

## Dossiê 5

As fontes de pesquisa para moda. Uma aproximação interdisciplinar e arquivista da história da moda: pesquisa e ensino.

# SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF 19TH CENTURY JEWELRY: THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS

Fontes para o estudo da joalheria do século XIX:  
as exposições universais

Sources pour l'étude des bijoux du XIXe siècle:  
Les Expositions Universelles

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## Summary

This article seeks to identify the contributions of the International Exhibitions to the dissemination of patterns in the second half of the 19th century Jewelry, given that those events were the stage for demonstrations of the ideals of progress and technological advances prevailing in the 19th century, in addition to having mirrored the values and tastes of the elite of nineteenth-century Europe. We will analyze, from the perspective of Material Culture, textual and visual documents considering the production, circulation and use of objects of the International Exhibitions held in London in 1851 and in Paris in 1889. From the jury reports we will seek to identify which were the criteria used to choose the awarded jewels in each Exhibition, as well as who were the main exhibiting jewelers and their characteristics. From catalogs and illustrated newspapers of the Exhibitions we will try to understand the visuality of the jewels, shapes and materials. By using the International Exhibitions as source for the study of Jewelry, we intend to contribute to an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the history of Fashion.

**Key words:** Jewelry. International Exhibitions. Material Culture.

## Resumo

Este artigo busca identificar as contribuições das Exposições Universais para a disseminação de padrões na joalheria da segunda metade do século XIX, posto que tais eventos foram palco para demonstrações dos ideais de progresso e avanços tecnológicos vigentes no século XIX, além de terem sido o espelho dos valores e gostos da elite da Europa oitocentista. Analisaremos, sob a perspectiva da Cultura Material, considerando a produção, circulação e usos dos objetos, documentos textuais e visuais das Exposições Universais realizadas em Londres em 1851 e 1862, bem como da Exposição de Paris de 1889. A partir dos relatórios do júri buscaremos identificar quais foram os critérios utilizados para a escolha das joias premiadas em cada Exposição, bem como quem eram os principais joalheiros expositores e suas características. A partir dos catálogos e jornais ilustrados das Exposições buscaremos compreender a visualidade das joias, formas e materiais. Ao utilizarmos as Exposições Universais como fonte para o estudo da joalheria, pretendemos contribuir para uma aproximação interdisciplinar do estudo da história da moda.

**Palavras-Chave:** Joalheria. Exposições Universais. Cultura Material.

## Resumé

Cet article cherche à identifier les contributions des expositions universelles pour la diffusion des tendances dans l'industrie de la bijouterie de la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle, étant donné que tels événements ont représenté une étape de la démonstration des idéaux de progrès et des avancées technologiques du XIXe siècle, en plus d'avoir été le réflexe des valeurs et des goûts de l'élite européenne du même siècle. Du point de vue de la culture matérielle et considérant la production, la circulation et l'utilisation d'objets, nous analyserons des documents textuels et visuels issus des expositions universelles organisées à Londres en 1851 et 1862, ainsi que ceux de l'Exposition de Paris de 1889. À partir des rapports du jury nous essaierons d'identifier les critères utilisés pour choisir les prix décernés lors de chaque exposition, ainsi que les principaux bijoutiers exposants et leurs caractéristiques. Selon les catalogues et quelques journaux illustrés des expositions, nous tenterons de comprendre les aspects visuels des bijoux, leurs formes et les matériaux choisis pour les fabriquer. En utilisant les expositions universelles comme source d'étude des bijoux, nous entendons contribuer à une approche interdisciplinaire de l'étude de l'histoire de la mode.

**Mots-clés:** Bijoux. Expositions Universelles. Culture Matérielle.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Frédéric Boucheron, founder of the famous French jewelry that bears his name, was the son of textile merchants. Inspired by the fineness of textile materials, he began, at a very young age, to make gold jewelry as flexible as the laces of his childhood. He would then become the first jeweler to open a shop at the Place Vendôme in Paris in 1893, where all major jewelry houses would later gather<sup>1</sup>.

Despite the clear intersection between clothing and jewelry in the fashion universe, the same does not occur in the academic field. References to jewelry are often found in research in the field of clothing and fashion, but this usually occurs on an ancillary or secondary basis. In fact, one of the functions of jewelry is to complement clothing, sometimes working to hold parts together, as in the case of buttons, buckles or pins, and it is certain that jewelry, as well as clothing, also go through cycles, albeit less ephemeral, and change over time according to tastes and technological resources. Some pieces of the so-called costume jewelry<sup>2</sup> have changed over time, following the changes in fashion. This was the case of the so-called *Stomachers or Devant de Corsage*, which were created to cover the front of the bodices and became popular in the 15th century. These pieces changed shape and size according to the cutout of the dresses, and fell into oblivion as waistlines disappeared, to be turned into smaller brooches to be worn at chest height.

