HOME and AWAY
APPROACHES TO TEXTILE CONSERVATION AROUND THE WORLD

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Edited by Victoria Allan

UKIC
UNITED KINGDOM INSTITUTE FOR CONSERVATION OF HISTORIC AND ARTISTIC WORKS

TEXTILE section

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FOREWORD

'Home and Away – approaches to textile conservation around the world' was the title of the forum held by the UKIC Textile Section to coincide with the 11th Annual General Meeting in 2002. The all-encompassing title was intended to attract as broad a variety of contributions as possible. This publication includes the papers given by five speakers, as well as two posters displayed at the forum; their geographical references include Mongolia, Singapore, the Czech Republic, Africa and Tibet.

Conservators described their experiences of working away from their countries of origin or training; they referred to practical problems of working far from home with limited resources and made observations about other cultures' attitudes towards textiles and their conservation. The cultural origins of textiles, such as Tibetan thangkas, were demonstrated to have affected choices made in their treatment and display in the UK. And conservators with training and experience of work in countries with which few of us are familiar gave us a valuable insight into techniques which often diverged from the UK experience of conservation.

Thanks are due to Clare Stoughton-Harris for organising the forum, to Sarah Foskett and Karen Thompson for their help, and to the Textile Conservation Centre for hosting the event at the Winchester Campus of the University of Southampton and for inviting delegates to tour their conservation studios. Thanks also to May Berkhouwer who chaired the event, and to the members of the Textile Section Committee who made their contributions to the day's success.

Victoria Allan

COLLABORATIVE CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION PROGRAM WITHIN THE EMERGING COUNTRY OF MONGOLIA

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Introduction

In April of 1998 a US project team travelled to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, to work with the Cultural Heritage Centre, an office of the Ministry of Enlightenment, to implement a three-phrase project entitled 'Cultural Preservation Programs for Mongolia'.

'Cultural Preservation Programs for Mongolia' was formulated as an outgrowth of two previous projects: 'Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan', an exhibition organised by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, and a cultural needs assessment produced by consultant Hal Fisher in 1996 in association with the Ministry of Culture of Mongolia. The Ministry of Culture officially accepted the 'Needs Assessment' document in 1996.

Background

Mongolia's museums have been severely impacted by the country's transition from a centralised economy towards a free market economy. Cultural organisations, which once enjoyed 100 percent government funding have, under the transition economy, been thrust into a situation where they are responsible for funding significant portions of their budget through non-government sources. A professional staff member's wages are only $50 a month. Government initiatives, decentralisation, a lack of capital, and deterioration of buildings pose significant challenges to the preservation of Mongolia's Cultural Heritage on a museum level.

In an effort to streamline government operations, in 1997 the Ministry of Culture was consolidated with the ministries for science, technology, and education to form the Ministry of Enlightenment. All government ministries now have the same

organisation plan, consisting of four departments: Information, Monitoring and Assessment; Strategic Management and Planning; Policy Implementation Co-ordination; and Public Administration and Management.

The national museums are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Enlightenment, but with new economic challenges, museum directors have more responsibility for developing revenues to support their operating budgets. The common strategies for achieving operating funds are leasing out museum space for commercial endeavours, (which can range from private gift shop to film processing outlet, bank, or computer training classroom) and realising fees from foreign loan exhibitions (which at the time of writing this paper are happening at an extremely high rate).

The projects

In 1998 the principal components were: a five-day art handling workshop for museum professionals, a ten-week residency for a professional conservator conducting a needs assessment survey in Ulaanbaatar and surrounding areas, and the development of a master plan for the national collections. The project team consisted of Hal Fisher, Linda Scheifler Marks, and Teresa Heady.

The five-day art handling workshop was carried out in conjunction with the head of the Cultural Heritage Centre, Khisigbayar, Linda Shiefler Marks and Teresa Heady. The Cultural Heritage Centre operates under the auspices of the Ministry, with the director of the Centre reporting to the general secretary, who oversees the ministry's day-to-day operations. The Cultural Heritage Centre is responsible for the preservation of Mongolian culture. The director of the Centre, a well-trained paintings conservator, works closely with the national museums to ensure that objects are registered and that the collections are maintained.

The workshop was broken down into lectures and practical sessions. Each day consisted of a lecture on two different art materials and one collection handling issue. A demonstration was given and followed by a practical, in which all the museum professionals participated. At the end of each day different groups were formed; they presented problems and asked the audience to problem-solve for them. The workshop was written up in manual form in Mongolian so that participants and their institutions had reference materials to draw from.

The survey

It was decided that 8 of the most important collections would be surveyed during my ten-week residency. It was hoped that at each museum, workshops could be organised on different aspects of the collections care which arose as the survey was being carried out.

After the survey was completed, the recommendations were written up and taken to the directors of the different museums. It was determined that appropriate storage for the most important national collection was a priority due to the conditions in which the collection was stored. The museum, which responded positively, was the Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts. The project co-ordinator was able to collaborate with the then museum director to start implementing the most achievable recommendations. So in July of 2000 the project was taken further. Using the document produced in the 1998 survey of museum collections and buildings, and after many months of careful planning and working with both the director and his staff, the storage project began.

It began rather smoothly; all was in place before we arrived in Ulaan Bataar, but due to unforeseen circumstances our progress was slightly impeded by the failure of any supplies to arrive. Our container of supplies was stuck in Chinese customs. The project was to be completed in 8 weeks; when the container was finally released from customs, we had 8 days left before I had to go home. It was not possible to tackle the 3 storage areas that needed most improving whilst waiting for the supplies to arrive, so the museum staff and I decided that the area next to be prioritised would be the Thangka storage area. This work received a stamp of approval from the Prime Minister in conjunction with his party and the Ministry of Enlightenment.

The museum staff were incredible, and having done so much preparatory work whilst waiting for the supplies, an amazing amount was accomplished before I left; I felt confident that the staff would carry on after my departure.

Conclusion

Due to the relationship that has been built up over the years with the Mongolian government through these projects, there are now plans to implement and complete a three-year project for the redevelopment of the former Lenin museum (which had been turned into shops). This building was assessed in 1998 and was found suitable for the permanent storage and display of the collections of Mongolian Art which are now housed in unsuitable buildings all around the city.

It has always been the remit of the project leader that in order to help the Mongolian government with its cultural heritage needs, the help would have to be consistent, show cultural sensitivity, use as few outsiders as possible, use them only to train those who deal with the collections, and to do follow-up visits as often as possible.

SIX WEEKS IN SINGAPORE – CONSERVATION FOR THE ASIAN CIVILISATIONS II MUSEUM

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In January 2002 I spent six weeks working at the Heritage Conservation Centre, an institution of the National Heritage Board in Singapore. It was an opportunity to work in a relatively new conservation laboratory, on Asian textiles with which I was relatively unfamiliar. It was also a chance to refresh my ideas about conservation and to exchange information with the Singaporean and foreign conservators. In return I hoped to help by completing practical projects, and sharing my experiences of conserving and installing textiles for major museum projects.

This is an exciting time for Singapore's heritage industry as real efforts are being made to develop culture awareness and interest in museums. The National Heritage Board (NHB) is the organisation responsible for this development, which the Government is committed to funding. The National Heritage Board's mission is 'to explore and present the heritage and nationhood of the people of Singapore in the context of their ancestral cultures, their links with Southeast Asia, Asia and the world through the collection, preservation, interpretation and display of objects and records' (1).

The organisational structure of the NHB is divided in three:

- Divisions - which includes The Heritage Conservation Centre
- Institutions - National Archives of Singapore, Singapore History Museum, Singapore Art Museum and Asian Civilisations Museum
- Subsidiaries, which includes the Singapore Philatelic Museum.

The Heritage Conservation Centre (HCC) is a repository and conservation facility. Its mission is 'to manage, care for and facilitate access to the heritage collections under the guardianship of the Board, in accordance to international standards and to promote heritage preservation through dissemination based on continuing research and professional development in heritage issues' (1).

There are 4 departments:

- Registration (collections and repository management, access, documentation and preventive conservation)
- Conservation (preventive and interventive conservation, research)
- Photography
- Administration/Estates Management.

The custom-designed building, the first of its kind in Asia, was funded by a government grant of 22.5 million Singapore dollars. It is divided into two distinct areas - a collection zone with strict environmental and security controls, and a non-collection zone with less stringent requirements. There are object handling facilities on Level 1, repositories on Levels 2 and 3, and conservation labs on Level 4, with the possibility for expansion with the addition of a 5th floor.

There are 15 stores, with 8000sq m of storage space for furniture, archives, textiles, garments, metals, archaeology, organics, paintings and mixed media. The registrars and museum assistants are in charge of the stores, into which the Conservation Department has a lot of input in an advisory role for systems and materials. In general the stores were well laid out, and used simple effective systems, with metal racking and drawers. All stores had spacious, well laid out areas for working with objects. Lighting is generally good, but in the organics store the high metal racking is placed directly under the lights, making the lighting poor in the aisles and consequently in the shelves. In the garment store objects are stored in metal cupboards, in drawers with a Correx base. The objects are laid out flat and covered with tissue paper, with the paper object identification label laid on top. Each drawer can be completely pulled out and placed on four wooden trestles so the objects can be viewed without removal from it, which helps to save on the requirement for workspace and can reduce object movement. The majority of the flat textiles are stored on rollers in a compactor system in the textile store. Each textile is rolled onto an acid-free tube, covered with acid-free tissue paper and labeled.

The stores form part of the commitment to increasing public outreach. A programme for schools was developed at HCC in 2001, and guided school groups now tour the facilities on a regular basis. It is hoped to extend this to other groups soon. There are posters about conservation, storage methods, pest control and so on throughout the stores and the building generally, giving good practical information about the work of the HCC.

Preventive conservation is the responsibility of all staff at HCC. The Conservation Department runs the Integrated Pest Management Strategy. There is a receiving and holding area for examination of incoming objects on the ground floor of the building. In addition to freezing, objects can be treated with the Anoxia system, and a nitrogen bubble is brought in through an external agency when large-scale fumigation is required. After pest treatment the objects are moved to the examination room, where they are surveyed by the conservation department prior to storage. Each object is documented, a condition report made out, and minor treatments such as brush vacuuming and tape removal carried out. The object is then put into a transit room until it can go into storage.

On Level 4 at HCC there are conservation laboratories for paintings, paper, textiles, artefacts, large and heavy objects. There is also a conservation research laboratory, and a small photography studio. The laboratories are open plan, comprising a long corridor with spaces off it for paintings, textiles and paper. The artefacts laboratory is a separate space. The textile laboratory is a large space with one wall of windows.

The ceilings in the lab are high, and the fluoro-diffuser lighting often was insufficiently bright for close working. There are currently no task lights available. The Nederman extraction units have the motor fitted in the roof space and are very effective and quiet when running. There is no large equipment, like a wash table or a vacuum table, and no dyeing facility. Senior textile conservator, Patricia Moncrieff, is currently developing the laboratory and building up the supplies of equipment and materials.

