

# CONSERVATION CENTER

*for Art & Historic Artifacts*

## Textile Preservation Tips and Tricks





# Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts



*In a typical year:*

- Preservation Services specialists complete over 50 survey projects.
- Approximately 60 CCAHA-sponsored workshops, conferences, webinars, and training sessions are presented.
- The Digital Imaging Services staff digitizes thousands of pages of fragile archival documents, books, and photographs.
- Conservators assess and treat more than 6,000 individual artifacts, from over 400 clients.
- Housing & Framing Services house approx. 75% of the artifacts treated (folder, sleeve, box, mat and frame, or sealed package).





# PART I.

# Documentation & Terminology

**Tell me about a textile.**

**Why document textiles?**

# What to look at when documenting textiles

## Description

### Materials:

fibers, fabrics, dyes,  
and closures

### Structures:

fabrics, seams, and  
decorations

Previous alterations  
and repairs

## Condition

### Previous damage:

structural and visual

### Stability:

likelihood to  
maintain current  
condition

Previous alterations  
and repairs

# Helpful tools

- Magnifier or thread counter
- Measuring tape
- Microspatula
- Tweezers
- Clean hands



Courtesy of Mission San Luis Rey and Ghia Larkins

# Condition Ratings

<b>Excellent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No apparent change from original condition</li><li>• Current condition aligns with significance</li></ul>
<b>Good</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Current condition is minimally different from ideal for significance</li><li>• Minimal visual or structural damage</li><li>• Original/ideal condition is still very accessible</li></ul>
<b>Fair</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Current condition is moderately different from ideal for significance</li><li>• Moderate visual or structural damage</li><li>• Original/ideal condition is somewhat accessible, but compromised</li></ul>
<b>Poor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Current condition is substantially different from ideal for significance</li><li>• Complex or comprehensive visual or structural damage</li><li>• Original/ideal condition is difficult to perceive</li></ul>
<b>Culturally significant condition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is condition related to cultural significance? Should it be preserved?</li></ul>

# Documentation methods



Painted silkwork picture, 1811  
Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library

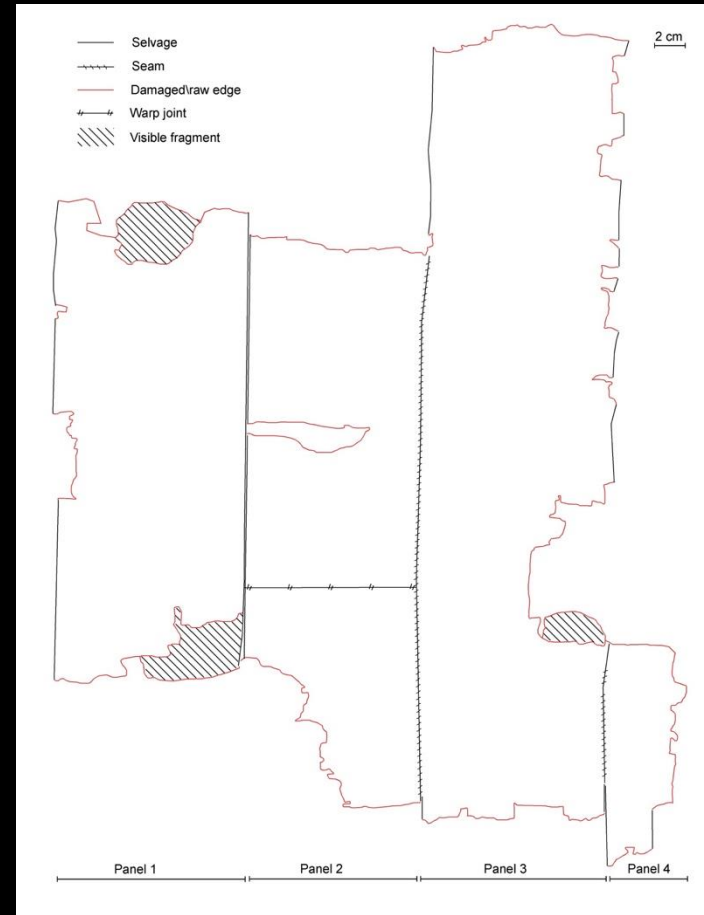
# Documentation methods



- Tears
- Losses
- Stains

Painted silkwork picture, 1811  
Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library

# Documentation methods



Tapestry woven fragment with monkeys  
Chimu Dynasty (11-15c), Peru

# Documentation methods



S.1703\_4-2015 Proper left and proper right before treatment

Frankenstein's monster's boot, 1935  
Victoria & Albert Museum

**Brief Object Description:** This is the right boot of a pair of boots worn by Boris Karloff in the 1935 film *Bride of Frankenstein*. It is constructed of two layers of faux suede stitched together at the seams and along the top edge. The interior is light brown. The exterior is dark brown. The boot has leather soles.