There is, however, in jewelry, a sense of permanence which is incompatible with the fast cycles of fashion. This statement was made by the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé in 1874<sup>3</sup>:

I would advise a lady, who is undecided as to who to trust the design of a precious jewel, to request it to the architect who built her house, instead of asking the illustrious seamstress responsible for her evening dress. Such is, in a word, the art of jewelry." (MALLARMÉ, 2016, p. 275).

A partir do sentido de permanência a que se refere Mallarmé, abordaremos neste artigo as fontes para o estudo da joalheria. Based on the sense of permanence referred to by Mallarmé, we will approach in this article the sources for the study of jewelry<sup>4</sup>, focusing on the contributions of the International Exhibitions to the theme of 19th century jewelry. From official documents of the International Exhibitions and the vast bibliography produced on the subject, we will seek to identify the patterns of jewelry presented in those events, which we believe to be the mirror of the values prevailing at the time. Our approach will be taken from the perspective of Material Culture, which Thomas Schelereth has defined as "The vast universe of objects used by humanity to deal with the physical world, to facilitate social life, and to create symbols and meanings." (SCHELERETH, 1985, p. 13, our translation).

Research into Material Culture assumes looking at the object under its different aspects: production, circulation and use, and for that, the use of different sources, such as several threads that intertwine forming a plot with coherent meaning, is essential.

<sup>1</sup> Located in the 9th arrondissement of Paris, the devise of Place Vendôme dates from 1699, but it was from 1893 that it began to become the center of high jewelry. Source: [https://us.boucheron.com/en\\_us/the-maison/history.html](https://us.boucheron.com/en_us/the-maison/history.html)

<sup>2</sup> The term Clothing Jewelry is used by Gonçalo de Vasconcelos e Souza.

<sup>3</sup> The text of the poet Stéphane Mallarmé was published by Revista d'Obra (s) in 2016 and translated by Izabella Haddad. <https://dobras.emnuvens.com.br>

<sup>4</sup> This article is part of our PhD research, whose theme is the production, circulation and uses of jewelry in the 19th century in São Paulo, currently underway at the USP Graduate Program in Social History, under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Heloisa Maria Silveira Barbuy.

For Ulpiano Bezerra de Meneses, no attribute of meaning comes from materiality itself. These attributes are selected by the groups that do so in their production, circulation and consumption, so says Ulpiano “[...] it would be vain to search the meaning of objects in objects themselves” (MENESES, 1998, p. 91). The importance of understanding materiality lies in allowing numerous readings about its context, manufacturing techniques and signs of use. Therefore, the convergence of the use of material, textual and visual sources is essential.

In the nineteenth-century Jewelry, material sources are essentially collections of jewelry from museum collections, to which access is often restricted, as well as private collections that are often inaccessible for research. Through the material analysis of the jewelry we identify shapes, materials, types of gemstones and embedding of metals. Sometimes it is also possible to identify goldsmith and contrast marks<sup>5</sup>, on the pieces, which give the indication of authorship and the place the piece was produced.

Textual sources, in turn, provide us with information about the practice of the goldsmith’s profession, trade and also about the possession and use of jewelry. This is the case with inventories, wills, trade regiments, and import records, as well as novels, chronicles, or letters that contain descriptions of the types of jewelry used in the nineteenth century. The iconographic sources, on the other hand, give us clues about the use of jewelry, as in the case of portraits, where it is possible to observe how rings, necklaces, bracelets or hair and clothing props were used.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the International Exhibitions were of great importance for the dissemination of ideas, values and tastes. We will dedicate this article to analyze textual and visual documents of the International Exhibitions, seeking to identify their contributions to the universe of jewelry. We will mainly analyze reports and catalogs of the 1851 exhibition held in London and the Paris exhibition of 1889, as we believe these were the exhibitions that, from jewelry perspective, presented the most relevant novelties in techniques and materials. However, we do not fail to contemplate relevant information from other exhibitions that will permeate this article<sup>6</sup>.

## 2 THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS

The International Exhibitions count on considerable bibliography and have been researched in depth from the most different approaches. For this reason, we expose in the present article general characteristics that we consider necessary to show the dimension of the grandeur of these events, how they were organized and disseminated. Those were great commemorative events that could last approximately six months, where several countries presented their best products, inventions and technological advances to the world, competing for medals offered to those who stood out. Receiving a medal at an International Exhibition meant consolidating a prominent position in the segment. There was a profusion of products from all over the world; from machines to hats, from cotton to diamonds.

