

EUROSEAS CONFERENCE 2019 AT THE HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN
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Closed Panel

Power Dressing: Clothing and Ornament as Amulet

Convener

Florina H. Capistrano-Baker, City University of New York

Speakers

1. *Kaja McGowan, Cornell University*
2. *Cherubim Quizon, Seton Hall University*
3. *Florina H. Capistrano-Baker, City University of New York*
4. *Doan Thi My Huong, Vietnam National Institute of Culture and Arts Studies*

Discussant

Mark Johnson, University of London

Abstract

...it is worn like an idea, that of a terrific power, for it is enough to be seen for this power to be demonstrated.¹

It has been argued that some forms of jewelry and specialized garments trace their origins to magical purposes. This panel retrieves the genealogy of instances of Southeast Asian clothing, personal adornment, and architectural ornament from present-day (often) secularized iterations to earlier expressions of faith in supernatural powers. Speakers address factors and processes that endow material things with amuletic qualities. Do apotropaic powers derive from formal characteristics such as shape, design, or composition? How does color, or the mind's perception of it, contribute to an object's efficacy? How are meanings and notions of power negotiated, enhanced, or negated as various objects transition from sacred to secular and vice versa? Specific materials such as gold and silver; or semi-precious gems such as jade, pearls, and coral, among others, were traditionally believed to protect, prolong life, or cure illness before their transformation into contemporary expressions of secular power and wealth. What were the basis for their early association with spiritual power and their present-day function as tangible markers of economic status? How do group affiliations, conceptual associations, or performative actions impact these processes?

¹ Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 56.