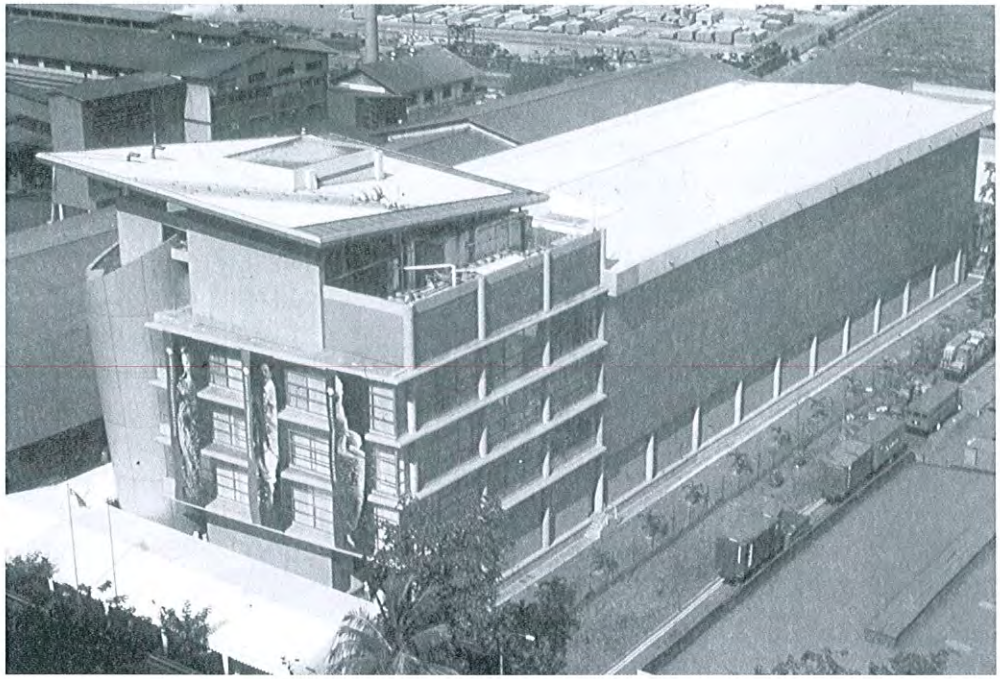
The main project at the moment is conservation for the new Asian Civilisations Museum II. The ACM II, due to open early in 2003, is located in the newly refurbished colonial Empress Place Building. The exhibits are divided into 4 regions, West, South, Southeast and East Asia. In addition to the galleries there is a performing arts area, Children's Centre and Discovery Room, as well as a large temporary exhibition area which it is hoped will attract international exhibitions. Behind the scenes are storage areas, photography rooms and collections, documentation and examination rooms for incoming and outgoing objects. There are three conservation labs, but no conservators will be based permanently at the museum. The building is air-conditioned, zoned into object spaces on a 24-hour system and public ones on an 8 hour one. The windows are UV filtered, but there is generally little ingress of natural light. Housekeeping and inspection procedures for pests will be based on those practised at HCC.

Approximately 1500 objects will be installed in the ACM II, of which 150 are textiles. In 2000 Frances Hartog surveyed many of the textiles and prepared a report on treatment proposals and display options. However the object lists subsequently changed and many of the objects were dropped or changed. Much time was spent in the stores during the six weeks with the conservator, curator and designers, looking at case layouts and display/installation options, and surveying new additions to the list.

The design company for the project, GSM Design, is based in Montreal. The architect and exhibition designer, Patrick Keyser, is based in Singapore and is the main link with the team in Montreal. The case layouts and revisions are relayed back to Montreal to be altered, and this can have time implications for the team in Singapore. Also, many case layouts were originally done with little conservation input due to the timing of the project, and subsequently have had to be altered as a result of working more closely with the conservators. As a further consequence textile conservation treatment options and times are now being restricted due to the lack of time.

While at HCC I worked on four practical conservation projects, prepared reports for two object treatments and participated in the discussions on display and installation of textiles for ACM II. I also participated in general activities at HCC such as attending lectures and so on. Patricia Moncrieff, senior textile conservator, supervised the placement. Patricia has worked in conservation in Australia for the past twenty years, in museums and latterly running her own business. We worked very well together and I enjoyed her enthusiastic and open approach to conservation and her great knowledge of the Asian textile craft. Patricia and I have slightly different approaches to conservation, and this stimulated much interesting debate, for instance about the merits or otherwise of the use of adhesives for textile conservation. We looked at a wide variety of objects for the ACM II project and discussed treatment options. The general approach being taken is of minimal intervention, due in part to the time-scale of the project and the lack of manpower.

The treatments carried out were generally stitch repairs. These included the royal garments that belonged to Sultan Abdul Rahman Riau-Lingga (1860 – 1870). The unlined jacket and trousers are of cream silk with a supplementary weft design in red, blue and gold. The jacket fabric is generally weak, with a number of splits in a horizontal direction. The body of the jacket was given a full support of undyed silk crepeline, with laid thread couching in a silk thread over areas of damage. No support lines were worked through the body of the jacket. The jacket and trousers required a mount for display. A soft sculpture of Plastazote covered with white cotton lawn was made for the jacket. The sleeve inserts were covered with silk fabric to enable them to slip in easily. The jacket does not close at the front edge and a strip of flesh - coloured silk was stitched over this area to cover the white fabric. A similar soft sculpture was made for the top section of the trousers, with tabs of Velcro stitched to the inner waist as a means of securing them. This was a joint project with Patricia and Tan, the museum assistant who works in conservation on a part-time basis. Conservation is still a relatively new profession in Singapore and there is currently no training available in the country. At the moment few of the Singaporean conservators have undergone formal training. HCC is committed to sending assistant conservators and technicians on internships and attachments at overseas institutions, and are also trained locally by the senior conservators.



The Heritage Conservation Centre

Lynn McClean and Patricia Moncrieff, senior textile conservator, HCC, with the completed 19th century Indonesian hanging.

The second project was a rare and unusual late 19th century hanging from Sumba Island, Indonesia. The embroidered motifs, fertility symbols of a woman surrounded by female babies, a lobster and jellyfish, are normally found on skirts. The hanging, which is of undetermined use, is made of undyed cotton fabric embroidered with bark threads. The fabric is very distorted and wavy down the side edges, due to the embroidery. There are a number of white and pink coloured stains from mould, notably across the central section. There are some areas of loss and weakness of embroidery, again notably in the central band, and at the top and bottom edges. Again this was a joint project with Patricia. The hanging was given a full lining of undyed linen fabric, with running stitches worked around each motif to secure these heavier areas to the support fabric. A brick-stitch was then worked over the damaged areas. All stitching was worked with a cotton thread. The hanging was too long for the display case, which has a depth of 2m, so 40mm had to be turned at the top, and 70mm at the bottom. Velcro was stitched to the top edge for hanging.

The final practical treatment was the front panel of a mid-19th century Chinese robe. This is an example of Kesi, a silk and gold metal thread Chinese tapestry weave with motifs of flowers, bird and mountains. The panel had been conserved in the past, with a full stitched support onto gold silk fabric, which had been bonded onto an open-weave cotton fabric for body. Areas of damage and weakness had been couched. The fabric had not been turned under along the edges of the robe, but left square. The curator was very keen that the fabric be turned in order to define the shape of the robe. The edges were pinked, turned and herringbone stitched with a Stabiltex thread. The robe will be stitched to a padded board and displayed in a shadow box.

In conclusion, the placement at the Heritage Conservation Centre proved to be an interesting and useful experience. It was a busy time for the conservators working on the ACM II project and it was great to be involved. I appreciated being able to concentrate on practical treatments, and exchange information about display and installation of objects for the project. I learned from the frank discussions about differences in approaches, both to textile conservation and conservation generally. A short-term exchange of this nature is a valuable means of both professional and self-development, and as such is to be recommended.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the National Heritage Board of Singapore and The Heritage Conservation Centre for hosting my placement, particularly Loh Heng Noi, Director of HCC. Thanks are also due to my colleagues and friends at HCC, especially Patricia, who made it so enjoyable and were so enthusiastic and interested in conservation at the National Museums of Scotland. Finally to the NMS to setting me free for six weeks. The trip was made possible by generous grants from the NHB and the Friends of the National Museums of Scotland.

Notes

1. 'Heritage Enriches' National Heritage Board Annual Report 2000 – 2001.

TAPESTRY RESTORATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC USING THE 'EXTRA LITTLE LOOM'

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Since its origins at the turn of the twentieth century, tapestry resoration in the Czech Republic has been closely connected with the country's tapestry weaving workshops. Tapestry restoration involved reweaving using a needle; this method was considered the only one giving aesthetically acceptable results. The ethical and technological limitations of the method were not admitted until the 1980's when the restoration of some very fine tapestries with large missing areas initiated the first experiments with the 'extra little loom'.

The technique using the 'extra little loom' was developed by Josef Muller, one of the Czech Republic's finest tapestry designers, and gradually improved throughout the 1990's by a group of conservators from the Tapestry Studio at Jindrichuv Hradec in co-operation with Czech National Heritage. The method using the 'extra little loom' can be applied to tapestries with conspicuous defects, where a large proportion of warp and weft is missing (Fig. 1). It is suitable for the restoration of tapestries that are part of an historical interior, where the aesthetic reconstruction of a work is desired. It is essential that good evidence of the missing area exists, in the form of an original cartoon or an extant matching tapestry.

After wet-cleaning the tapestry using Syntapon N, the damaged area is secured by stitching it to silk crepeline. At the edge of the damaged area, new warp threads are inserted between the original warp threads. On the reverse of the tapestry the new warps are secured by stitching them through firm linen tapes.

Using a prepared 'mini cartoon', and guided by fragments of the original tapestry, the restoration patch is woven, with the new warps lying just above the original (Fig. 2). It is possible to match the newly woven patch to the original throughout the process, in terms not only of the technique of weaving, colour and shape of the original design, but also the feel of the structure and tensions of yarns. Once the patch is complete the ends of the new warps are withdrawn from the linen tapes and finished off on the reverse of the tapestry.

The indisputable advantage of this method is that the reconstructed patch is fully reversible and damaged original parts are conserved, hidden beneath the patch. In a variation of the technique, it is also possible to weave a patch that is slightly larger

Figure 1 The 'extra little loom' in use. New warps are stretched over and lie just above the damaged tapestry.

