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Gothic to Goth: Embracing the Dark Side

Sun, 01/29/2012 - Sun, 04/29/2012

Goodman Gallery

It might be said that death, art, and fashion went hand in hand in America in the nineteenth century. The death of George Washington in 1799 spurred an outpouring of public mourning that found expression in a new genre of art that encompassed memorial paintings, prints, public monuments, mourning kerchiefs, ceramics, and, not least, needlework. Mourning art was considered a beautiful and appropriate—even sophisticated and fashionable—art form rather than a frivolous or morbid fascination with death. It encouraged an interweaving of religious, social, and aesthetic ideas drawn from the neoclassical ideal of the “heroic death,” as well as the burgeoning Romantic Movement. As literature with macabre gothic overtones gained popularity, emotional expressions of sentimentality, melancholy, and even horror and terror became commonplace.

The presentation of grief and sorrow became an art in itself in the Victorian era (1837 – 1901) as England’s Queen Victoria brought the expression of mourning to its zenith following the death of her husband, Prince Albert in 1861. On both sides of the Atlantic, elaborate mourning outfits became *de rigueur*, along with codified rituals for their wearing. As the American public rapidly assimilated both the social mores and fashionable tastes of mourning, the late nineteenth century became widely known for its prominence of elaborate and ostentatious mourning fashion. Almost a hundred years later, the silhouettes and styles of Victorian mourning wear made a vigorous reappearance with the emergence of the Goth subculture in the late 1970s, although now with a vocabulary of nonconformity and self-expression rather than the moral obligations of earlier years.

Gothic to Goth offers an overview of the nineteenth-century cult of mourning in American art and fashion and indicates how that trend translated into contemporary Goth fashion, a genre now embraced by mainstream couture as well as by the rock subculture of the twentieth century. Included in the exhibition are representative examples of mourning art such as needle pictures, paintings, and post-mortem daguerreotype portraits; mourning jewelry and other accessories; two late Victorian mourning outfits; and examples of contemporary Goth fashion inspired by the mourning excesses of the earlier century. Objects from the museum’s own collections are supplemented by loans from the Everhart Museum, Burns Archive, Lackawanna Historical Society, Sigal Museum, Drexel Historic Costume Collection, the designer [Kambriel](#), Heavy Red Couture Noir and custom jewelry designer and manufacturer [Atelier Gothique](#)



Photo of Kambriel taken by Tina Dolin courtesy of Kambriel.com. Featured design: