

The Women's Studies Program and the Asian American Studies Institute present:

Behind the Seams of Paul Poiret's Harem Trousers (1911): Race, Fashion, and Virtuality in the Machine Age

Dr. Minh-Ha T. Pham

History of Art & Visual Studies and Asian American Studies, Cornell University

Thursday January 26, 2012

4:00 – 5:30 PM

Benton Museum

In 1911, legendary French fashion designer Paul Poiret introduced to the Parisian elite the first of several collections of Orientalist fashion he would design throughout that decade. Historical accounts of Poiret's collection of harem trousers, hobble skirts, and turbans suggest that his fashions functioned not simply as clothes (a material form and practice of self-care and self-presentation) but as an early form of virtual technology that extended the limits of the physical body and expanded the possibilities of somatic experience to include the experience of the Oriental other. Poiret's fashions produced in the wearer the sensation of being transported to the spatially, temporally, and racially distant location of the Orient. Operating as simulation rather than representation, Poiret's Orientalism is evocative of a history of race and virtuality that has been overlooked in cultural studies of Orientalism as well as the histories of technology. My talk will examine the role of Orientalism in shaping the Mechanical Age in which Poiret emerged as well as discuss the implications of Poiret's Orientalist fashions for thinking about race as central rather than incidental to the history of virtuality.

About Dr. Pham: Minh-Ha T. Pham is an Assistant Professor in the History of Art & Visual Studies Department and the Asian American Studies Program at Cornell University. Broadly, her research focuses on the relations of race, gender, fashion, and digital media technology. She is completing *The Technological Refashioning of Race*, a manuscript that brings together technology studies with critical race and gender studies to illuminate fashion's long history as a virtual technology of race. Her academic and popular writings on Asian/Americans and new and traditional media appear in *Feminist Media Studies*, *positions: east asia cultures critique*, *Camera Obscura*, *Signs*, *Ms. magazine* and others. She's also co-author of a research blog on the politics of fashion and beauty called **Threadbared** (iheartthreadbared.wordpress.com/) and curates a digital archive called **Of Another Fashion** (<http://ofanotherfashion.tumblr.com/>) that focuses on the everyday material cultures and practices of U.S. women of color. For more information about Dr. Pham, please visit her website, <http://www.arts.cornell.edu/histart/pham.html>.

For more information about this event, please contact the Women's Studies Program at 860-486-3970 or wsinfo@uconn.edu. More details are posted on the Women's Studies website, www.womens.studies.uconn.edu.

**Co-sponsored by the Department of Art & Art History, the Department of History,
the Humanities Institute, and the Asian American Cultural Center**