**General Condition Before Treatment:** The boot is in poor structural and aesthetic condition. The faux suede is actively shedding. Both layers are easily torn, and the coating on both layers is severely cracked. There is a large loss measuring roughly 5 x 13cm at the top of the outer layer on the proper right side. Additionally, the back seam and the seam along the top edge are split. There are numerous tears along the top edge, and a large tear at the top of the heel.

# Condition Terminology: Physical & Structural

## **HANDLING QUALITIES:**

- Flexible
- Brittle
- Stiff
- Shattering
- Powdering

## **COMPROMISED STRUCTURE (complete):**

- Tear
- Cut
- Split
- Hole
- Loss

## **COMPROMISED STRUCTURE (partial):**

- Abrasion
- Frayed
- Pilled

## **RELATED TO STORAGE & USE**

- Crease
- Fold line
- Distortion

## **RELATED TO STITCHES & APPLIED ELEMENTS**

- Broken, loose, or missing stitches
- Previous repair, mend, or alteration

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Courtesy of Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation

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Courtesy of Debra Hess Norris

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Courtesy of Mary Doering Collection, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

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Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

# Condition Terminology: Visual

## **EVIDENCE OF STORAGE & USE:**

- Yellowed and discolored
- Staining
- Grime
- Tide lines
- Accretion
- Corrosion
- Residues

## **RELATED TO FINISH:**

- Matte
- Glossy

## **RELATED TO DYES & PRINTS:**

- Fading
- Crocking
- Dye bleed or transfer

## **RELATED TO PESTS:**

- Fly specks
- Foxing
- Moth casings
- frass
- Grazing
- Mold

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Courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library



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Courtesy of Mary Doering Collection, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

