

A Mount for Prevention is Worth a Pound of Care: Rehousing Festival Hats at the Textile Museum of Canada

Hillary Anderson and Genevieve Kulis



Introduction

The Textile Museum of Canada (TMC) houses a diverse collection of textiles and textile-related objects that spans the globe. Among its collection are over 240 Chinese festival hats, which are some of the TMC's most popular artifacts. The hats' whimsical and elaborate designs make them a delight to behold. However, these same features also make their preservation a challenging undertaking.

Problem

Decorative elements on the hats produce localized areas of stress and vulnerability, making them structurally tenuous. The appropriate storage for the hats' ongoing stability had previously been beyond the available resources of the museum. The existing display mounts did not provide sufficient support and were aesthetically unpleasing. Other mounts, intended for storage use only, were distorting the overall shape of the hats and did not allow for indirect handling. In 2011 the TMC hired the Canadian Conservation Institute to conduct a facilities assessment of the museum. The TMC has used this document as a guide to improve the overall care of the collection and apply for grant assistance for storage upgrades.



Photo of Chinese festival hats in storage before the beginning of the rehousing project. The hats are crowded, unevenly supported, and most must be directly handled in order to be moved.

The Rehousing Project

In 2015, supported by funding from the Museum Assistance Program, a rehousing project began that allowed for the following actions:

- An inventory of the entire collection of festival hats
- Writing new condition reports for each hat
- The creation of dual-purpose storage/display mounts for each hat
- Reshelving and reorganizing the collection
- Updating collection records

Mount Requirements and Design

Both conservation concerns and aesthetics were important when the mounts were designed. The limited resources of TMC also made dual purpose storage and display mounts ideal. The system developed:

- Used conservation-appropriate materials
- Provided sufficient support to the artifact
- Was visually simplistic and unobtrusive
- Had removable/interchangeable components that could be modified when in storage or on display
- Allowed maximum use of the existing storage space

Method of Mount Fabrication

- 1) Two circles were cut from 2" polyethylene foam and glued together with hot-melt glue
- 2) The foam was carved to conform to the interior shape of the hat. If required, areas were padded using polyester batting.
- 3) On the underside of the foam form, a circle 4" in diameter was traced. A 3/4" deep incision following the traced outline was then made.



- 4) The form was covered in black cotton jersey, with excess fabric being tucked into the circular incision on the underside of the form.
- 5) A Plexiglas tube, 4" in diameter and cut to a desired height, was friction fitted into the circular incision on the underside of the form.
- 6) Trays were produced to meet dimensional requirements of the storage shelves. Each tray fit an average of three hats; each shelf fit either two or three trays, depending on shelf width.



- 7) A 4" diameter circle was cut from 1/4" polyethylene sheeting and glued to the interior of the tray with hot melt glue. This allowed for a friction fit between the circle and interior of the stand, preventing shifting or toppling.

- 8) To support decorative elements of the hats external supports were created, using materials including Reemay and polyethylene foam. Supports were secured using adhesive-backed Velcro or magnet strips, allowing for their removal, when desired.



Two festival hats as photographed on their completed mounts, each supported by Plexiglas tube in a storage tray. The hat on the left is stored at a height that allows its tassels to hang freely, while the back braid is supported with Reemay and polyethylene foam. The hat on the right has its ribbons secured in a roll using twill tape.



Outcomes

The implementation of the rehousing project has had numerous beneficial effects to the collection and ongoing museum operations and goals. These have included:

- The reduction of overall stresses to the hats
- The mediation and improvement of structural deformation including creasing and crushing
- The prevention of future damage due to direct handling and mishandling
- Allowing for conservation concerns requiring immediate intervention to be identified and addressed
- Improving access to the collection for staff, researchers and the public
- Enhancing ability to monitor the collection for potential future threats
- The reduction in time required preparing artifacts for display
- The development of a mount that can be applied and utilized for other artifacts within the TMC's collection



Photo of festival hats after completion of the rehousing project.

Conclusion

Building upon lessons learned in previous rehousing projects, the TMC was able to creatively adapt existing materials and utilize the diverse skills of staff and volunteers. This allowed for an effective and efficient use of available resources, which has been instrumental in facilitating this project's success.

The TMC strives to promote and preserve cultural history through its diverse collection. We are proud to contribute to the ongoing care of the museum's artifacts so that they may be enjoyed by future generations. It is hoped that this project will serve as inspiration to other institutions that may be facing similar storage challenges. We encourage these institutions to examine our model, evaluate the resources available at their institution, and adapt it to fit their needs.

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