True ephemeral cities were built, in a mixture of spectacle with didactic function, intended to teach how to live in the modern world. The architectural and urban legacy of

<sup>5</sup> The function of the Contrast mark is to attest to the quality of the metal from which the piece is made. Each producing center has its own brand, usually represented by the design of an animal.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the exhibitions analyzed, the main exhibitions held during the second half of the nineteenth century were as follows: Paris, 1855; London 1862; Paris; 1867, Vienna, 1873; Philadelphia, 1876; Paris, 1878; Chicago, 1893; Paris, 1900.

the Exhibitions reaches the present day and demonstrates the dimension of those events, marked by great modern works, such as the Paris Metro (first subway in the world), built for the 1900 Exhibition, and the Eiffel Tower, built for the International Exhibition of 1889.

The International Exhibitions were tightly regulated and organized events, and were widely documented, leaving a wealth of official records, as well as chronicles and varied accounts, in addition to abundant iconography.

Among the official publications, we chose to analyze the jury reports of the jewelry classes, trying to identify which criteria were used by the members of the jury in the evaluation of the pieces, which jewels were awarded, who were the exhibitors and the jewelers, since the values that guided the jury's choices were the same the European elite used to elect the everyday objects that reflected their lifestyle. Such objects, tastes and ideas were internationally widespread through people visiting the event as well as through images of the exhibitions, which circulated around the world. In São Paulo, for example, the *Correio Paulistano* newspaper reported in 1867 the exhibition of images of the International Exhibition that was being held in Paris that year:

One can travel to Paris and see all the marvels of the 1867 Exhibition with little money. The Garraux House has received a splendid collection of state-of-the-art photographic views for stereoscopes, representing all the wonders, curiosities, beauties, phenomena and rarities of the 1867 International Exhibition in Paris. (CORREIO PAULISTANO, 1867, edition 03472).

Most of the judges' reports contained a detailed description of the awarded objects and an explanation of the reasons the jury recommended the prize, however, without access to images of the pieces, we then resorted to the official catalogs of the exhibitions. In addition to the description of what were considered the best pieces of the exhibition, the catalogs also present illustrations that greatly help us in understanding the objects.

## 2.1 THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF THE WORKS OF INDUSTRY OF ALL NATIONS, LONDRES, 1851

The first major 19th-century International Exhibition, called *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations*, was held in London in 1851 over a large iron and glass structure built in Hyde Park, morally and financially supported by the British Royal House. Sandra Pesavento (1997) recalls that Queen Victoria compared the inauguration of 1851 with her coronation, according to records found in her diary. From May to October of that year, about 6 million visitors came to Crystal Palace, built in Hyde Park to house the 14,000 exhibitors, which featured 30 product classes, distributed in 4 major groups: 1) Raw Products; 2) Machines; 3) Manufactured Goods; 4) Fine Arts. In this classification system, we find Jewelry in the group of manufactured Goods, in Class XXIII - *Works in precious metals, jewellery, articles of vertu*.

Picture 1: Opening of the 1851 Universal Exhibition in London.



Source: Royal Collection Trust (2019).

The jury was composed of people from the metallurgy industry, members of the Sheffield and Birmingham Silver Association (regions of England known for silver production), a chemistry professor, an architect, and a diamond expert. The composition of this team of judges is, per se, an indication of the importance of technical excellence as an evaluation parameter, which is confirmed by observing the award criteria, described in the general rules of the Exhibition:

[...] in manufactured objects, consideration will be given to improved utility, improved shape and pattern, or high execution ability, as well as the use of new materials, and the combination of materials, beauty and design, taking into account price in relation to production excellence.” (GREAT EXHIBITION, 1852, our translation).

The medals awarded in the precious metal class, of which jewelry was part, made clear the search for innovation. Elkington, Mason and Co received a Council Medal<sup>7</sup> for introducing the electrical processes of gilding and silvering of metals in England. It featured a collection of objects of varying shapes and sizes, mostly made of copper or nickel and metal, covered with a silver layer, through the so-called electrotype process that combined electricity with alkaline gold or silver salt. The jury recommended a special medal for a set of gilded and enameled copper jewelry, adorned with portraits of the Royal Family painted on porcelain. Although the application of the electro-process was not unchallenged by the criticism of some judges, concerned about the health of the artisans because of the silver vapor emanating from the process, other exhibitors were also rewarded for the good use of the procedure as well as for the use of metal alloys that favored the making of thinner metal layers, enabling better chiseling<sup>8</sup> work without compromising the appearance of the gold.

