

Black silk parasol, ca. 1900-1910.
Toronto Metropolitan University
FRC1989.02.001. Donated by
Helen Service.



By Dr. Ingrid Mida

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1900s BLACK SILK PARASOL

“What new graces the Parasol offers to a woman! It is her weapon out of doors, which she carries jauntily and willfully, either at her side, or tilted on her shoulder. It protects her adornment and assures her poise, surrounding the charms of her face like a halo.” Octave Uzane, *The Sunshade, the Glove, the Muff*, 1883.

As French writer Octave Uzane so eloquently noted in 1883, there was once an art to carrying a parasol. Although designed to protect a woman’s delicate complexion from the sun, the parasol, like the fan, was a feminine accessory used to create visual interest and signal flirtatious behaviour. **An elegant woman could attract attention with her parasol by how she held it and moved with it, such as twirling it or snapping it shut.** The parasol also offered a place to hide, and there are even songs from the early 20th century written about the love that could blossom behind a parasol, including “Underneath a Parasol” (Beaujot 122-123).



The exquisite parasol pictured above from the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection (FRC1989.02.001) is made of black silk with a black net overlay and trimmed with 1/2 inch machine black lace. It measures 37.5 inches or 95 cm from tip to the end of the rod, which is missing its handle.

The parasol is embellished with elaborate scrollwork embroidery in cream cord.

The interior of the parasol is finished in black net. There is a decorative non-functional black bobble attached with black cord that dangles from one of the tips of the ribs. A ribbon flower in cream silk twill with a bead centre is attached to the wooden handle which is otherwise plain.

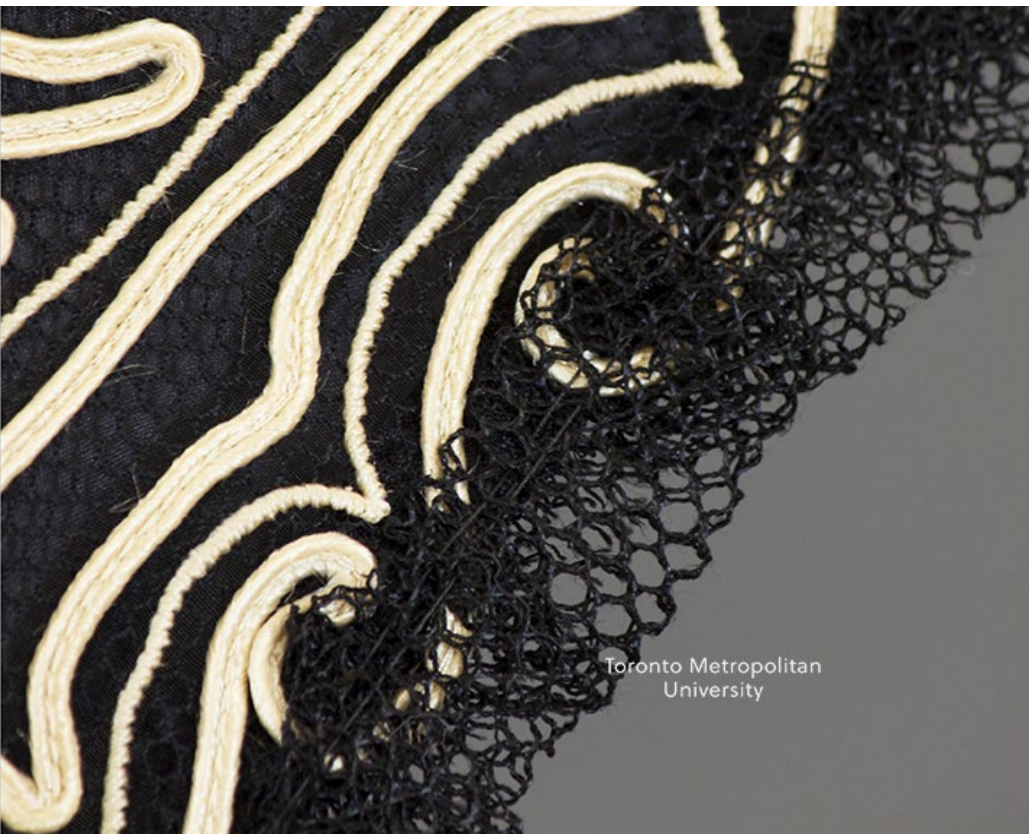
There is an open screw at the end to which would have been attached an ornamental handle that has since been lost. Otherwise, the parasol is in very good condition for its age. Had it actually been actively used to shield the owner from the sun, the black silk fabric probably would have been faded or showed signs of stress near the frame, but the material is intact and does not appear sun-damaged. The tip of the parasol is slightly worn, probably from resting it on the ground.

This parasol is one of several donated in 1989 by Helen Simpson. She also donated many other historic artifacts, including the oldest garment in the Collection: a green taffeta bodice and crinolined skirt dating to 1860. All of the parasols from this donation were dated to around the turn of the century.

Black silk parasol, ca. 1900-1910. Toronto Metropolitan University FRC1989.02.001. Wooden detail. Donated by Helen Service.



Black silk parasol, ca. 1900-1910.
Toronto Metropolitan University
FRC1989.02.001. Embroidery detail.
Donated by Helen Service.



Black silk parasol, ca. 1900-1910.
Toronto Metropolitan University
FRC1989.02.001. Lace detail. Donated
by Helen Service.



Toronto Metropolitan
University

Black silk parasol, ca.
1900-1910. Toronto
Metropolitan University
FRC1989.02.001.
Structure detail. Donated
by Helen Service.

On page 7 of the Ottawa Evening Journal dated Tuesday, June 12, 1900, there is an advertisement for the opening of an exhibit of "720 new and lovely" parasols at The Ross Co. of Ottawa Limited. The ad provides details of some of the parasols available including:

Thirty dozens in light silk crepes and chiffons, the latest creations of the London makers, and some from Berlin Germany, where the choices are these goods are now made. Thirty dozen sunshades of the latest styles. Some of taffeta silks, fancy circular striped, iridescent combinations, diagonal plaids and many other sorts of real beauty, gold and silver frames and rods, with natural and fancy handles at \$1.88, \$2.00, \$2.34, \$2.37, \$2.50, \$3.95. and \$4.50.

Black, and black and white taffeta parasols and chiffon parasols in eleven different styles, \$3.95 to \$12.00.

The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art has a large number of parasols in its collection. These can be seen [here](#).

For further reading: Beaujot, Ariel. *Victorian Fashion Accessories*. London: Berg, 2012. Print.

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