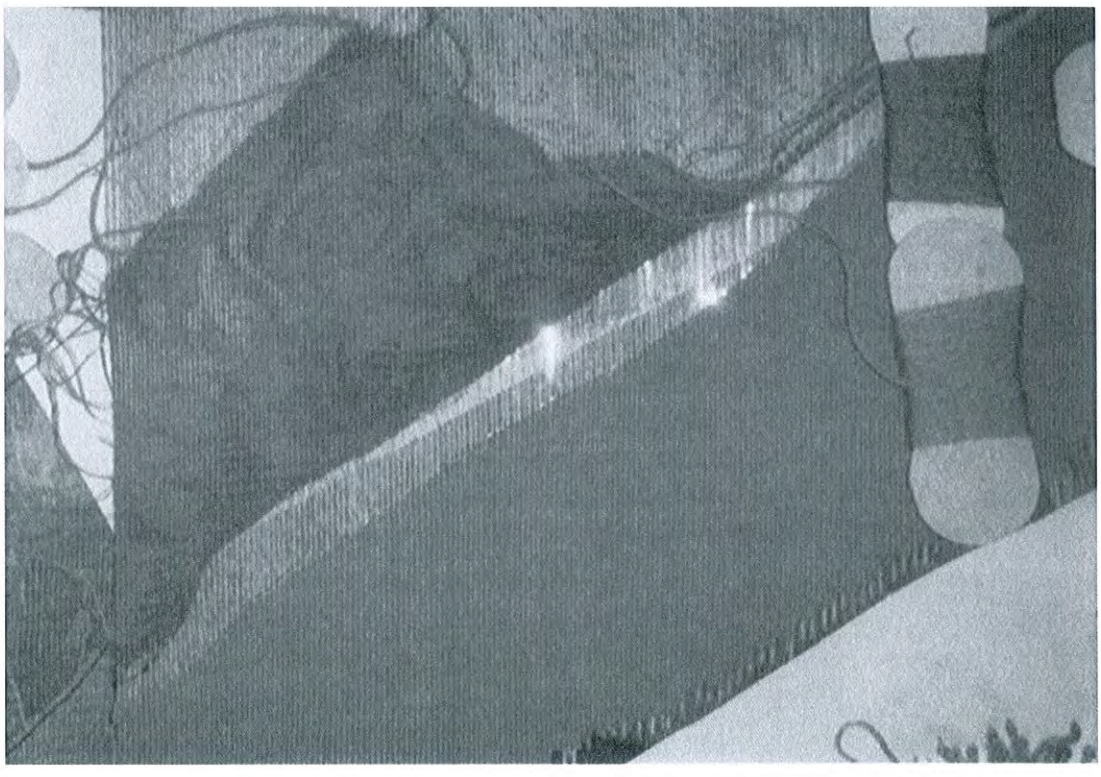

Figure 2 Weaving a patch in progress; note the 'mini cartoon' inserted between the damaged tapestry and the new warps. ('Building Noah's Ark', Brussels 1650.)

than the hole and (once weaving is complete) to apply it from the reverse of the tapestry, securing it using stitching. Both of these techniques were used for the first time when conserving the borders on a Brussels tapestry from the collections of Castle Hluboka (dated 1645). Seven extant tapestries in the set had similar borders from which it was possible to create 'mini cartoons' for the missing areas (Figs. 3 & 4).

A tapestry with very large holes and extensive weak areas was also treated using these techniques. 'Building Noah's Ark' is a Brussels tapestry dated 1650 and is from the collections of Castle Benesov nad Ploucnici. Specially woven patches of neutral colours were inserted behind holes in the borders and stitched in position; support stitching throughout weak areas was worked through to these patches. In this case 'mini cartoons' were made using photographs of a tapestry from another collection made from the same original cartoon.

Currently the technique using the 'extra little loom' is combined with more conventional conservation stitching techniques. Although results are often highly satisfactory, the method is still experimental and can only be used in the treatment of a limited number of tapestries.

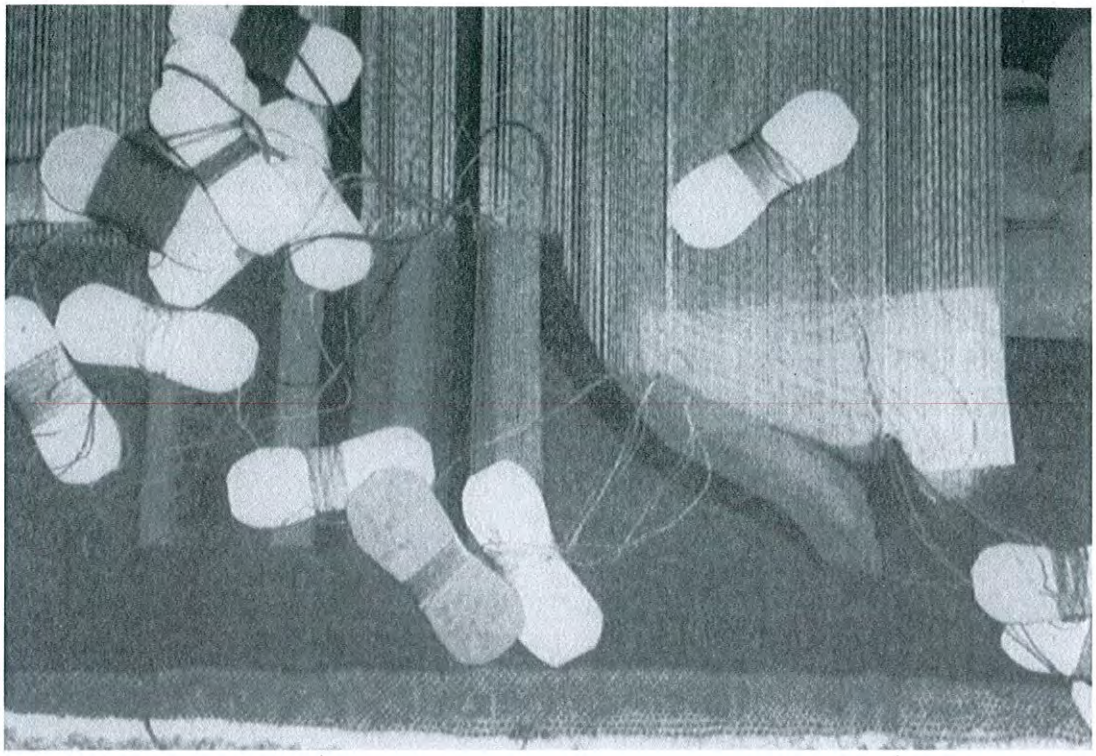

Figure 3

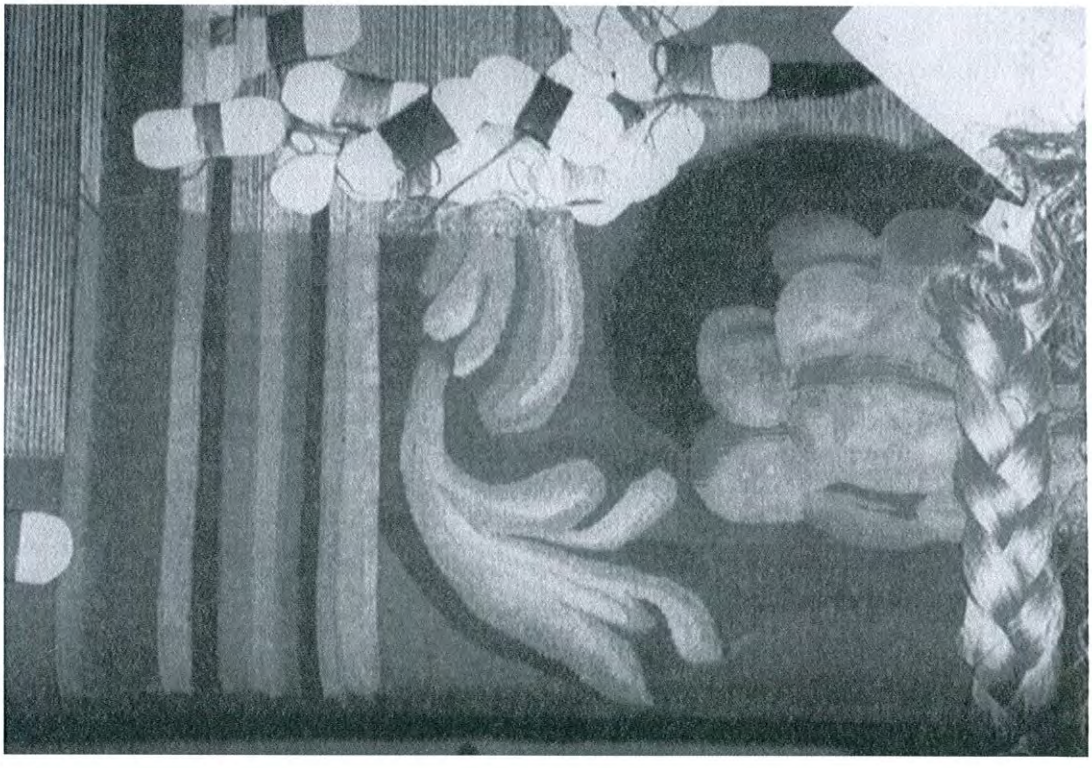

Figure 4

Figures 3 & 4 Reconstructing a damaged border in progress.

CONSERVATION OF THE CONTEMPORARY: AN AFRICAN CHALLENGE

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Introduction

Textiles, as part of the world's cultural heritage, are evidence of human stories and history. Many of us have family memories or stories relating to textiles worn or used on specific family occasions and for religious, ceremonial or official celebrations. As such, textile artefacts reflect the identity and culture of individuals or communities and are conserved as 'historical documents' (Eastop 2000:17) in museums.

Contemporary artefacts permeate our daily life and form our 'material' culture. From commodities to art, the contemporary simultaneously provides a representation of our aesthetic and social lives. Their roles and values differ according to diverse factors such as their nature, social history, and the physical and political contexts in which they have evolved. These factors also affect their potential collection and conservation.

The industrial development of the last century saw the emergence of new materials and new techniques in the creation and production of textiles. This gave new problems to museum professionals who became increasingly concerned about the conservation of contemporary material culture. The conservation of contemporary objects is a vast subject and raises a range of issues that cannot be covered in this paper. It is the author's intention to examine some of the ethical and practical issues relating to the conservation of African contemporary textiles in the wider context of African museology.

The following discussion considers three key ideas. Firstly, a description of the so-called contemporary 'recycling' movement sets the scene for a brief explanation of the roles and values of African textile artefacts in this context (1). Secondly, the benefits of collecting and conserving contemporary textile artefacts as part of African social and cultural history are discussed. Then a portrait of the current situation of African conservation is drawn describing the circumstances in which conservators work. Finally, ethical and practical issues encountered by African conservators and their

potential roles in the conservation of contemporary artefacts are discussed in a broader museological context.