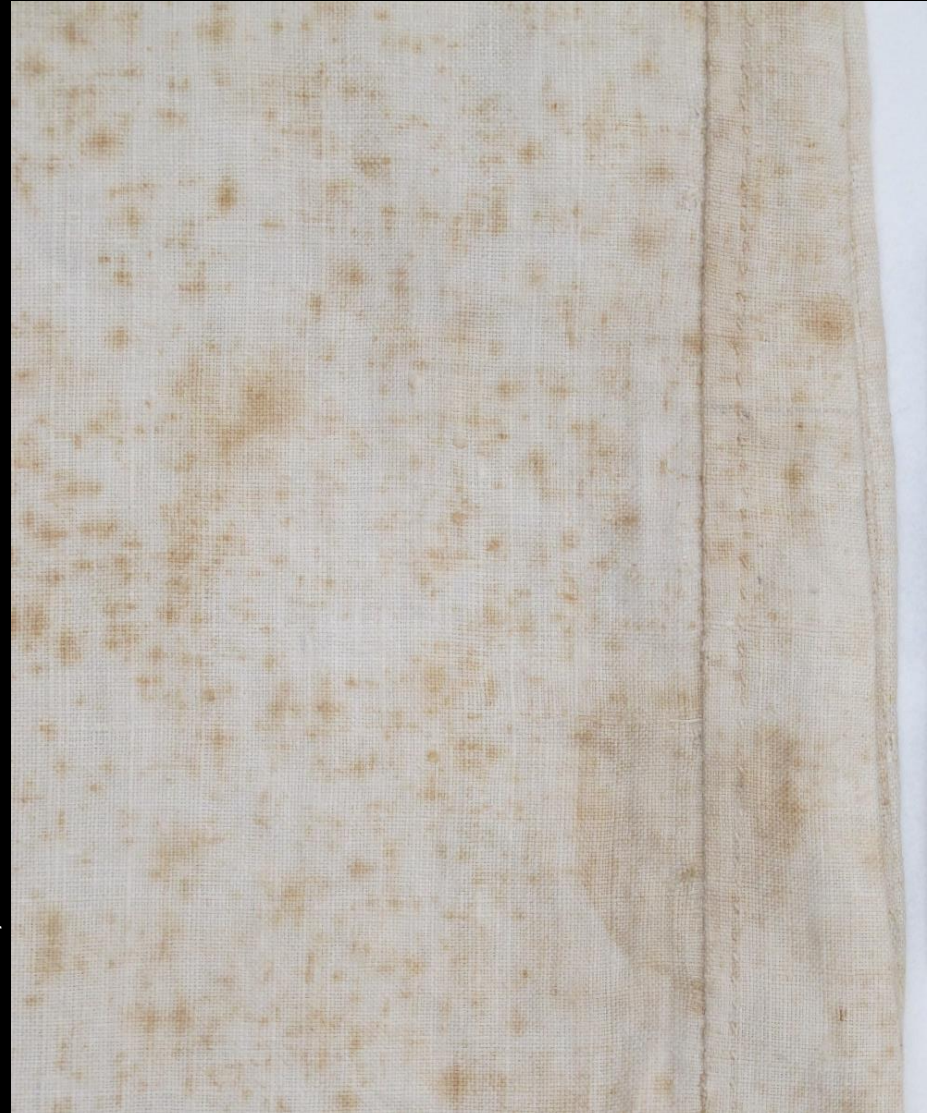


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Courtesy of Laura Milna



# Condition Terminology: Visual

## RELATED TO DYES & PRINTS:

- Fading
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Courtesy of Laura Mina

# Documentation tips

- Be consistent.
- Clarify left/right vs. proper left/proper right.
- Make educated material guesses; “likely” or “estimated”.
- A picture is worth a thousand words...so are diagrams!
- Always use at least two types of documentation (words and pictures; maps and pictures; etc).
- Clear descriptions of what you see is better than the incorrect use of common terms (e.g. brocade, tapestry, etc).
- Any documentation is better than none.

**Tell me about a textile.**

# Additional Documentation Resources

- Glossary of Textile Terms (Association of Registrars and Collections Specialists)  
[https://www.arcsinfo.org/content/documents/glossary\\_of\\_textile\\_terms.pdf](https://www.arcsinfo.org/content/documents/glossary_of_textile_terms.pdf)
- Textile Terms (GWU Textile Museum) <https://museum.gwu.edu/textile-terms>
- Vocabulary of Basic Terms for Cataloguing Costume (ICOM-Costume)  
<https://terminology.collectionstrust.org.uk/ICOM-costume/>
- Condition Reporting Textiles (Museum Textile Services)  
[https://www.nemanet.org/files/4413/8552/6675/Condition\\_Reporting\\_Textiles\\_by\\_Museum\\_Textile\\_Services.pdf](https://www.nemanet.org/files/4413/8552/6675/Condition_Reporting_Textiles_by_Museum_Textile_Services.pdf)
- Basic Condition Reporting (Connecting to Collections Care)  
<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/basic-condition-reporting/>
- Introduction to Conservation Reports (ICON)  
<http://www.conservationregister.com/Plcon-ConservationReports.asp>
- Documentation of Conservation Treatment (NPS)  
<https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/MHI/Chap8.pdf>
- Conditions and Effects (Getty Art & Architecture Thesaurus Online)  
<http://www.getty.edu/vow/AATHierarchy?find=tear&logic=AND&note=&page=1&subjectid=300186269>
- Visual Glossary (Australian Institute for The Conservation of Cultural Material)  
<https://aiccm.org.au/conservation/visual-glossary>



# PART II.

# Preventive Care of Textile Collections

# Preventive Care Considerations

- Climate
- Lighting
- Handling
- Storage & Mounting
- Labeling



# Climate

## Temperature:

- Avoid sustained high or low temperatures
- Avoid rapid fluctuations

## Relative Humidity:

- 40-60% RH is ideal
- Extended periods at highs and lows can lead to mold growth or embrittlement