<sup>7</sup> The Council Medal was the highest distinction offered at the 1851 Exhibition, recommended for those demonstrating an invention or innovation that contributed to the evolution of the industry to which they belonged. The other categories of awards were the Prize Medal, for pieces with excellence of quality and execution, and the Honorable Mention, for those who presented undeniable merit, but without justification for the recommendation of a medal.

<sup>8</sup> Chiseling is a metalworking technique which consists of using tools (chisels) to shape the metal.

The International Exhibition was meant to be the center of the world's wonders, and in the jewelry segment one of the great attractions of 1851 was the display of the world's largest diamond, the 360 carat Koh-i-noor. The Illustrated Exhibitor announced: "This diamond is now in Hyde Park, and can be seen by any worker in the country for 1 shilling" (THE ILLUSTRATED EXHIBITOR, 1851, our translation), reinforcing the idea that the Exhibition would be a unique opportunity for the masses to have access to knowledge.

Despite having "the purity of water", Koh-i-noor, had a poor cut, especially in daylight. The solution was:

It is now insulated and covered with a red cloth, away from daylight, and jets of gas are directed to the gemstone, which is surrounded by metal reflectors, making the diamond look more beautiful." (THE ILLUSTRATED EXHIBITOR, 1851, n.6, p.159, our translation).

Another relevant Council Medal winner, Garrard, R. and S., and Co Jewelry, located at Haymarket, London, presented an extremely rich collection, proving the immense skill of the English in gold and silver works (GREAT EXHIBITION, 1852). Garrard was highly praised for the finesse of his pearl, opal and sapphire pieces, as well as the size and purity of his diamonds.

In the report, the jury points out its verdict: "The purity and size of diamonds, rubies and pearls, as well as the quality of its workmanship, led the jury to nominate The Garrard House for the Exhibition's highest award, as for leading the national industry to progress". (GREAT EXHIBITION, 1852, p.513, our translation).

The Garrard House was founded in 1735 and is still in business. In 1843 it was awarded as Queen Victoria's first official jewelry store. There has been a solid and long-standing relationship with the British Royal House. In 1841, Garrard designed a sapphire and diamond brooch, which Prince Albert presented Queen Victoria for her to use in the wedding ceremony as "her something blue"<sup>9</sup>. This same brooch would have been the inspiration for Garrard to create the Prince Charles and Princess Diana engagement ring in 1981, exactly 150 years later, and then again, it recently returned to the royal scene with the engagement of Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge in 2010, when replicas of the ring were sold throughout England, as well as in Brazil. It was also The Garrard House responsible for the Koh-i-noor diamond re-lapidation, which was again exposed to the British public a few years later at the International Exhibition, held once again in London in 1862. The tradition of over two hundred years of activities and their connections with the English Royal House still play a significant role in the image of the company, which produces jewels inspired by royal jewelry, and informs clients that the company has "been serving every British monarch since 1841." (GARRARD, 2019).

Still in the wake of the novelties of the 1851 Exhibition, the artificial pearls exhibited by Mr. Constant Valès came out. Says the jury's report:

The jury was pleased to see the artificial pearls exhibited by M. Constant Valès, who demonstrated great ability to overcome the difficulties of execution and produced a superior imitation of natural pearls. He was awarded with a Prize Medal. (GREAT EXHIBITION, 1852, p. 518).

Valès was not the only one to be awarded for imitations; the same happened to French jeweler Truchy, who took a medal for presenting a perfect imitation of black pearls,

<sup>9</sup> The tradition that emerged in England in the nineteenth century, and then spread throughout the United States, says that every bride must wear something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue.

as well as sirs Savary & Mosbach, also French, who won medals for the quality of their imitation of stones, especially emeralds and diamonds. Hunt and Roskel, a British jewelry, founded in 1843, also received a *Council Medal* for presenting “A diamond bouquet, as rich as elegant, from which pieces, including the petals, can be removed for cleaning or to be turned into 7 brooches. A piece that defies criticism.” (GREAT EXHIBITION, 1852, p. 513).

### 3 PARIS INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION, 1889

At the end of the 19th century, the greatest attraction of the 1889 Paris Exhibition was the electric power, which allowed the exhibition to be visited at night as well. In the jewelry section, the light dazzle enhanced the displays. The Exhibition, celebrating the centenary of the French Revolution, brought together 61,000 exhibitors, divided into 9 groups and 83 product classes.