1. African contemporary textiles

Prior to looking at what constitutes contemporary African textiles and the reasons for collecting and conserving this heritage, it is necessary to explain the author's perception of 'contemporary' in the present discussion. This is defined as the period which has a cultural structure similar to that of today (i.e. 'now' - the period since c.1950) (2).

Process of reinvention

Western and Eastern culture brought into Africa, from the colonial period until now, has instigated the development of African contemporary movements. From the beginning of the 20th century, industrial goods of foreign cultural origin have gradually trickled down into African life. This effect is still apparent today, producing objects re-thought and reconstructed from foreign materials. These objects are often perceived to be imitations of 'something more beautiful', for a 'Western eye'. Contemporary textile artefacts may be regarded as imitations but they are fundamentally the products of a process of reinvention.

Contemporary and globalisation

The recycling of materials and the aesthetic of immediate impact, often through the use of bold colour, are remarkably consistent in the manufacture of contemporary artefacts throughout Africa. They reflect changes apparent in the artefacts' production and cultures in other parts of the world, such as India, Mexico and Indonesia (Vogel 1991:28). This is one of the effects of globalisation. Organisations such as the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM) and other Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) use them to cater for a growing tourist market. With them they export a perception of a contemporary Africa which suits Western visions of postcolonial African culture. As Jackson (1995:7) explains, techniques of contemporary recycling evolved from the traditions of communities but carry further economic and cultural meanings in the local market.

Contemporary African textiles

Contemporary textiles can be divided into two distinct categories. The first consists of contemporary versions of older textiles: traditional designs and weaves used for ceremonial and religious purposes or in the everyday life. The second category relates to textile artefacts resulting from a process of 'reinvention' which uses recycled

materials and creates new artefacts with new functions such as fashion accessories, decorative objects or children's toys.

From ancient to contemporary textiles: an explosion in the diversity of materials

Differences between older and contemporary textiles are observed in the level of skill and in the quality of materials used in their construction. In the past the demand for luxuries led to the development and refinement of techniques and the use of 'noble' materials. Examples such as intricate embroideries embellished with gold and gemstones or plant fibre artefacts made with elaborate and lengthy techniques of weaving are found in the majority of African countries. At present, commercial exchanges are intensifying in Africa thus influencing traditional methods of production.

An explosion in the diversity of materials available to producers in the second half of the twentieth century has led to the creation of a variety of contemporary textiles made of miscellaneous materials, traditional and unconventional. Sewing machines, synthetic textiles, plastic and metallic accessories such as glues, staples, buttons or beads are among the many materials used. The technique of recycling is one of the African responses to the diversity of changing crafts and artistic production of the twentieth century. These construction techniques represent a form of popular culture, cheap and instantly responsive to changing trends.

The materials used in the construction of these contemporary textile artefacts are sometimes produced in the East and in India. These cheap fabrics destined for the African market consist mainly of printed cloth. African textile designs are plagiarised by Chinese, Indian and Pakistani manufacturers who are able to access the latest technology, increasing productivity while reducing costs (Picton and Mack 1995:51).

This imported textile production responds to an African need for a contemporary, visual substitute of traditional and everyday clothes at a reduced cost. They do not strive for the splendour of the earlier ones: instead, they aim to impress and give a strong visual impact while responding to economic pressures. Yet, if new techniques and synthetic materials have slowly changed the appearance of traditional artefacts, their functional properties continue to serve the same purposes.

2. Why collect and conserve African contemporary textiles?

How will a culture be remembered through the heritage it has produced? Who decides what constitutes a common contemporary cultural heritage and what should be preserved? Today the concept of what constitutes contemporary cultural heritage is complex and establishing criteria for its selection is a difficult task for any culture.

The aim of this discussion is to justify the conservation of African contemporary textiles for future generations, not only when they are represented by major pieces of art but also when they 'memorialise the banality of yesterday' (Corzo 1999:XVI).

Africa has a rich, fascinating but complex cultural heritage. It is a continent comprising more than thirty countries and a vast number of distinct ethnic groups and cultures producing a variety of arts and artefacts which testify to its influence on the history of human civilisation.

Towards a re-appropriation of a cultural heritage?

The identity of any community evolves socially and culturally throughout history. However, many African cultures are pictured ethnographically in the mid-19th century, at the time they were first studied, and are still presented as such in their respective African museums. The Western and ideological presentation of 'scientific' objects, recording the advancement of African societies, is not often one in which contemporary African communities recognise themselves.

Consequently, collecting and conserving contemporary material culture will allow African museum professionals to enter into a process leading to the re-appropriation and emergence of autonomy in their cultural heritage. Through the collection and conservation of their contemporary 'identity', museum professionals will also promote the involvement of all components of society in the protection and enhancement of their own cultural heritage.

Fighting illicit traffic and preservation of the contemporary

The conservation of the contemporary not only plays an important role in the autonomy of African museums but also affects its potential protection and preservation. Protecting heritage and fighting illicit traffic in cultural property is one of the missions of the International Committee of Museums (ICOM) and the International Committee of African Museums (AFRICOM) (3). However this is an overwhelming mission considering the number of objects of national historical significance not yet conserved in museums but which are still present in many churches and in public or private hands. Artefacts are stolen every day and sold to dealers all over the world: a heritage irremediably decreasing and irreplaceable. Collecting and conserving contemporary material culture will protect African cultural heritage for future generations.

The preservation of this heritage also requires scientific treatment. Africans have so thoroughly digested and interpreted foreign forms into their own value systems and visual codes that the foreign origins of those forms have become virtually unrecognisable (Vogel 1991:36). Contemporary textiles are evolving in the contemporary recycling movement in which the origins of the materials involved are still recognisable, but for how much longer will this be the case?

The diversity of modern materials used for the creation of contemporary textile artefacts makes knowing their exact composition and ageing characteristics virtually impossible. The combination and interaction of cellulosic and synthetic textiles, plastics and metals contribute to the degradation of contemporary artefacts when in unstable environmental conditions. While African natural fibres accommodate these environmental conditions, man-made substances and synthetic fibres will probably require appropriate preventive conservation treatments if long-term preservation of artefacts is to be achieved. One of the advantages of collecting and preserving contemporary objects now is to allow museum professionals to make sense of a collected object at the time of its collection thus getting the scientific, oral and literary information behind the object crucial for conservation treatments.

3. African conservation institutions

Conservation approaches and standards are also affected by the effects of globalisation. In Western ethnographic conservation, contemporary objects are often regarded as an intrinsic category of material culture. In Africa, issues related to the conservation of the contemporary cultural heritage have not yet been fully debated by museum professionals. In most African countries, political and economic contexts have slowed museum development. Most African countries have no national policy dedicated to the protection of their cultural heritage.

In parallel, individual museums are currently facing problems related to the collection and preservation of an increasing number of contemporary objects (Savane 1999). What they will collect, how and why they preserve their heritage, are pressing issues for African museum professionals. Yet problems of selection justification, storage and conservation will probably be similar to those encountered in the West.

Today, the number of African museum professionals in the field is insufficient for the conservation of a cultural heritage neglected for years, at risk and constantly increasing. The situation is becoming critical. However, three major advancements contributing to the development of an African conservation discipline have occurred over the last decade. In 1999 AFRICOM was established with its headquarters based in Nairobi. The creation and implementation of two conservation studios based in Mombasa (4), Kenya and in Porto-Novo (5), Benin is now completed. ICOM and AFRICOM have edited a 'Handbook of Standards' (Annabi, Betu and Chieze 1996). This documents African collections and fulfils the objective to implement standards of professional practice as a basis for all action in the fields of museology and conservation.

The conservation of the contemporary in Africa creates tremendous responsibilities and numerous challenges for museum professionals. However, the discipline has developed on a solid and academic basis helped with the assistance of international

conservation related institutions (6). The results of this collaboration are reflected in a developing awareness among African curators of the benefits that conservators can bring to their museums. Moreover, the implementation of preventive conservation strategies and the benefits they can bring can be observed in a large number of African museums (Luhila 1999). These conservation achievements place African conservators in a privileged position from which they can develop and promote their professional discipline in dynamic and collaborative ways with other museum colleagues.

Today the emergence of a contemporary and changing African culture, combined with the recent birth of these institutions provide an institutional and scientific framework for African museum professionals. These initiatives also constitute an essential tool in the design of conservation principles and strategies for the conservation of African material culture, both ancient and contemporary.

4. African conservators' challenges

African conservators have multiple roles in the conservation of the contemporary. Among them, collaboration with curators, conservation documentation, preventive conservation and the promotion of a conservation network are discussed.

Curatorial collaboration

African textile innovation and development does not always have significance for African museum professionals. They tend to model their tastes on Western ideals. As in most Western countries, the conservation of 'antique' artefacts is prioritised. This important part of the cultural heritage is more 'attractive' than the contemporary one for international customers and museum visitors, and thus has consequences on the prioritisation of the preservation of contemporary cultural heritage.

For African conservators, problems met in the conservation of contemporary textile artefacts arise initially in the selection of the material to be preserved. While it is the prime responsibility of conservators to conserve the material and the social history of an artefact, they are rarely consulted in the process of selection. If the conservation of the contemporary is motivated by a desire to put objects into a state in which their authentic meanings and value can be easily understood, conservators require the contemporary data accompanying the collected object. What makes a contemporary object collectable for a museum? What is the perception and value accorded to the object at the time of its collection? These are important data that should be shared by museum professionals and be included in the conservation documentation of the object.

Other contemporary information associated with the cultural and social value and identity of an artefact constitute the basis of the object's 'biography' in its new museum environment and are essential in order to shape a justifiable conservation treatment. Is the artefact considered as traditional, ceremonial, decorative or as a commodity product? Often the same contemporary object is recycled, is religious or ceremonial and is also found in the tourist market. Therefore, which conservation treatment should be devised? Indeed, African traditional textiles are often linked to religious and sacred contexts and require minimal or no conservation intervention while contemporary ones may be associated with concepts of aesthetic, social contexts and with the art market.

The complex and confusing status of contemporary artefacts calls for an effective collaboration between curators and conservators in the process of documentation. However, African museum professionals are torn between the emergence of an African contemporary culture which does not fit into Western systems of value but represents their contemporary identity, and the need for western acknowledgement and financial support.

Documentation

A key problem is the search for financial support, time and expertise to document contemporary objects according to the professional standards recommended by AFRICOM. A first step in the conservation of contemporary artefacts should be the promotion of succinct systems of documentation that gather together in one file curatorial and conservation information. Ideally, preservation strategies should concentrate on contemporary objects which have a counterpart in the past (7). This would encapsulate a fuller picture of the materials, techniques and ' biography' (Kopytoff 1986) of the collected object.

The condition, construction and material composition of an object provide evidence which exposes important and often concealed aspects of an object's cultural and social 'identity'. The assistance of craftsmen, artists and the community would allow conservators to obtain the contemporary data that belongs to an object. In many African countries, the history of cultural heritage relies on oral tradition. This is an invaluable source of information which should not be ignored, as when the present generation of craftsmen and artists go, these community memories will be lost. Such collaborative systems of documentation would probably allow the contemporary 'integrity' of an object to be preserved for posterity as well as for future generations of museum professionals.

