

# Fashioning Masks and Making Do

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## Fashioning Masks and Making Do, with Dr. Nancy Hills

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Nancy Hills has designed costumes for theatrical productions all over the United States, many put on at the Caine College of the Arts. The designs have been displayed at several locations, including the International Prague Quadrennial held in the Czech Republic, and have garnered her prestigious awards. Her research of historical clothing has taken her all over the world, where she is able to examine historical garments up close and observe historical trends in the clothing you wouldn't be able to see by just looking at a picture.

With today's circumstances, face masks have become a new piece of daily fashion here in the United States and around the world, so it was fitting that this episode's conversation was with Nancy Hills, professor in the Caine College of the Arts and researcher of historical clothing. Nancy believes that the wearing of masks has become an enterprise and a statement. If you wear a mask you're concerned about yourself and your fellow man. It will evolve into more American ingenuity (she has a graduate student who has opened an etsy account selling masks), and says a lot about who we are and where we are. Even though she believes it could be giving people a false sense of security, Nancy has noticed more and more people wearing masks, and thinks it is representative of the gravitas of this situation.

As a researcher of historical clothing, there are several other examples Nancy gave of how clothing reflects the times and situations society experiences. In both world wars, there were ways of displaying one's patriotism through clothing. In the United Kingdom, people began to wear very simple clothing. Expensive jewelry and fabrics

were considered bad taste, as the resources that went into making elaborate outfits could be going to the war effort. Clothing was rationed during World War Two in the United Kingdom, so lots of effort and resources were put into making more "low end" clothes that were still well designed, well manufactured, and approved by the government. This led to more space being made on shipping containers and more availability in factories, which were both put towards the war effort. Additionally, the production of clothing items that weren't "necessary" such as silk stockings were halted, which led to a boom in those items when the war was over.

According to Nancy, crises can also lead to changes in the design of clothing. When World War 1 broke out there was a huge influx of women filling the roles that men usually filled. Thus, women needed more flexibility and mobility than was provided to them wearing cinched corsets. By necessity, women began to wear fuller, shorter skirts, more practical shoes, and relaxed, looser jackets. Before World War Two, men were still carrying their watches in their pockets. But a wristwatch was more practical for flying an airplane or driving a vehicle, so those became a much more common accessory. Military coats were heavy and made of wool. But during World War Two Burberry was commissioned to make light weight cotton coats, which are what we now commonly call a trench coat. It is not out of the ordinary for people to adapt their fashion based on what is going on in the world. Nancy believes that it is actually a healthy place to be, saying, "it's heartening seeing people wanting to help others and themselves." We appreciate Nancy for taking the time to talk to us and be a part of the Instead podcast.