidien dans toutes les couches de la société. Du fait de la disparition de cette mémoire matérielle enfantine, les musées négligent les pratiques vestimentaires des enfants et les excluent des processus de patrimonialisation de leur culture quand bien même ceci est l'un de leurs droits fondamentaux (Convention relative aux droits de l'enfant, 1989). À travers trois études de cas de musées français et britanniques particulièrement associés à la conservation et à la valorisation de l'histoire de la mode enfantine, cet article analyse l'état actuel du patrimoine vestimentaire enfantin et son effet sur notre compréhension des mécanismes de socialisation des enfants. Il explore les avantages d'une approche patrimoniale cohérente pour préserver la mémoire de la mode enfantine, comprendre les interactions des enfants avec leur propre culture, et envisager les perspectives que cette approche pourrait apporter aux jeunes en termes d'éducation et de citoyenneté.

INDEX

Mots-clés: mode enfantine, musées, enfance, histoire du vêtement, droits de l'enfant, patrimoine inclusif

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