Conservation collaboration

In essence, conservators have responsibility and authority for representing to curators conservation issues relating to museum artefacts. In the context of contemporary artefacts acquired by museums the responsibilities are similar. Initiating

collaborations with curators will ultimately promote the whole conservation discipline. Curators can provide vital documentary information on contemporary collected artefacts and also financial solutions and other support for conservation work. Conservators are aware of the capacity of existing storage facilities and the environmental needs of artefacts. Is there space and adapted environmental conditions to store new objects? Do museums have the conservation facilities and capability to conserve contemporary artefacts? These represent legitimate questions and it is the responsibility of the conservator to communicate and explain to curators the conservation needs related to the acquisition of new artefacts. Collaboration with artists and craftsmen could also benefit to curatorial and conservation work and research. The author hopes to see a general acceptance that collaborative work like this is considered an essential core function of a conservator's work. It should be properly funded and not undertaken on an ad hoc basis where each project is considered separately.

Development of preventive conservation

Many contemporary recycled artefacts have a low commercial value. While this fact represents a financial advantage in terms of collection procedures, conserving contemporary artefacts will generate further expenses. Prior to conservation, interventive treatment of contemporary artefacts, the collection, storage and documentation procedures will provide many financial pressures. For many African museums the storage of their existing collections is already an issue in terms of space, security and unstable environmental conditions.

Research development into preventive conservation is essential for the conservation of contemporary material culture in Africa. The practice of preventive conservation will accommodate the specific needs of contemporary material culture while responding to the current lack of financial and conservation resources. In the present African museum context, the conservators' expertise is essential in order to balance practical, ethical and economical constraints in imaginative, pragmatic and professional ways.

Conservators will also have to make use of the scientific data associated with the practice of preventive conservation. Understanding the interactions between new materials and the impact of their environment upon them is an advantage for conservators involved in the conservation of the contemporary. The practice of preventive conservation will also make it possible to analyse and monitor, over time, the degradation processes of different new materials. Such analyses will be beneficial to the present and future care of collected material culture, in Africa and elsewhere. The collected data will also provide a foundation on which conservators can build conservation strategies and propose feasible treatments. In the author's opinion it is important that parallel ethical standards should be developed for the preventive conservation of contemporary objects. This should be done in association with curators, scientists and the community of origin.

Professional network

Artists and craftsmen invent techniques of construction which accommodate the nature of the modern and recycled materials and use them in the creation of contemporary textile artefacts. In many cases these techniques are unsophisticated, resulting in the production of an ephemeral product. Consequently, the combination of modern, mixed-media materials and techniques of construction calls for conservation strategies adapted to the specific conservation needs of contemporary textile artefacts. Fielding (2001:21) argues that 'the answer should come from conservation education and training, thereby expanding the pool of expert curators and contemporary creators can confidently draw on.' Today African conservators have to rely on their own cultural and historical resources: libraries, photographic documents, oral tradition. The context of isolation in which African museums are placed makes many existing conservation resources unavailable to them and calls for the promotion of an enlarged network of cultural heritage-related professionals. The participation of non-museum institutions should be opened to existing potential partners involved in the production of contemporary material culture, such as artists, craftsmen and manufacturers, and also universities which have scientific facilities and the potential for associated academic research. Financial input, policy and practice issues ultimately would be implemented according to AFRICOM's museum standards.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, African conservators seeking professional information and contacts can not ignore facilities offered by the World Wide Web. The Western network of conservators has proved to be an efficient and useful tool to provide assistance and information to colleagues. EPA and PMDA are equipped with new technological material, but there is still a need for further promotion of their institutions nationally and internationally. Then Western and African conservators can share and benefit from their respective experiences.

Conservation of contemporary textiles in the context of other conservation disciplines

How are compromises in the conservation of contemporary artefacts made and rationalised by other conservation disciplines? This is a legitimate question posed by African conservators seeking to examine and review how other conservation disciplines decide upon treatments. Painting and ethnographic conservation and industrial heritage are among the disciplines which work on contemporary cultural objects. In this respect a close examination of their conservation treatment perspectives should be undertaken by African conservation institutions, opening new prospects for African conservators.

Indeed, world-wide, conservation principles are constantly called into question. As Clavir (8) (1994) demonstrates, the precepts of so-called 'current ethnographic conservation' can either serve or misinterpret African cultural 'otherness' according to how/whether they adapt to a community's cultural identity. The originating cultures

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of anthropology and history collections sometimes have ideas and priorities about artefact care and conservation that differ from the classic conservation approach (Welsh 1992:13). Similarly, contemporary conservation has to accommodate the conservation of the contemporary.

Textile conservation and the museum public

According to Mr.Zechariah (9), Senior Keeper at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, it is important to understand that in the colonial period, African museums often appropriated the people's heritage against their will, thus creating a great communication gap between the communities and their respective museums. Moreover, the understanding and views of the communities represented are rarely taken into account in museological presentation and conservation of the collected people's heritage.

Today, African conservators question their role and responsibility in relation to the potential interaction possible between contemporary objects and the museum public. To what extent is conservation a question of interpretation? Is conservation motivated by a desire to put objects into a state in which their authentic meanings and value can be easily understood (Roberts 2001)? There are many concepts of conservation that need to be explored in order to establish a method that would help to increase the level of interest in the public and lead to a better understanding of their cultural heritage.

Conclusion

In Africa questions raised about the roles of contemporary textile artefacts and their physical conception are diverse and complex and lead to enigmatic ethical and scientific conservation related considerations.

It is a real challenge for African conservators to respond to these conservation issues. They operate in contexts of political instability, financial uncertainty and are isolated from conservation professionals in other parts of the world. The consequences of colonial and post-colonial political, social, and cultural factors directly affect museological issues that in turn affect conservation issues. The effects of globalisation, particularly the emergence of mass-produced products and the development of tourism, outline a contemporary reality which will unquestionably affect the future of museology and textile conservation in Africa.

Today, African conservators are confronted, as are their Western colleagues, by similar questions raised by the conservation of contemporary material culture. There is a need for international collaboration, particularly with so-called ethnographic

Western museums and conservators working with African material culture. Benefits for Western museum professionals can already be seen through the valuable documentation provided by the 'Handbook of Standards' (ICOM 1999). Further collaboration could provide data on traditional methods of preservation, natural environmental conditions of artefacts and African ethical views on particular conservation treatments.

International workshops could provide invaluable opportunities for Western and African conservators to meet by creating a forum in which scientific, ethical and social exchanges could be initiated.

However, to create such exchanges African conservators should formulate and address their scientific and practical needs to their Western colleagues. In that perspective AFRICOM, EPA and PMDA should launch and promote a conservation site on the World Wide Web which would allow African conservation institutions and individuals to benefit from the current Western conservation network of professionals and vice versa.

International initiatives and collaboration in the conservation of the contemporary would afford an opportunity to fill the present cultural gap that exists between Africa and the West in the disciplines of conservation and museology and allow them both to advance within in a contemporary perspective.

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Notes

1. Africa retains numerous and distinct communities and related cultures. The aim of the author is not to minimise them by supposing a sole African culture but to present examples met through personal experiences while working in Africa.
2. The definition chosen for this purpose reflects one extrapolated by Rosander (1980:5). He contrasts the meaning of present day to the one of contemporary. In his view the present is the period which has a cultural structure similar to that of today (i.e. 'now' - the period since c.1950), while contemporary would be the present moment and from a practical aspect - a year or so back in time.
3. AFRICOM is a non-governmental, autonomous and pan-African organisation of museums created in October 1999 in Lusaka, Zambia. The basis for AFRICOM has been established through an ICOM programme for Africa implemented by museums in Africa and co-ordinated by ICOM under the supervision of an African Co-ordinating Committee. The AFRICOM Programme relies on sharing experience and comparing professional practices. AFRICOM promotes the participation of museums in the context of global and sustainable development and strengthens networks for collaboration among museum professionals in Africa and abroad. Three major fields are covered: educational services, management and inventories.
4. National Museums of Kenya and ICCROM, for and on behalf of English-speaking sub-Sahara Africa, established the Programme for Museum Development in Africa (PMDA). The Programme is registered as an Educational Non Governmental Organisation. It provides museum professionals with facilities such as a library, offices, a conservation laboratory, collection storage areas, exhibition gallery and field operation equipment. Its scope of activities covers staff development and training, support for national capacity building initiatives, museum development and outreach cultural projects.
5. EPA (Ecole du Patrimoine Africain) is a semi-autonomous institution, established as a base for museum development in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa (as a joint effort of the University of Benin and ICCROM). EPA has a programme (which includes training and consultancy services), a staff of 8 people, a two-stories building for hosting activities, accommodation for 18 people in a University of Benin student hall, and a guesthouse.
6. Among them: ICCROM, ICOM, ICC, GCI and the University of London.
7. An example is a popular exhibition of ancient and contemporary icons, at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Ethiopia (June 2001). It catered for the interests of visitors, promoted international research and led to an increase in the

budget allocated for the conservation of contemporary artefacts (Chojnacki:2000).

8. Miriam Clavir is Conservator at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology; she also teaches preventive conservation and museum principles for the UBC Department of Anthropology.
9. Personal communication with Mr. Zechariah, July 2002, Addis Ababa.

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African Museum and Conservation Institutions Contacts

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EPA (Ecole du Patrimoine Africain)
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epa@epa-prema.net

PMDA (Programme for Museum Development in Africa)
Contact: Mr. Mwadime Wazwa, Programme Manager, PMDA
Mrs. Catherine Antomarchi, Programme Director, Collections, ICCROM, Board member, ICOM-CC
pmda@africaonline.co.ke

The Handbook of Standards, Documenting African Collections
www.icom.org/afridoc

West African Museums Programme
www.wamponline.org

PAINTED TIBETAN THANKAS: CONSERVATION AND MOUNTING (WORK IN PROGRESS)

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Background

The conservation and mounting of 18 painted Tibetan *thangkas* at The National Museum and Galleries on Merseyside (NMGM) began in early 2000. Currently, conservation is almost complete (Phase 1) and mounting the *thangkas* is just beginning (Phase 2). This is a joint project between Textile and Paper Sections of The Conservation Centre. When complete, the *thangkas* will be on long term display in the new World Cultures galleries at Liverpool Museum and will be the largest *thangka* display in the United Kingdom. NMGM's Tibetan collection is one of the finest and most comprehensive in the country and it has an excellent international reputation. The majority of objects were acquired as a direct result of British involvement in Tibet 1900 – 1950, and instead of being looted or collected at random they were acquired by political and military officers who had a genuine interest in Tibetan culture (Fleming 1997). The 18 painted *thangkas* selected for display were chosen from a group of approximately 40 which are mainly painted but also include some appliquéd *thangkas.*

Traditional use and storage

Before devising a conservation strategy it was important to find out how *thangkas* were used and cared for in their Tibetan context. *Thangkas* were made and used throughout the entire Himalayan region. They consist of a painting, in water-based pigments and dyes, executed on a textile support. The painting is mounted in silk brocades or damasks which are adhered and/or sewn between an upper and a lower roller. A veil made from a lighter open-weave silk, two silk ties and a hanging mechanism are sewn to the upper roller. Thangkas are lined with cotton or silk fabrics (Figure 1). A range of regional mounting styles and manufacturing techniques in NMGM's *thangkas* was observed. NMGM's *Thangkas* depict figures from the Buddhist pantheon of deities including *Arhats* (saints), *Boddhisativas* (Buddhas) and wrathful figures (Frédéric 1995).

