The History of Fashion and Consumer Culture
Professor Jennifer M. Jones
Fall 2010

This seminar will focus on the history of the development of a distinctive culture of fashion and consumption in the West from the Renaissance through the 20th century. We will explore empirical cases studies ranging from the rise of the men’s three-piece suit, to the emergence of apartment stores and fashion magazines in the 19th century, to birth of the new feminine styles like the of the flapper in the 1920s and the New Look post-1945. The class will pay special attention to a particularly rich primary source only recently available at Rutgers University: a complete run of Mademoiselle magazines from 1935 to 1975. Although the course will focus on developments in Europe and America, we will be attentive to the impact of non-western and global contexts in shaping the history of fashion.

The course will also introduce students to the key theoretical literature concerning the history of fashion and consumer cultures as well as different methodological approaches to the history of fashion and consumption. Seminar-style discussions will place a heavy premium on participation and discussion. In addition to several shorter papers, students will each write a roughly twenty-page paper using primary sources on a topic they develop in consultation with the professor. All research topics must focus on a period before 1980.

Weekly discussions will draw on short articles and primary sources available online or on the course SAKAI website.