

Collections Care

Historic Textiles

Textiles have graced human lives for thousands of years. We have wrapped ourselves in them and decorated our homes with them. Up until the invention of rayon in the 1880s and its mass-production around 1905, textiles were always made from natural fibers, such as cotton, hemp, silk, linen, and wool. These natural materials, however, are very susceptible to deterioration mechanisms, including general wear, soiling, moisture, and light, and so historic textiles are often some of the most fragile items in any collection. As with any museum or personal collection, appropriate handling techniques and storage are the first line of defense in their preservation. General tips include handling textiles with very clean hands and no jewelry¹, not allowing others to wear or try on historic clothing, monitoring for moisture and pest activity, and good housekeeping in storage and exhibition areas. Further tips on caring for historic textiles, including quilts, clothing, and flags, can be found below.

General Textile Care

- American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works (AIC): [“Caring for Your Treasures – Textiles”](#)
- Connecting to Collections Care:
 - [“Notes From the Home Front: Care & Handling of Heirloom Textile Collections” Webinar](#) (Presenter: Jane Hammond of ICA-Art Conservation, Cleveland, OH)
 - [“Live Question and Answer Session on Storage and Handling of Textiles” Webinar](#) (Presenter: Mary Ballard of the Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute)
- Henry Ford Museum: [“Antique Textiles and Costumes”](#) (by Mary M. Fahey, Chief Conservator)
- Minnesota Historical Society: [“Conservation and Preservation of Heirloom Textiles” Video Series](#)
- National Park Service: [Museum Handbook: Appendix K, “Curatorial Care of Textile Objects”](#)
- Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute: [“How to Handle Antique Textiles and Costumes”](#)
- Victoria and Albert Museum (London, UK): [“Caring for Your Textiles”](#)

Quilts

- Connecting to Collections Care: [“Practical Solutions: Quite Care and Display” Webinar](#) (Presenter: Camille Myers Breeze of Museum Textile Services, Andover, MA)
- Canadian Conservation Institute: [“Basic Care: Quilts”](#)
- International Quilt Study Center & Museum (University of Nebraska-Lincoln): [“At-Home Textile Care”](#)

¹ Gloves mask the tactile sensation of fingers, which may lead to inadvertent rough handling and potential damage. They should, however, be used if the textile might contain metal or hazardous materials, such as arsenic. Accelerant- and powder-free nitrile gloves are best.

Clothing

- Connecting to Collections Care: [“Mounting Garments for Display” Webinar](#) (Presenters: Kathleen Kiefer and Petra Slinkard of the Indianapolis Museum of Art)
- Karen M. DePauw: *The Care and Display of Historic Clothing* (book) (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017)
- Victoria and Albert Museum (London, UK): [“Caring for & Wearing Historic Costumes”](#)

Flags

- Connecting to Collections Care: [“Flag Rolling and Storage” Webinar](#) (Presenter: Anne Ennes, National Park Service)
- Inside the Conservator’s Studio: [“How to Store Your Flag”](#) (by Gwen Spicer of Spicer Art Conservation)
- National Park Service: [“Flag Rolling and Storage”](#) (Conserve O Gram Series, August 2009, Number 16/5)