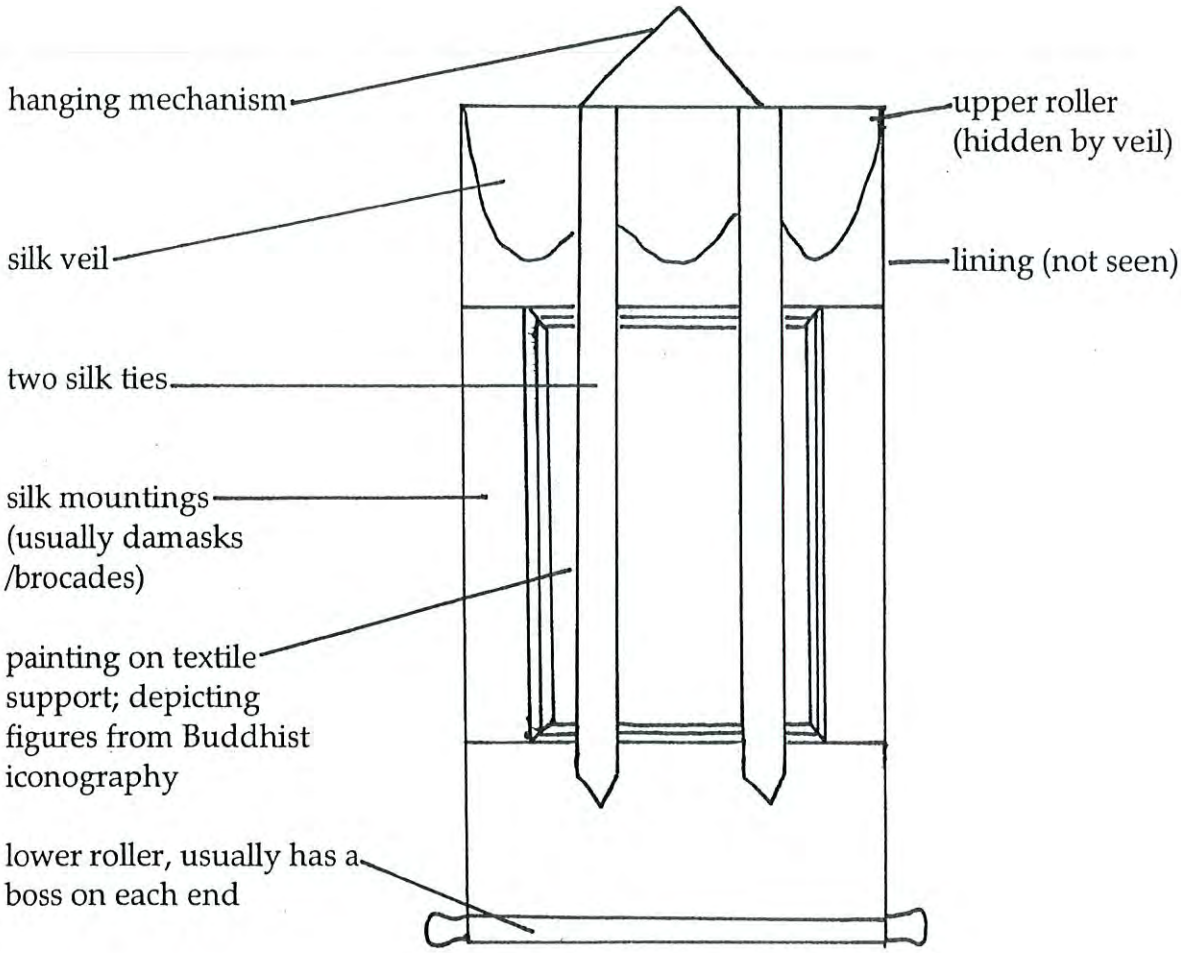

Figure 1: A diagram of the typical elements of a *thangka* (adapted from Schaftel 1991: 4)

Thangkas are used as visual aids in Buddhist meditation to help guide the practitioner towards enlightenment (Bruce-Gardner 1988:4). The painted image is believed temporarily to house a particular deity, and its spiritual energy allows the *thangka* to function as a visual medium between man and the divine (Rawson 1995:103). The silk mountings act as a 'doorway' through which the practitioner reaches the deity during meditation (Huntingdon 1970:194). *Thangkas* were commissioned for a variety of reasons including dedication to a sick person and help for a dead person to receive a good rebirth. The act of commissioning a *thangka* accumulated merit and facilitated a Buddhist's journey towards enlightenment (Jackson & Jackson 1998:10). A *thangka* becomes active after its consecration ceremony, during which inscriptions can be painted onto the lining or canvas. Inscriptions may include sacred syllables corresponding to the heart, throat and head (2).

Thangkas were hung on the walls in monasteries, family homes, used in public ceremonies and could be easily rolled up and transported by wandering teachers and storytellers (Schoenholzer-Nichols 1988:83). *Thangkas* were rarely on permanent display and when not in use were covered with their veil. After use *thangkas* were rolled and stored away. In the Tibetan context *thangkas* are primarily valued for their iconographic and religious significance and their function is to convey complex ideas in a portable format.

Condition

Understanding how *thangkas* were traditionally used as well as knowledge of their previous storage in the museum explained some of the damage observed in NMGM's *thangka* collection. Damage occurring to the *thangkas* during traditional use could include some of the following.

- Surface and ingrained soiling: dirt, soot and grease, some of which possibly derives from the burning of butter lamps and incense during Buddhist practise (Bruce-Gardner 1988). This can lead to darkening and obscuring of the unvarnished paint surface. Handling often results in black greasy soiling on silks around the lower roller.
- Mechanical damage: rolling and unrolling (as well as rolled storage) can weaken the adhesion of the paint to the textile support and paint cohesion. This can lead to cracking, flaking, abrasion and subsequent paint loss. Stress caused by the weight of the heavy lower roller during display can result in splitting and tearing of silks, particularly in structurally weak areas such as seams. Wear from handling is often visible on the silks around the lower roller.

- Structural and inherent weakness: the range of materials which are used to make *thangkas* means that the damage observed is often the result of complex interaction and differential responses to handling, ageing and fluctuating environmental conditions.
- Tide mark stains: water damage can lead to 'tide mark' staining, discolouration and colour bleeding and/or loss from unstable dyes and pigments. Environmental fluctuations and/or water damage can cause distortion and buckling of the painted image.

At NMGM *thangkas* are currently stored flat in a specifically designed cabinet (Lord 1997) but previously were hung vertically by ties from their top edge. Their previous storage cupboard was in a draughty, old warehouse where they were exposed to dust and poor environmental conditions. Damage occurring to the *thangkas* from museum storage probably includes some of the following:

- Surface and ingrained soiling: museum dust and soiling.
- Mechanical damage: the weight of the lower roller placed stress on the silks resulting in splits and tears. The fragile veils tended to catch onto adjacent *thangkas*. The unsupported thangkas were vulnerable to flexing of the textile support which probably has led to some cracking and associated damage to the painted images.

Some *thangkas* are missing upper and/or lower wooden rollers, bosses and silk veils but it is not clear when this occurred. It is possible that materials were deliberately removed by Tibetans in order to make new *thangkas* (Bruce-Gardner 1988:6). Some *thangkas* have been framed for display with only the painted image visible. Despite the damage observed the *thangkas* selected for display were generally relatively complete and intact.

Museum requirements for display

The strength of the NMGM's Tibetan collection lies in its quantity and quality of religious and ritual artefacts. The design of the Buddhism galleries therefore emphasises the significant influence of Buddhist practise and ritual in daily Tibetan life (Fleming 1997). *Thangkas* will be displayed in four cases, each using the same mounting method:

1. 6 *thangkas* will be displayed on A-frames, back to back. This case will describe significant events in 'The Life of the Buddha' and the *thangkas* complement a narrative text.
2. 3 *thangkas* will displayed in a 'Tibetan Shrine' context with other ritual objects. This case will emphasise the importance of monasteries and monks in the Buddhist community.

3. 2 *thangkas* will be displayed in context of a 'Tantric Room' with additional ritual objects. Tantric rituals were powerful practises designed to speed up the journey towards enlightenment. Tantric objects were not intended to be seen by the uninitiated and therefore the front of the case has limited viewing.
4. 1 *thangka* will be displayed with costume and other artefacts in a case exploring the wider theme of Britains relationship with Tibet.

It is also envisaged that 5 more *thangkas* will be hung in box cases on the gallery walls. Because the galleries will have comfort heating/cooling only, the cases will provide the primary environmental control and so are designed to high specifications.

Conservation concerns

Our conservation strategy aimed to balance the following:

- respect for the traditional use and function of *thangkas*
- physical preservation and stabilisation of deteriorating materials whilst maintaining a minimally interventive approach
- safe and supported display of the *thangkas* in the Buddhism gallery.

The formulation of a conservation and mounting strategy was the result of collaboration with colleagues in The Conservation Centre and externally with The Victoria and Albert Museum and The British Museum.

A review of *thangka* conservation literature showed that the type of treatment a *thangka* receives is often depends on its context (see Bibliography). Stabilising and supporting the *thangkas* was important but we also wanted to ensure that treatment retained the *thangkas'* flexible (and therefore functional) nature, preserved the original materials and retained evidence of traditional use where possible. The conservation strategy was also influenced by knowledge that the *thangkas* will be displayed in a controlled museum environment. A practical consideration was the need to complete the project within the time allocated.

Phase 1 – Conservation

Currently, conservation is nearly complete. Conservation of the painted images has been carried out by Anna Hillcoat-Imanishi and conservation of the textiles by Helen Bacchus. All *thangkas* were photographed and documented before conservation. Pigment analysis and metal thread analyses are in progress.