In the jury report of the jewelry class we noticed the reference to the terms costume jewelry and jewelry, the first referring to the jewels made of golden or silver metal, and the second referring to the pieces with diamonds and gems. The discovery of diamond mines in South Africa in the 1870s flooded the European market with this type of stone and lowered its price, so, good design made with art and perfectly executed came to value. Pieces of complex execution were much appreciated: flowers and foliage for hair and clothing, as well as fanciful forms such as chickens, butterflies, dragons, mermaids, and turtles. In addition, the preparation of metals also had to be done with art; enamels, niellos<sup>10</sup>, filigree<sup>11</sup> and mosaics were essential elements for good jewelry.

Official documents report that there were great efforts to artificially produce gemstones, but “existing attempts were still restricted to laboratories, such as M. Feil, who tried to forge gemstones by melting the component elements at high temperatures” (Picard, 1892, p. 549). Nevertheless, if artificial reproductions were not yet in industrial scale, imitations were objects of important trade. Glasses colored by a metallic oxide which resembled gemstones, in addition to the widespread use of *strass*<sup>12</sup> in place of diamonds.

Although we had heard of pearl imitations since the 1851 Exhibition, it was not until 1889 that reports described the manufacturing process in detail, indicating that it had then become common practice. According to the report, fake pearls were vastly produced, either for clothing or jewelry. A single manufacturer could employ 1,700 people. The document further states that at the 1889 Exhibition a new method of making fake pearls was presented:

Glass with a pearlescent layer, plus a varnish layer, filled with melted paste [until then it was filled with Arabic gum or hot wax]. This new method, despite providing lower brightness, supports immersion in hot water.” (Picard, 1892, p. 549).

With Jewelry increasingly reaching the world of Arts, another French winner of the Jewelry Grand Prix was the already famous French house of Frédéric Boucheron, mentioned at the beginning of this article, which created a totally innovative necklace that did not require a clasp, with a hidden spring surrounding the neck, and it was given the status of a work of art, being referred to as: “Question Mark Necklace”, due to its shape. After the first necklace with this system was presented at the 1889 International Exhibition,

<sup>10</sup> Niello is a black metal alloy composed of sulfur, copper, silver and sometimes lead, used as filler of contour lines in jewelry.

<sup>11</sup> Filigree are gold or silver strands that form designs, such as lace.

<sup>12</sup> Strass is made of metal-coated glass stones at the bottom to imitate the sparkle of diamonds.



others of the same shape were created by the brand, becoming an iconic piece of Maison Boucheron. (BOUCHERON, [2019]).

## 5 CONCLUSION

In order to contribute to an interdisciplinary approach to the history of fashion, we dedicated this article to the observation of the sources for the study of 19th century Jewelry from the perspective of Material Culture. We used textual and visual sources on the International Exhibitions of the second half of the nineteenth century as object of analysis, given the Exhibitions had, among other functions, the role to disseminate tastes, ideas and habits prevailing among the European elite, which eventually spread to other territories, including to Brazil.

We analyzed the reports by the jury of the Jewelry classes at the Exhibitions held in London in 1851 and in Paris in 1889, from which we sought to identify the criteria for awarding the exposed jewels.

We first identified that the composition of the jury attested to the constant concern of the organization of the exhibitions with technical and innovation issues. At the first major International Exhibition held in London in 1851, the highest awards in the category were recommended to the jewelers who developed the processes of electromagnetic metal gilding, which made it possible to lower the price of the pieces. Jewelers who had tradition and proximity to the British Royal House also stood out in the exhibition, not only for the opulence of the pieces presented, which in many cases were owned by English nobles or even Queen Victoria, but also for the purity of the diamonds and the balance between the size of the gems and the amount of metals that composed the jewelry, what the jury called lightness.

Although we identified that the award criteria varied from one exhibit to another, we could observe a typology of jewelry that was awarded in all exhibitions of the 19th century: imitations of both pearls and stained gems that were successful for being well executed, as well as metal gilding processes which made jewelry less expensive.

At the end of the 19th century, at the 1889 Exhibition in Paris, the first exhibition with electric power, the highlight of Jewelry was the spectacle of lights, as it was possible to illuminate the displays to enhance the sparkle of diamonds. The jewelry gained status of artwork, where design, form and excellence of execution became central. In this context, Boucheron, the French jewelry, won the 1889 Grand Prix with the “Question Mark necklace”, the first necklace made without a clasp, which became the brand iconic piece

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