

# *Textile Cleaning and Care*

## **Vocabulary:**

### *Conservation:*

The preservation of cultural property by way of examination, documentation, treatment, and preventive care, informed and supported by research and education. Executed using reversible techniques and materials.

### *Restoration:*

Treatment procedures intended to return cultural property to a known or assumed state, often through the addition of non-original material.

### *Cellulosics:*

Natural fibers derived from plants that need minimal processing to be manufactured into thread or fabric. To include: cotton, linen, hemp, and wood.

### *HEPA:*

“High Efficiency Particulate Air.” Usually in reference to filtration systems for environmental control or vacuums.

### *Modified natural fibers:*

Manufactured fiber made from processed plant cellulose. To include: rayon.

### *Proteins:*

Natural fibers derived from animals and insects that require some processing to be manufactured into thread or fabric. To include: wool, silk, fur/hair, and leather.

### *Synthetics:*

Manufactured fibers made from chemical synthesis. To include: nylon, acrylic, and polyester.

## **Decorative Arts Bibliography:**

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## **Textile Care:**

### *Tools:*

- Petroleum-free nitrile gloves – [www.labsafety.com](http://www.labsafety.com), [www.safewareinc.com](http://www.safewareinc.com)
- Cotton cloths – home improvement stores

- Brushes, “Hake” or “Windsor-Newton” brushes – art supply stores, [www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com)
- Brush cleaner, “The Master’s” – [www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com)
- Vacuum screens or knee high stockings – [www.gaylord.com](http://www.gaylord.com), home improvement and sewing notions stores, and pharmacies
- Distilled water – grocery stores
- Nylon bobbin net – Dukeries Textiles and Fancy Goods, UK (mail order via [dukeriestextiles@googlemail.com](mailto:dukeriestextiles@googlemail.com))
- Acid-free tissue paper, 18 lb and 12 lb weight: [www.gaylord.com](http://www.gaylord.com)
- Acid-free boxes – [www.gaylord.com](http://www.gaylord.com), [www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com), [www.hollingermetalede.com](http://www.hollingermetalede.com), [www.containerstore.com](http://www.containerstore.com)
- Tyvek™ HomeWrap® or CommercialWrap® – [www.lowes.com](http://www.lowes.com) or independent contractors
- Muslin – sewing notions stores, [www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com)
- Natural, unbleached cotton batting – [www.joann.com](http://www.joann.com), sewing notions stores
- Cotton tape – sewing notions stores

*Environment:*

- Light damages both the dyes of textiles and the fibers themselves. Visible light and ultraviolet light both contribute to deterioration. The only way to completely prevent light damage is to keep textiles in the dark. Remember, light damage is cumulative and nonreversible.
- For display, keep light levels low (5 footcandles/50 lux), limit display time, and consider keeping a cover or curtain on the object that can be drawn aside when necessary.
- Maintain stable climate year-round, avoiding fluctuations of more than 10 degrees in temperature or 20 percentage points of relative humidity. Humidity between 40 and 60% and temperatures between 65 and 73 degrees are reasonable in a home environment in our climate. Avoid storing items in attics and basements.
- Insects:
  - Clean objects thoroughly before storage. Garments soiled with food residue, perspiration, or feces attract pests.
  - Maintain the proper temperature and relative humidity. Some pests become more active when warm, others have a longer lifecycle when cold.
  - Isolate objects by wrapping them in acid free paper and placing them in boxes on elevated surfaces. Do not store them on the floor.
  - Monitor textiles routinely for signs of pest activity: grazing, holes, webs, and castings, and isolate objects for further review by a conservator if found to be affected.

*Textile handling and movement:*

- Wash and dry your hands frequently. Wear petroleum-free nitrile gloves ONLY if the textile features metallic decoration.
- When moving pieces, try to support the whole object. Request help if moving a large piece or, if the object is small enough, slide a rigid board under the object and lift the board. Cover the object to prevent movement.
- Avoid dragging or sliding textiles.