Painted image

(i) Consolidation

The images were treated first to stabilise loose and flaking paint. Areas of actively flaking paint were consolidated using a solution of methyl cellulose. This consolidant was chosen after an extensive literature review, consultation with colleagues and based on previous research and experience of consolidating similar material such as Indian miniatures on cloth (Hillcoat-Imanishi et al 1999). Other consolidants such as gelatine were considered but methyl cellulose was chosen because of its superior ageing (Feller and Wilt 1990) and working characteristics. Testing was carried out to determine the most useful concentration and viscosity of the solution. Generally, solutions in the range of 0.125% to 0.5% of medium viscosity methyl cellulose in de-ionised water with a very small addition of Industrial Methylated Spirits to aid penetration achieved best results, having no visual impact on either the reflectance or the saturation of the painted surface. The concentration of the solution was varied according to need and was applied with a very small brush under the microscope. Care was taken not to place any consolidant over the paint flake but beside a crack where it would be drawn under the flake by capillary action (Grantham 1999). In some cases the solution was applied 2 or 3 times to achieve stabilisation of the paint flakes, but often one application was sufficient.

(ii) Cleaning

After consolidation the painted surface was mechanically cleaned with a small Japanese squirrel-hair brush and vacuum tweezers, monitoring the effect on the painted surface through the microscope. Cleaning and stain removal were carried out on the painted image only where the degree of soiling was severe and it was felt would obscure the visitors' understanding of the painted image. Soiling, stains and accretions which were generally identified as evidence of contextual usage were left in situ although some accretions which could be harmful to the thangka, such as insect deposits, were removed. The debris from surface cleaning and the removed accretions were kept for future reference. Stained areas judged to interfere strongly with visual access to the painting were carefully solvent cleaned using cotton wool swabs, after rigorous testing. A variety of solvents were used, depending on the individual response of the paint and the soiling.

(iii) Repairs

On some of the thangkas repairs to the support were necessary; here tosa usushi Japanese paper and very dilute wheatstarch were used. The paper was not coloured to avoid migration of colourant into the object when using this water-based adhesive. Where the repairs were visible from the recto they were later coloured with pastels or sometimes very dry watercolours.

Textiles

(i) Cleaning

All the silks, veils and linings were surface cleaned with a low powered vacuum suction to remove loose surface soiling and museum dust. Although disfiguring, water stains, stains and ingrained soiling were not generally reduced or removed. The silks were regarded as integral to the thangka and were not removed or separated from the painted image for cleaning (Schoenholzer-Nichols 1988). The soiling was considered useful evidence of traditional use (Eastop & Brooks 1996).

(ii) Removal of repairs

Repairs were removed from two thangkas where they were causing damage and preventing effective support of the silks for display. One thangka was missing its upper roller and had been crudely repaired by sewing the mounting silk and lining together. The silk brocade was brittle and splitting. Another thangka with a split and torn lower mounting silk had been repaired by inserting silk damask patches between the silk and the lining. These patches had been crudely sewn through both the silk and lining. The patches were creased and folded, acting as a further source of distortion. In both these cases, the repair stitching was documented and then removed.

(iii) Support of fragile silks/replacement of missing rollers

Animal glue deposits were often present where the silk and lining had been adhered around the lower roller. These deposits were removed or reduced to facilitate effective stitched support of the silk and/or lining. Damaged silks, including those where repairs were removed, were given full or localised stitched supports onto dyed silk habutai. Because of the planned display method (explained later) it was necessary to replace missing rollers – these were made from Perspex™ or aluminium. After being provided with appropriate support, the silks and/or lining were shaped to create new 'sleeves' around replacement rollers. Fragile silk veils were encased in dyed nylon net where appropriate.

It is interesting to note here that Tibetans do not practise conservation or understand it as in the west. In the Tibetan context damaged thangkas were cut up and the silks re-used (Schoenholzer-Nichols 1988:83). Damaged images would be re-painted or a new image would have been made (Bruce-Gardner 1988:6). We have seen evidence both of replacement silks sewn over older silks and of re-painting among the thangkas in NMGM's collection.

Phase 2 - Mounting and Display

The second phase of this project, currently in progress, is to attach the *thangkas* onto individual rigid, fabric-covered boards for display. The mounting design aims physically to support the *thangkas* and show them as hanging, functional objects. The boards will be fixed to the backboards of each case and will provide stability during handling and transport. They will also ensure minimum flexing of the painted image during installation. Although a mounting strategy has been devised the system outlined here may require amending after the initial trials have been evaluated.

The board construction currently under consideration is outlined below:

- Hexlite 620™ (aluminium honeycomb core with a fibreglass-epoxy skin) – selected for its stability, rigidity and strength for permanent display. Methods for finishing the edges are currently being evaluated and include finishing with resin, resin and aluminium tape, aluminium tape only or nothing.
- Acid-free museum mountboard – to buffer environmental fluctuations.
- 1 layer of cotton domette, fixed to the back of the Hexlite™ board.
- A final cover of cotton poplin – fixed to the back of the Hexlite™ board.

Methods for attaching the museum mountboard and fabrics to the board are currently being evaluated.

Current ideas for attaching the *thangkas* to the support board include using Perspex™ clips to hold the upper roller against the board (the tension would be adapted using a screw on the back of the board) and supporting the heavy lower rollers in Perspex™ 'cups' so that the silks do not carry the weight. Missing bosses will be replicated in wood, resin or metal as appropriate. In the 'Tibetan Shrine' and 'Tantric Room' the fabric used to cover the boards will match that used for the backboards to make the mounting method less conspicuous. It is not envisaged that the *thangkas* will be sewn to the boards in any way. Minimal padding on the boards was chosen so that the painted image lies absolutely flat and is encouraged to relax down against the board during display.

If original hanging mechanisms exist they will be pegged above the *thangka* but will not carry any of the weight. Contextual pictures show silk veils are arranged in a range of ways (Bruce-Gardner 1988:3; Schicklgruber & Pommaret 1997; Jackson & Jackson 1998), but at NMGM the final choice will be agreed with the curator. Similarly, in contextual photographs silk ties are sometimes seen hanging over the painted image but at NMGM they will be positioned to hang just above the painted image, in order to avoid abrasion of the paint or obscuring of the image.

Conclusion

Thangkas are part of the Himalayan tradition in which sacred art is created and valued for its spiritual purposes rather than for its artistic or aesthetic importance. The function and care of *thangkas* in Tibetan and Western contexts can be very different and the type of conservation treatment that a *thangka* receives often depends on its context. The ethical guidelines that are the cornerstone of conservation decision-making, action and intervention have emerged in a specific cultural context and are designed to protect and preserve the objects in our care. It is important to preserve the integrity of the artefact and to recognise that the mounting silks support the function of the painted image. Conservation and mounting aimed to treat the *thangkas* holistically and give each element due consideration and respect.

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Notes

1. Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.
2. Personal communication with Zara Fleming, Consultant and John Clarke, Assistant Curator, Department of Indian and South East Asian Art, The Victoria and Albert Museum.

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The following abbreviations have been used:

ICOM-CC	International Council of Museums, Committee for Conservation
UKIC	United Kingdom Institute for Conservation
WAAC	Western Association for Art Conservation

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List of Materials and Suppliers

Acid Free Museum Mountboard
Conservation by Design, Timecare Works,
5 Singer Way, Woburn Road Industrial Estate,
Kempston, Bedford, MK42 7AW.

Hexlite 620™
BK Resins,
Ashgrove Estate, Ashgrove Road,
Bromley, Kent, BR1.

Methyl Cellulose
Fluka Chemie AG, Sigma Aldrich Co. Ltd,
The Old Brickyard,
Gillingham, Dorset, SP8 4XT.

Perspex™
Ineos Acrylics, PO Box 34,
Darwen, Lancs, BB3 IQB.

Wheat Starch and Industrial Methylated Spirit
Merck BDH Laboratory Supplies,
Poole, BH15 1TD.

Tosa Usushi Japanese Paper
John Purcell Paper,
15 Rumsey Road,
London, SW9 0TR.

POSTER: TEACHING TEXTILE CONSERVATION IN LAHORE, PAKISTAN

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Introduction

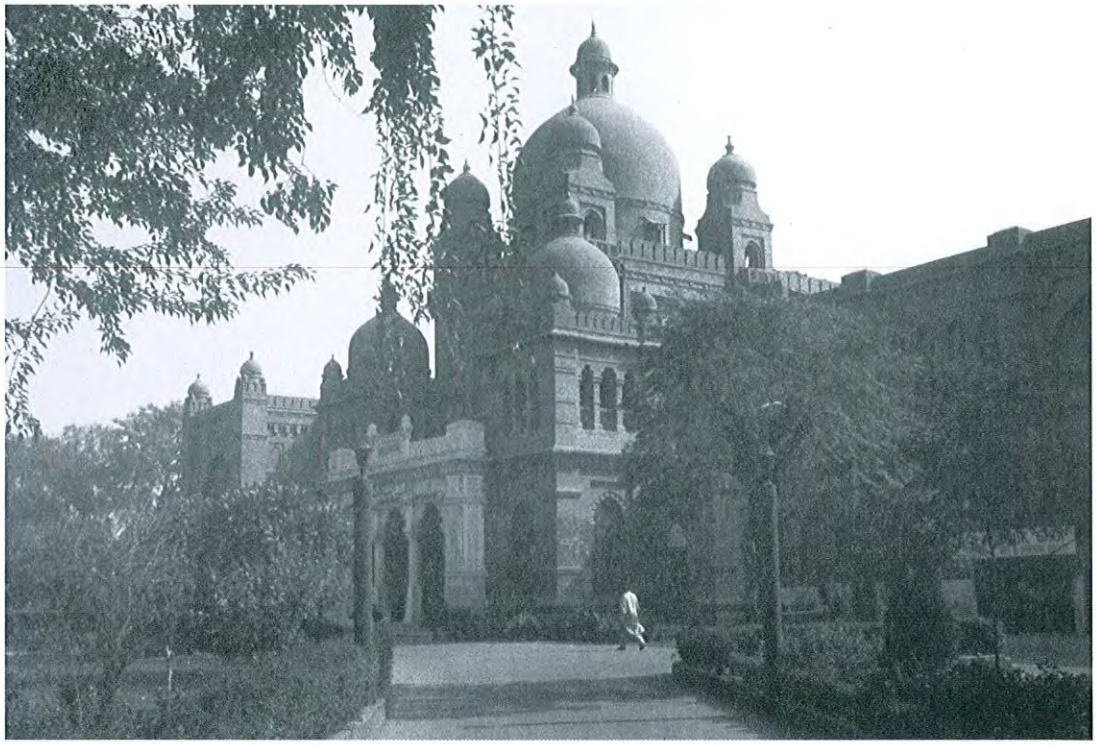
The two week course took place in October 2000, and aimed to teach the basics of preventive conservation techniques. It covered the principles of many aspects of textile conservation, aiming to give the participants enough knowledge to enable them to look after the collections in their care to the best of their ability. Twenty-one people, male and female, attended the course. The students included curators, fashion students, administrators, conservators, researchers and conservation scientists.