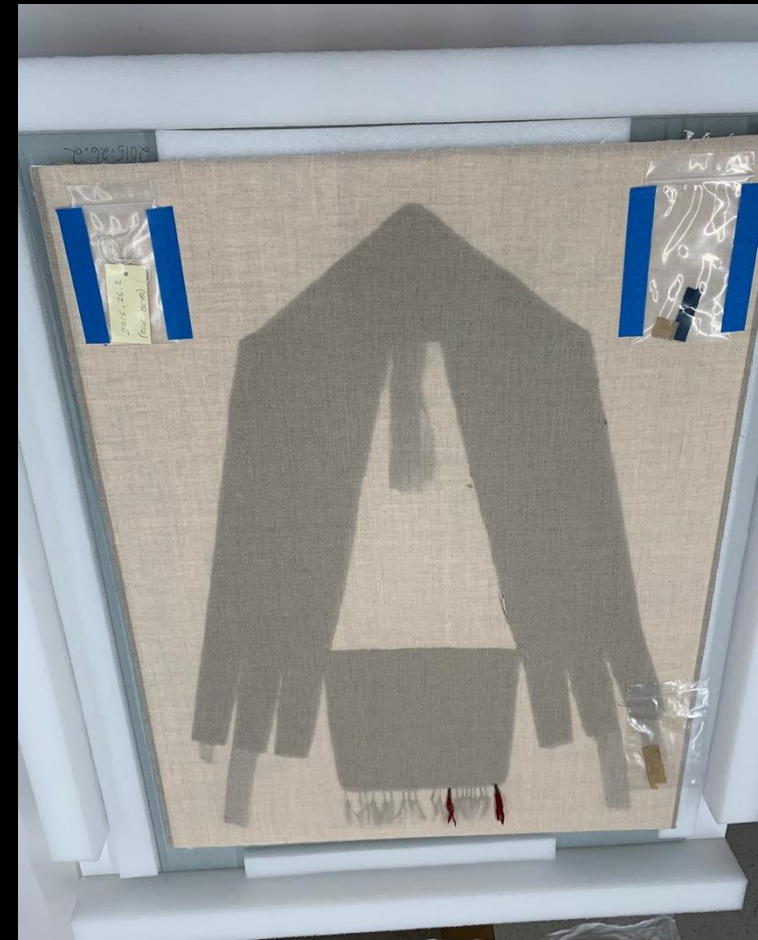
# Light Exposure

- Excessive exposure leads to fading or discoloration and fiber damage, which can ultimately cause splits and tears.
- Light can cause both fading and darkening, depending on the material and light types.
- Light exposure is cumulative (a debit account you can't refill).



# Light Exposure

- Choose LEDS if possible
- Add UV filters to windows and lights and use UV filtered plexi
- Avoid halogens
- Rotate textiles that are on exhibit
- Do not display directly in front of or across from windows
- Store textiles in light proof storage enclosures or spaces without windows



# Handling

Make a plan:

- Table surfaces prepared and cleared
- Pathways cleared
- Can the object fit through doorways?
- Can the object fit on a cart or hand carried?
- Are partners needed to make the move?
- What are your support materials?

Look for potential vulnerabilities in the textile:

- If fragile or large, what supports are needed?
  - Rigid supports
  - Secondary textile sling supports

# Handling



# Storage

Storage materials and housings:

- Flat files and shelves
- Hanging racks
- Butcher's carts
- Blueboard boxes and tubes
- Padded hangers



# Storage options: Folded or flat

## Good Candidates:

- Fragile textiles
- Small textiles
- Flexible textiles
- Heavy textiles



# Storage options: Folded or flat



Pad the folds (and line the box)!

