

Mounting Quilts for Exhibition

Mounting techniques for quilts vary and installation methods should be determined by the condition of the quilt and the exhibition style of the institution.

Generally, there are three styles of mounting quilts for exhibition:

1. Vertical wall mount
2. Angled or horizontal rack mount
3. Horizontal display on furniture

Vertical Mounting

There are two accepted methods for hanging a quilt:

1. Velcro method

This method involves attaching a velcro strip along the back of the top edge of the quilt. Velcro tape consists of two parts – one strip with “loops” and one with “hooks”. The hooked strip is the part which is attached to the quilt. This strip is first machine stitched to cotton twill tape. The twill tape is then hand-stitched to the quilt back (see Figure 1). The handstitching should just catch the inner layer of batting, but not be so deep as to penetrate to the quilt top.



Figure 1. Example of Velcro Method
(From *The Winterthur Guide to Caring For Your Collection*)

The strip with loops is attached to the wall with rust-free staples, or preferably attached to a wood strip that is then attached to the wall. This wooden strip should first be sealed with polyurethane and covered in clean, unbleached muslin, prior to attaching to wall.

Best practice using velcro:

According to curator Jan Mast of The Quilt Museum, the optimal procedure for using this method would be to apply velcro tape to all four sides of the quilt, with corresponding wooden wall strips. In this way, no stress is applied to the quilt. For quilts without true right angles, she suggests replacing the wooden strips with a wooden board cut to the exact shape of the quilt. This board should be sealed and covered with acid-free tissue prior to attaching to wall.

The velcro method is preferred by many curators due to its ease of use. It is applied with hand-stitches, thereby creating minimal stress for the quilt. Moreover, velcro can be wall-mounted on a slight angle to accommodate uneven edges. Use caution when removing the quilt from wall. Do not pull quilt. Instead, loosen one end of tape between loops and hooks. Then, run hands along length of tape to detach from wall.

Despite its popularity, there is however some question as to the archival quality of velcro tape, thus there is a second commonly used method.

2. Sleeve Method

This method involves attaching a fabric

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sleeve or casing to the top edge of the quilt, thus allowing for a curtain rod. The casing should be made of clean unbleached cotton muslin. The casing will be 4" wide, with the length determined by the quilt edge length. The casing should be hand-stitched to quilt 1" from edge (see Figure 2). A 1" wooden dowel will serve as the curtain rod. The dowel should be sealed first with polyurethane.



Figure 2 Example of Sleeve Method
(Adapted from <http://luannkessi.blogspot.com/2009/08/exhibit-quilt-preparation.html>)

Rack mounting (angled or horizontal)

Quilts not able to be hung, can be mounted and displayed on wooden racks. These racks are raised wooden frames built larger than the quilt's dimensions. Depending on the size of the quilt, the frame may also be topped with a wooden, or archival board. This board helps to minimize stress on the quilt, and prevent sagging (see Figure 3).

First, the wooden rack must be sealed with polyurethane. Then, it is wrapped with clean, unbleached cotton muslin strips or with acid-free tissue. Clean unbleached cotton muslin is next stretched across the top of the frame, either covering the wooden board top, or expanding the open gap, like an artist's canvas. The material is attached

to the frame with rust-free staples.



Figure 3 Example of Angled Rack Mounting
(Copyright 2012 by Matthew Craig)

The quilt is squared on the cotton muslin cover and hand-stitched to this backing. Since these stitches may be visible, it is suggested that either long, decorative stitches be used or, if the quilt is good condition, slipstitches. Either way, care should be taken that stitches may be easily removed in the future.

Horizontal on furniture

Depending on the institution, the best technique for displaying quilts may be on, or in, period furniture. Historic homes and period rooms lend themselves well to this technique and may be the only option due to space considerations.

Some curators use period chest of drawers or trunks for displaying quilts. This method is best suited for quilts in poor condition or for quilt tops only. Furniture used for display purposes should be lined with acid-free tissue or archival box liners to prevent damage to the textile. Some curators have described sealing exposed drawers or trunks with plexiglass in order to prevent visitor

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damage, but this is not recommended.

Best practice

Another horizontal display method for quilts is the use of a period bed. For quilts without significant damage, this is the ideal use of historic furniture for display purposes. Beds provide support, as well as context, for the quilt. Beds should first be covered with clean unbleached cotton muslin, or acid-free tissue, in order to protect the quilt.

Additional considerations

Whichever mounting method is selected, consider the following guidelines:

- Never place quilts in direct sunlight
- Any material in direct contact with quilt should be of archival quality
- Hung quilts should be taken down periodically to prevent stress and to clean/vacuum
- Never attach quilts to wall or frame with nails or metal clips
- When handling quilts, use clean cotton gloves
- Never carry quilts by the edges. When carrying bare textiles, drape over arms, across two people if necessary
- When hanging quilt, use more than one person to prevent stress/damage to the quilt

Once removed from exhibition, quilts should be placed in acid-free tissue and stored in archival boxes.

Best practice

If working with historic quilts, consult a textile conservator prior to implementing

mounting. Conservators can help assess the textile and determine which mounting method is most suitable.

References

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