

The Nineteenth Century Series:
Museums, Collections and Modern Visualities

The Exotic West: the Circuit of Non-Indigenous Carioca Featherwork in the Nineteenth Century

March 1, 2023

12:00-1:00pm via Zoom

(scan the QR code below to register)

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Figure 1

Fixed feather fan; from the Yusupov Collection. Brazil (probably Rio de Janeiro) c. 1870. Inv. no. ERT-6675. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum. Photo by Konstantin Sinyavsky.

Taking as a starting point a feather fan belonging to the Jeronimo Ferreira das Neves Collection at the D. João VI Museum in Rio de Janeiro, this article examines a type of non-indigenous featherwork that was produced for export during the nineteenth century in Brazil. The nineteenth-century fashion for adornments made from feathers and stuffed animals invaded major fashion-producing centers such as Paris and London at a time when bourgeois imperialism had helped to multiply intercontinental trade links. For middle-class women, these objects introduced the exotic as a distinct aesthetic, corresponding to a desire for innovation driven by growing standardization in food, housing and clothing. Rigid feather fans produced in Rio de Janeiro were internationally known from 1830 onwards. However, even when existing studies are considered, little is known about this Rio-based industry, which reached its peak between 1870 and 1890. In reflecting on the production, circulation, and consumption of rigid fans, I aim to identify the symbolic meanings attributed to this industry by Brazilian and European markets and to determine whether nineteenth century featherwork made by non-indigenous Brazilians could have been an expression of indigenous influence on nineteenth-century fashion.

