Care of Historic Silk

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Textile Conservation Workshop

Connecting to Collections Webinar
July 22nd, 2020
Itinerary

- History
- Production
- Objects in collections
- Problems with silk
- Caring for silk textiles
  - Treatment
  - Storage
  - Display
- Review
“Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk”
By Emperor Huizong of Song - The Yorck Project (2002) 10.000
Museum of Fine Arts, online collection, Public Domain,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=153058

Silk Weaving on a Loom
Attributed to Liang Kai - Cleveland Museum of Art, online collection
"The Song Economic Revolution: Textiles and Silk". Asia for Educators.
Columbia University., Public Domain,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=37332584
Moth, cocoon and silk worm
[Image](https://www.quora.com/Do-butterfly-come-from-silk-worm-or-caterpillar)

**Protein fiber**
- Triangular fibers
- Double-stranded, coated in sericin
- Long strands- up to 3000 ft

http://content.inflibnet.ac.in/data-server/eacharya-documents/5704da968ae36ca4cbb0afc0_INFIEP_229/563/ET/the_silk_polymer_and_its_system.htm
Reeling cocoons
https://lilyabsinthe.com/2015/05/01/shattered-silk-lily-absinthe-looks-at-silks/

Woman Weaving at Loom, Japan, Edo Period
Yanagawa Shigenobu I (1787–1832)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
De-gumming removes sericin
• Reduces stiffness
• Triangular fibers are more lusterous

De-gumming silk
http://www.wormspit.com/degumming.htm

Dyeing silk
http://www.wormspit.com/dyeing.htm
Examples of Historic Silk
Samplers

Private Collection

Private Collection
Needleworks

Litchfield Historical Society

Litchfield Historical Society
Quilts

Baby Blocks Quilt
Private Collection
Flags

Japanese Battle Flag, WWII
Private Collection

Militia Flag
Private Collection
Tapestries

Private Collection

Private Collection

Tapestry weave closeup
Furnishings

Damask curtain panel
Newark Museum of Art

Silk upholstered settee
Caramoor

Damask pillow
Private Collection
Ethnographic textiles

Kaitag, Dagistan
Private Collection

Suzani, Uzbekistan
Private Collection

Kimono, Japan
Newark Museum of Art

Metallic yarn with fiber core
Costumes

Christening Gown, mounted
Private Collection

Court Ensemble
Keeler Tavern Museum

18th c. style silk brocade gown
Lyndhurst National Trust
Beaded Flapper Dress
Private Collection

Silk Bonnet
Private Collection

Stockings
Museum of the City of New York

Shoes
Shelton Historical Society
Problems with Silk
Dye bleed on a sampler
Private Collection

Bleeding embroidery yarn
Private Collection
Degradation

Shredded silk christening coat
Private Collection

Marsh hat with silk ribbons
South Carolina Confederate Relic Room

Heavily fractured silk flag
Private Collection
Faded front
Vibrant colors on back

Needlepoint Chair Seat
Private Collection
The Silk Merchant, Japan, 1892 (oil on canvas)
Robert Frederick Blum (1857-1903)
Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio, USA
Weighted Silk

Shattering skirt lining

Shattering bodice lining
Damaged bodice lining

Shattered crazy quilt fabric
Moth larvae and fras
https://entomology.ca.uky.edu/ef609

Embroidery loss and insect casing
Caring for Historic Silk

Treatment, Storage and Display
Vacuuming

• Cover with fiberglass screening
• Fiberglass should have protected edges to prevent snagging
• Low suction
• Gentle, even application with little to no pressure
Variable speed vacuum

- If unavailable, place fingers between brush head and object or screen

- Canister vacuum with variable speed and HEPA filter, if possible

Nilfisk vacuum with hose
Micro-attachments
Textile wrapped and prepared for freezing
DO NOT ATTEMPT TO WASH SILK!

- Fragile fabrics will get worse
- Dyes may bleed

Please consult with a conservator!

https://www.culturalheritage.org/about-conservation/find-a-conservator
Silk crazy quilt with damaged fabrics
Nylon net for consolidation
Nylon net stitched over damaged area
• Cotton thread and curved needle
• Stitches around perimeter in strong seam area
• Net is nearly invisible once trimmed
Damaged silk

Silk stabilized

Ship Picture
Private Collection
Needleworks mounted on wooden shingles
Discolored fabric and oxidized mounting materials
Haze on glazing
Mounting a sampler on an archival board

Re-framed sampler
Storage

Environmental monitoring

Textiles rolled on acid-free tubes
Acid-free materials

Acid-free storage boxes
• Choose size to fit textile with minimal folding
• Pad out any folds with tissue

Unbuffered acid-free tissue
• Only use unbuffered tissue with silk

Labels
• Labels with pictures allow identification without opening the box
Packing costume

Pad out folds and creases with tissue

Cover embellishments and closures that could snag using tissue

Pad area surrounding costume with tissue to prevent movement

Place a photograph of the piece on the outside of the box

Men’s silk vest padded out for storage

Gown padded out for storage
Padded hangers, Spicer Art Conservation

http://insidetheconservatorsstudio.blogspot.com/2014/11/not-on-that-hanger.html
Interior support strap for weight distribution
Display

- Environmental control
- Limit ultraviolet light
- Acid-free materials
- Rotation/limited display time
Examples of improper display
A Velcro hanging mechanism is hand sewn onto a textile.
Tapestry with supportive straps and header on the reverse

Tapestry with dust cover and velcro
Altering a mannequin with net

Mannequin with black stockinet cover
Altering a mannequin

Research silhouette and order appropriate form
Measure interior of garment-shoulders, torso, waist, and hips
Pad out necessary areas with cotton or polyester batting
Cover form with cotton or polyester knit fabric of an appropriate color
Create under dressing layers as needed

Dorfman mannequin with net arms and custom cotton shift
Velvet gown on an altered form
Private Collection

Skirt secured to mannequin
Flapper dress before and after framing
Review

• History and production
• Objects in collections
• Problems with silk
  • Environmental exposure, degradation, weighting and aging
• Caring for silk textiles
  • Treatment—cleaning and stabilization
  • Storage—environment, materials and packing
  • Display—environment, mounting and mannequins
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www.textileconservation
workshop.org

Visits available by appointment