*Textile dusting:*

- Dust occasionally or as needed.
- Check condition of surface. Do not dust if the surface is brittle or raised.
- Vacuum using a HEPA filter equipped vacuum and fresh dust bag with freshly cleaned hoses and nozzles.
- Vacuum:
  - Avoid sucking off loose pieces by using a screen in one of two ways: cover the nozzle with a knee high stocking held on with a plastic band OR cover the textile with a flexible, bound screen that is placed in position.
  - Hold the nozzle 1.5"-3.25" above the object.
  - For three dimensional elements, gently brush the dust or dirt towards the nozzle. Small attachments can also be used with great caution.

*Textile cleaning:*

- Use extreme caution. Avoid and minimize the need to clean with proper storage.
- Check condition of surface. Do not clean if the object is large, has a raised or applied surface decoration, or is woven with different colored materials.
- Wet clean:
  - ONLY wet clean flat-woven cellulosic.
  - Lay object flat in screen to create a hammock.
  - Lay both in tray filled with 2" of distilled water. Soak 30 minutes. Gently disturb the water. Change the water as it discolors, until it soils no more.
  - Lift the hammock out of the water and place it on clean mattress pad. Blot (do not press) gently with a towel. Do not manipulate item while wet.
  - When damp, gently hand press the textile back into shape, easing the folds and wrinkles out. Do not reblock the object. Rounded seams can be gently encouraged back into shape by inserting or laying on a curved surface, such as a rolled towel.
- Dry clean:
  - ONLY dry clean wool and silk (unless previously laundered).
  - Stabilize any holes or weak areas prior to dry cleaning.
  - Select a dry cleaner that has national certifications and the ability to hand-clean. Personally speak to the cleaner before placing your objects in their care.
- *Prestige-Exceptional Fabricare*, Silver Spring, Maryland.
  - When in doubt consult a conservator.

*Textile repair:*

- Minor, superficial repairs may be addressed by the owner. Loose (but intact) seams and applied decorations can be tightened or reapplied.
  - Use identical materials (i.e.: Silk on silk, cotton on cotton) and make the repair using recommended stitches found on the Canadian Conservation Institute website.
- Structural and stability issues should be addressed by a professional.

*Textile Storage:*

- Flat storage:

- Textiles should not come in direct contact with wooden shelves or drawers; acid-free boards should be used, and changed when they begin to discolor. White cotton or linen sheets are another option.
- The best option is to store items flat, as over time fibers will weaken and items will break or shatter along folds and creases. If folding cannot be avoided, acid-free tissue should be used to pad the folds.
- Items should be stored in acid-free boxes. Each item should have its own box if possible, but if not heavier items should be stored beneath lighter ones and they should be interleaved with acid-free tissue.
- Hanging storage:
  - Do not hang items that are not in good condition, heavily beaded items, or garments cut on the bias.
  - Use sturdy hangers (avoid new wooden hangers), pad out the shoulders with batting, and cover the batting with muslin. Follow the step-by-step instructions on Sara Rivers-Cofield's *Commitment to Costumes* blog.
  - Cover the garment with a muslin cover or a polyethylene garment bag. Do not use dry cleaner bags or vinyl bags for long-term storage.
- Rolled storage:
  - It may be preferable to store large items (i.e. quilts) using acid-free tubes. The textile should be rolled with the right side facing out and interleaved with acid-free tissue. Tissue or muslin should be rolled around the outside of the item and secured with twill tape.

### **Textile and Costume Care Bibliography:**

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"Evil Agents of Deterioration." March 2012.

The Textile Museum. *Guidelines for the Care of Textiles.*

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Williams, Don and Louisa Jagger. *Saving Stuff: How to Care for and Preserve Your Collectibles, Heirlooms,  
and Other Prized Possessions.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

### **General Conservation Websites:**

The Canadian Conservation Institute: [www.cci-icc.gc](http://www.cci-icc.gc)

The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works: [www.aic-faic.org](http://www.aic-faic.org)

American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works: [www.conservation-us.org](http://www.conservation-us.org)

Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute: <http://www.si.edu/mci/index.html>

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