Background

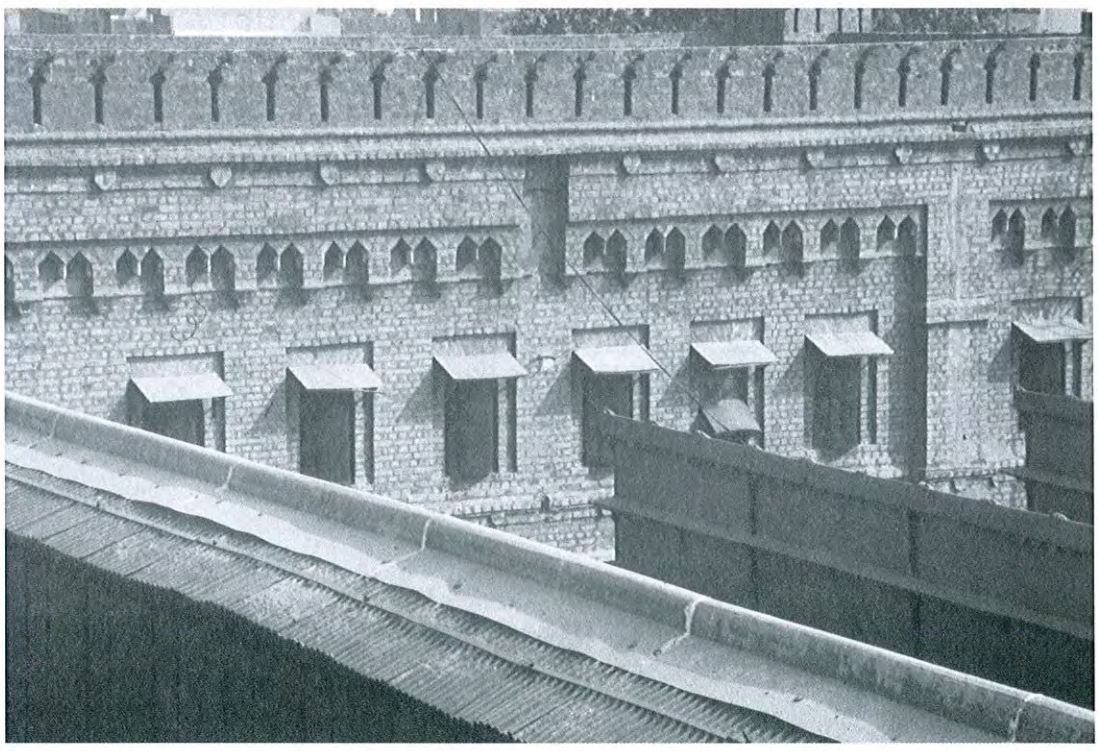
The course took place at Lahore Museum, a building whose fabric is in a state of disrepair. High humidity and temperatures fluctuate dramatically within the museum according to seasonal changes. The majority of textiles are permanently on display. A few are held in storage, folded in steel containers. The textiles on display are not buffered from the fluctuating relative humidity and temperature levels in the museum. The effects of light deterioration was made obvious when textiles were removed from display. High levels of dust and dirt were apparent throughout the museum. Poor upkeep of the fabric of the building and poor display techniques have also contributed to the degradation of the textiles.

The course

An understanding of what textiles are, how and why they degrade was covered throughout a series of lectures covering textile technology and materials, construction, deterioration, environmental issues, storage and display and good housekeeping.

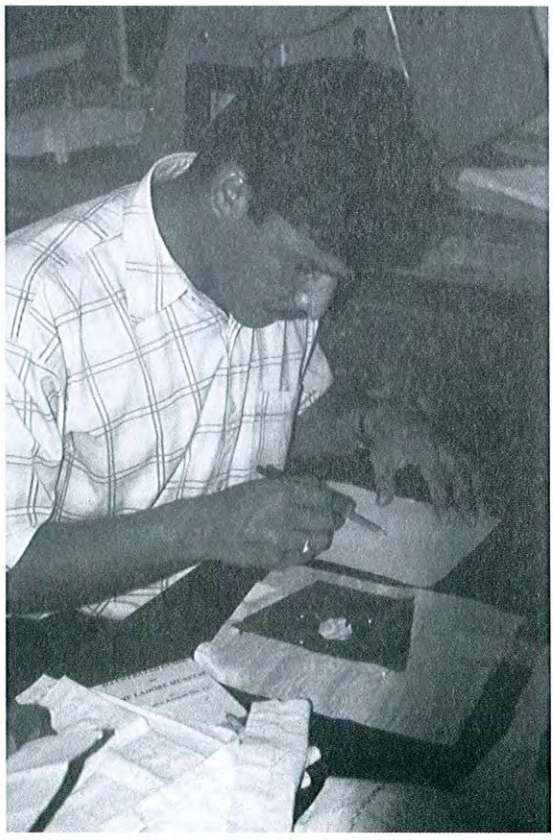


Lahore Museum



The roof of Lahore Museum

Textiles on display at Lahore Museum. Note colour differentiation due to light.



Student working on a stitching sample

Basics in practical textile conservation were taught on the course: stitching exercises covered the majority of conservation techniques including the positioning, length, amount of tension and purpose of each stitch and the choice of threads and fabrics. This knowledge was then transferred to supporting a damaged sample of coloured silk fabric onto a silk support fabric. Padded boards and hangers were also constructed. The materials used on the course were all locally sourced.

Recommendations

Recommendations were made for rotating exhibits, reducing the number of objects on display, implementing good housekeeping techniques and improving support of the textiles whilst on display. A temporary exhibition of textiles was opened to mark the completion of the course, and some improvements of display techniques were implemented.

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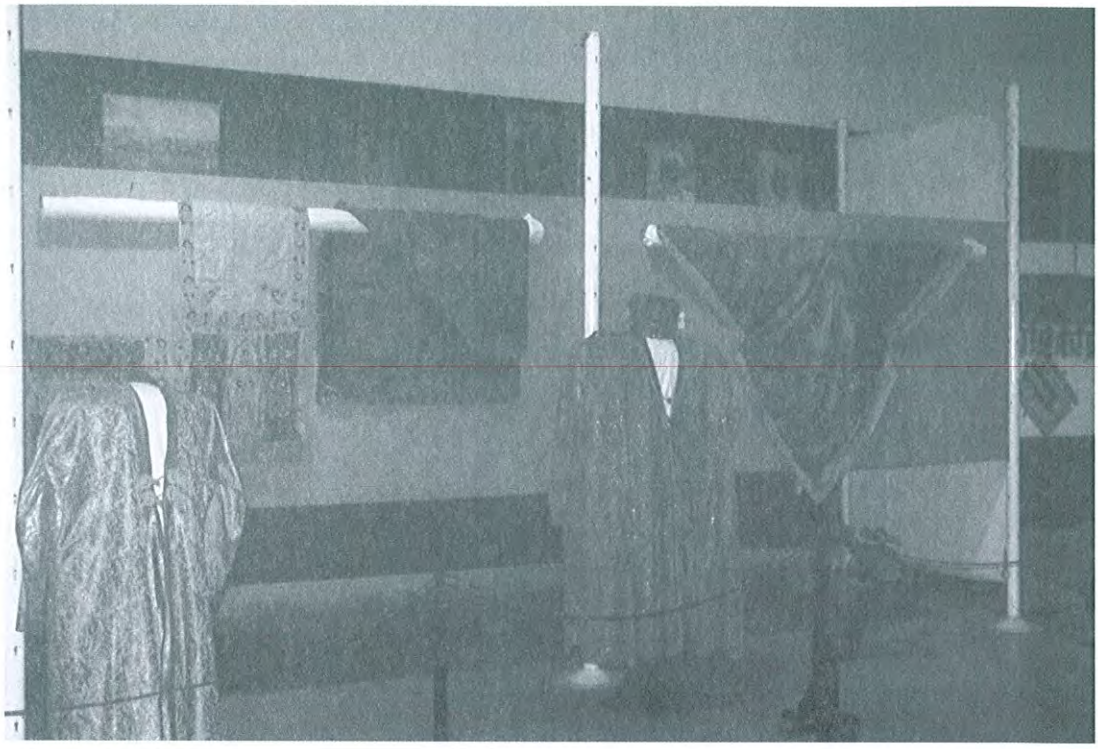
Jenny Band and colleagues – Textile Conservation Studio, Hampton Court Palace;

Robert Snell and the British Counsel in Lahore;

All at Lahore Museum.



Textiles on display in a special exhibition to mark the end of the course

Myself and three students

POSTER: ROUND THE WORLD ON A MANNEQUIN - DISPLAYING COSTUME IN THE WORLD CULTURES GALLERIES AT THE ROYAL ALBERT MEMORIAL MUSEUM, EXETER

MORWENA STEPHENS
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Cullompton, Devon

The 1995-99 Heritage Lottery funded redevelopment of the World Cultures Galleries at Exeter provided an opportunity to review the display and mounting of the collection, both in terms of object support and interpretation. The cased displays are arranged according to world religion with objects displayed largely on plinths or sloping boards.

Much of the costume is minimally tailored, often comprising a single textile or vegetable fibre woven panel. An attempt was made throughout to display costume in such a way as to suggest how it was worn in its original context. This was in order to 'people' the displays and make objects more understandable. Unbleached cotton or grey dyed cotton (selected as a neutral contrast for light coloured objects) was used to cover mounts; this was, in part, a choice made to minimise dye costs.

In some cases calico-covered papier-mâché mannequins and heads and shoulders were used as the rigid core of the mount. To minimise costs some papier-mâché forms were made in-house by volunteers. Some costume, such as the Tahitian mourner's costume (Stephens 2001) required individual core mounts to be manufactured from brass and carved Ethafoam. This technique was also used for body parts such as hips (to display belts), or lower legs (for leggings).

In most cases the core mount was adapted better to fit and support the costume using intermediate padding layers. Cloaks and other costume were supported using quilts of polyester felt covered in brushed cotton (Domet) which offered some friction against the surface of the costume to prevent slippage. These are similar in principle to the linings developed by Brako (1993) and Parker (1997).

Both the cedar bark and Maori cloaks were stitched onto calico linings, and Velcro fixings (applied through all layers along the top edge) enabled them to be fixed to their polyfelt/brushed cotton quilts. The brass armature supporting the Bakongo feathered net costume was covered in a series of Plastazote 'buckets' with a cotton covering. The Yoruba robe was lined with brushed cotton, pleated and then stitched through to the cotton stockinet and calico covering the mannequin.

Research, consultation with originating cultures, with community groups in the city or with field-experienced ethnographers was required to establish how costume is worn in its original context. Diagrams or illustrations can prove invaluable and should be collected where possible.

Acknowledgement

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Bakongo costume after mounting for display