

TEXTILE PRESERVATION

The term textile is derived from the Latin *textilis* and French *texere* meaning “to weave.” Textiles include any filament, fiber, or yarn that can be made into fabric or cloth using a wide variety of materials and techniques. Textiles have many different purposes in our lives including artistic, technical, cultural, or sentimental.

Most antique textiles are composed of natural fibers including wool, cotton, linen, or silk; however other historic textiles also are made of synthetic fibers which pose unique preservation problems.

From military uniforms to homemade quilts, textiles tell stories of the past and how people lived.

Storage

Select a location with a stable, dark climate, such as a closet or under a bed. Avoid attics and basements because of extreme fluctuations of temperature and humidity.

Best practices recommend storing materials in a climate of 65-70°F and 50-55% relative humidity.

Ideally, textiles should be stored flat in archive storage boxes, rolled on acid-free, lignin-free cardboard tubes or hanging textile storage. Regular cardboard, wood, metal, and most plastics should be avoided because they emit acids or chemicals that cause damage to textiles.

Flat Storage

Recommended for fragile items. Flat storage provides balanced support that helps reduce fiber damage. Stacking and folding textiles should be avoided. If folding is unavoidable, folded areas should be padded to support and soften the creases in the fabric.

Rolled Storage

Recommended for rugs, quilts, and large flat textiles. The decorative side of textiles should face the outside on the roll. Textiles may be layered between acid-free tissue as it is rolled. Rolled textiles should be covered with unsized, washed muslin or acid-free tissue.

Hanging Storage

Recommended for costumes that are neither fragile nor heavy. Padded hangers provide a wide surface to support the textile.

Materials like hats, gloves, sleeves, and shoes may be lightly stuffed with acid-free tissue to help keep their shape.

Fabrics should not be stored in tightly sealed boxes, frames, or plastic bags, as moisture and other damaging vapors may be trapped.

