

Susan L. Siegfried

Fashion and the Reinvention of Court Costume in Portrayals of Josephine de Beauharnais (1794-1809)

Article. Source : Apparence(s)

Susan L. Siegfried, « Fashion and the Reinvention of Court Costume in Portrayals of Josephine de Beauharnais (1794-1809) », *Apparence(s)*, 6, 2015

Extrait de l'article

This essay studies the inventive deployment of fashion in paintings of Josephine Bonaparte during the period of her rise to public prominence, which began in the mid-1790s, through her reign as empress of the French (1804-09). One of its concerns is the status of visual images as a form of evidence about court costumes and fashion, recognizing the difficulty of separating the styling of the clothes from their representations in the visual arts. Pictures constitute an extremely important, and sometimes the only, material source of information about clothing that may not survive or may differ from its representation in archival documents and other textual sources. Yet visual images cannot be assumed faithfully or 'transparently' to describe the garments they depict. Instead, they are better thought of as translations, which are governed by representational conventions of their own. Indeed, visual images are capable of generating new images that refer as much if not more to those pictorial conventions as they do to actual garments or objects. In this regard, it is worth attending to distinctions between the genres and media of pictorial representation since their formats and physical characteristics can be telling in themselves of the role of fashion and costume in representing a court, particularly in a modern era of print culture and public exhibition. I shall be looking especially at official portraits and popular engravings of Josephine in formal court costume, and will also consider portraits and genre paintings that presented her in more informal situations during the years of her reign. The divisions in this rich pictorial culture reveal changes in Josephine's status as a female sovereign, and show that her portrayal as empress cannot simply be regarded as a revival and continuation of the imagery of the pre-Revolutionary court.

[Lire la suite \(journals.openedition.org\)](http://journals.openedition.org)