TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
real places telling real stories
ON TODAY’S AGENDA

- What are textiles?
- Mechanisms of deterioration
- Storage
- Handling
- Exhibit
- Cleaning
- Resources

COSTUMES, SAMPLERS, FLAGS, LINENS, QUILTS, TENTS AND SO MUCH MORE

WHAT ARE TEXTILES?
THREE CATEGORIES OF TEXTILES

› Animal fibers
  › Wool and silk
› Natural fibers
  › Cotton and linen
› Manmade fibers
  › Completely manmade (polyester)
  › Regenerated (rayon)
› Textile collections may also contain non-textiles
MECHANISMS OF DETERIORATION

- Oxidation
- Hydrolysis
- Cross-linking

PHYSICAL FORCES

- Textiles are easily damaged by stress
  - Tears
  - Repeated folding
  - Wear
  - Gravity
INSECT DAMAGE

- Carpet beetles
- Hide beetles
- Clothes moths

LIGHT DAMAGE

- Textiles are particularly vulnerable to fading.
- Light can also catalyze oxidation and hydrolysis of materials.
- Ultraviolet light is the most damaging to museum collections.
TEMPERATURE AND RELATIVE HUMIDITY

- High temperature accelerates chemical reactions.
- High relative humidity promotes mold growth and insect infestation.
- Low relative humidity causes loss of flexibility and desiccation.
- Fluctuations stress delicate textiles.
- Storage at a cool temperature (68-70) and 50-60% rH is recommended.
FLAT STORAGE

- Best for small textiles, and extremely fragile textiles like crazy quilts.
- Use storage boxes or drawers.
- Stack sturdy textiles between sheets of unbuffered tissue.
- Avoid stacking fragile textiles.
- Store fragile textiles with a support like a sheet of archival board covered with muslin.
- Minimize folds. Pad folds with acid-free tissue.
- Extremely fragile textiles and fragments may require a mat for safe storage.

ROLLED STORAGE

- Best for quilts, rugs, blankets and tablecloths and flags
- Roll around the exterior of an appropriately sized acid-free tube.
- Roll acid-free unbuffered tissue around the tube to create a leader.
- Interleave with tissue as you roll.
- Use two people to roll large objects to maintain tension.
- Wrap in muslin to protect from dust.
- Roll quilts with top side facing out.
COSTUMES

- Hanging storage
  - Best for fitted, constructed garments in good condition.
  - Do not use for fragile garments, heavy garments, or bias cut dresses.
  - Use padded hangers and dust covers.

COSTUMES

- Boxed storage
  - Best for unconstructed garments (kimonos), heavy and fragile garments and men’s pants.
  - Use as few folds as possible.
  - Pad folds with tissue to minimize stress.
  - Use a muslin sling in the box to help remove garments safely.
HANDLING TEXTILES

WEAR GLOVES WHEN HANDLING TEXTILES.

Nitrile is preferable to cotton.
RULES FOR HANDLING TEXTILES

- Never handle artifacts unless absolutely necessary.
- Move fragile textiles on a support.
- Know where you are going to put an object down before you pick it up.
- Remove jewelry, badges, belt buckles, etc. that could snag on delicate textiles and cause tears.
- Use two people to carry textiles when necessary.

ALWAYS TRANSPORT TEXTILES ON A SUPPORT

- Because textiles are not rigid they must be transported on a support.
- Roll flat objects around a tube for transport.
- Garments may be transported in boxes with tissue padding the folds.
- Heavy textiles with surface decorations may be fan folded into a box.
- Small textiles may be transported flat on a muslin-covered board.
TEXTILES SHOULD NEVER BE ON PERMANENT DISPLAY.

Rotate fragile textiles after 3 months. Sturdy textiles may be displayed for 6–9 months.
CASES

- Textiles in museums should be exhibited in cases to create a microclimate.
- In house museums keep use ropes and chair cords to protect textiles from patrons.

EXHIBIT OF SMALL TEXTILES

- Exhibit flat in case.
  - Lay on a padded board.
  - Textiles may be exhibited on a 15 degree angle
- Small textiles may also be exhibited framed.
  - Consult a conservator to determine the most appropriate framing method.
EXHIBIT OF LARGE FLAT TEXTILES

- Supports should distribute the weight of the textile.
- Appropriate supports include
  - Hook and loop tape
  - Archival tubes
  - Large slant boards
- Frames (quite common for flags)

EXHIBIT OF COSTUMES

- Sturdy costumes may be displayed on a mannequin
  - Ensure the mannequin supports the garment completely.
  - Do not put bias cut garments on mannequins for extended display.
- Fragile costumes may be displayed flat or on a slant board.
- Unconstructed costumes may be displayed draped over an archival tube
ANY CLEANING OR CONSERVATION OF TEXTILES SHOULD BE PERFORMED BY A CONSERVATOR.

http://www.conservation-us.org/membership/find-a-conservator

RESOURCES

- THC Museum Services Resources
  - NPS Museum Handbook
  - NPS Conserve-o-Grams
- Canadian Conservation Institute
- Smithsonian Conservation Institute
THANK YOU!

› Let’s stay in touch!
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