

Kimono in Western Eyes

From Art to Fashion

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Art and Fashion, as cultural movements, visual representations of prevailing social and moral ideas, and responses to economic shifts and technological innovations, have much in common. Though both rely on creative acts, Art has a long and respectable academic history, while Fashion has been decried as ephemeral and trivial. Without a doubt, however, just like Art, Fashion contains its social base and can be examined exists on context.

As a process to explore the interconnection of Art and Fashion, this paper focuses on kimono as a particular cultural object, which has evolved in its artistic form as well as an aesthetic realm. This paper consists of three parts. The first chapter, The Kimono: the Cultural History, chronicles the evolving process of kimono and its social function in Japan until the seventeenth century, and it examines how the West understood in kimono when it first arrived. The second chapter, Kimono in Western Art, 1800-1900, focuses on kimono's journey to Europe in the eighteenth century through the end of nineteenth century, and contextualizes its social meaning through Art. The third chapter, Kimono in Fashion, is the discussion of the shifting society of the early twentieth century and the transition of kimono from Art to Fashion, specifically putting attention to Mariano Fortuny and Paul Poiret. By way of conclusion, the kimono's impact on the West is re-analyzed through Art and Fashion, showing how it has evolved transitionally to respond to, and driven social change.