

Modern Women Wear Satin:  
Fabric, Femininity, and  
Art Deco Hollywood

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SUB Cherry/Silver  
3/26/2019  
12:00-1:00pm

The figure of the woman is found across Art Deco-styled architecture and décor. Art Deco, which overlapped with The Great Depression and the emergence of the New Woman in the 1920s and '30s, is known for its metallic surfaces, classical references, and depictions of modernity and progress. Culturally, this era saw changes in attitudes toward women and sexuality, as well as attitudes about money and class. Many of the anxieties and fantasies about these changes were enacted on the film screen, and satin material, as both costuming and set décor, is a useful touchstone for investigating how these issues were expressed through the cinematic medium. Satin clings suggestively to the body, capturing and reflecting light in a dramatic manner, directing visual attention to women's bodies. Examining the use of satin on screen reveals the contradictory perception of (primarily white) women at this time: as both frivolous ornament and as economically valuable and symbolic of a prosperous future.

Dr. Becky Peterson teaches in UNM's Department of Cinematic Arts. She is currently the 2018-2019 UNM Feminist Scholar-in-Residence. She has published articles in *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* and *Arizona Quarterly*, as well as in the edited collection *Habits of Being: Accessorizing the Body*. Her writing has also appeared in *Hyperallergic*, *The Rumpus*, *Bitch Magazine*, and other publications. She holds a PhD from the University of Minnesota and is writing a book about textiles and film.

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