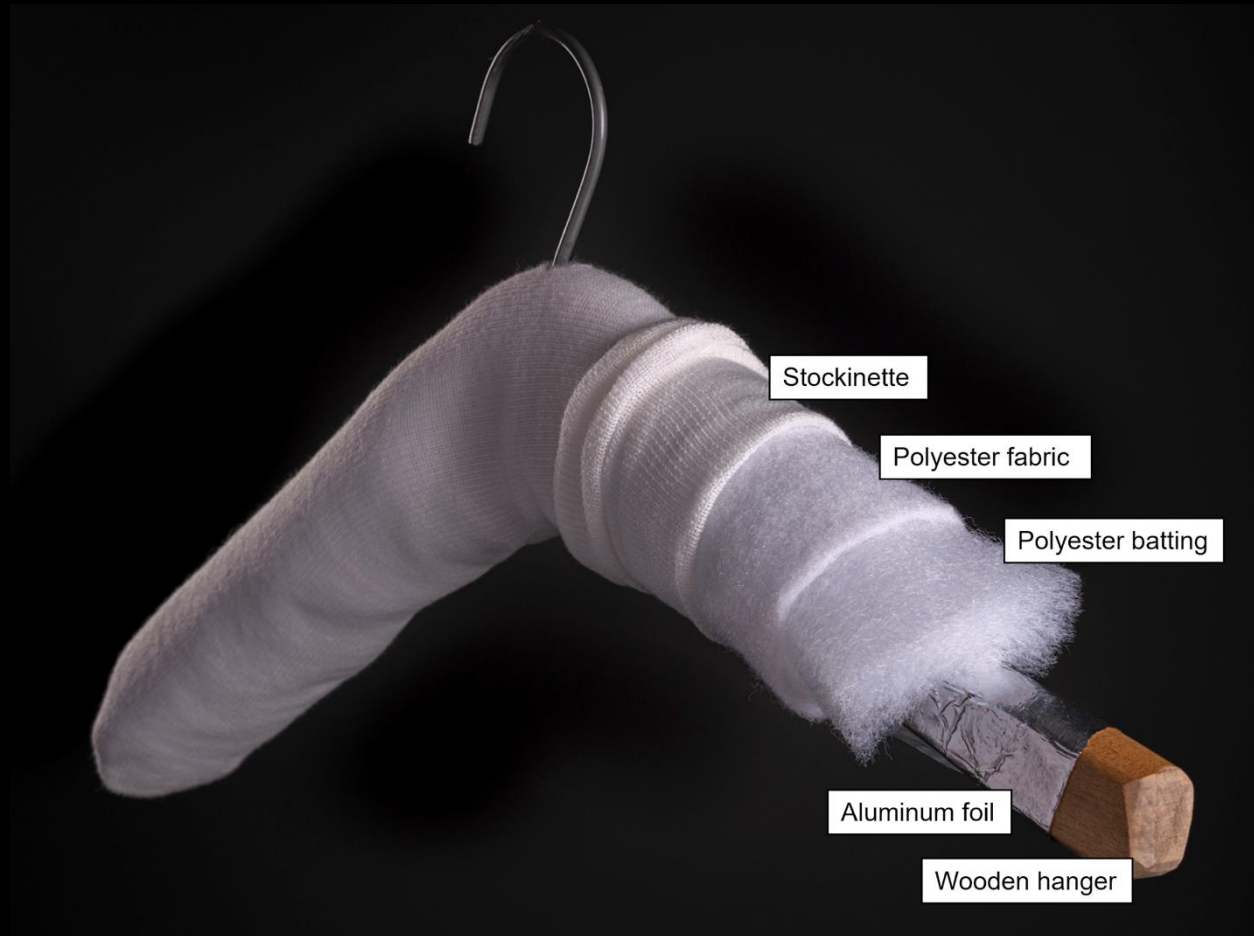
# Storage options: Hanging

## Good Candidates:

- Framed textiles
- Clothing with minimal adornment/layers
- Lightweight textiles
- Textile in good condition



# Storage options: Hanging



Always pad your hangers!

# Storage options: Rolled

Good Candidates:

- Large flat textiles
- Heavy textiles



# Storage options: Rolled

How to:

- Prepare a roll with cradles, cover, and ties.
- Consider the tube diameter and weight in relation to the textile.
- Roll along the length of the warps.
- If pile or nap, roll with it facing up.
- The tube should extend beyond the edges of the textile.

# Mounting

- Same considerations for storage types can be applied to mounting.
- Mounting techniques will vary based on the textile needs and institutional budget.
- When hanging textiles, ensure the weight is spread evenly across the top, using Velcro supports or rod sleeves.



# Mounting

- When mounting costume, ensure the mannequins are padded with archival materials (e.g. polyester wadding encased in cotton stockinette).



# Storage & Mounting Resources

reCollections: Caring for Collections Across Australia

<http://culturalmaterials.net/wp/28-2/cultural-material/textiles/>

## Museum Textile Services Resources

- Storage <http://www.museumtextiles.com/textile-storage.html>
- Displaying Costume <http://www.museumtextiles.com/displaying-historic-costume.html>
- Displaying Flat Textiles <http://www.museumtextiles.com/displaying-flat-textiles.html>

## CCI Notes

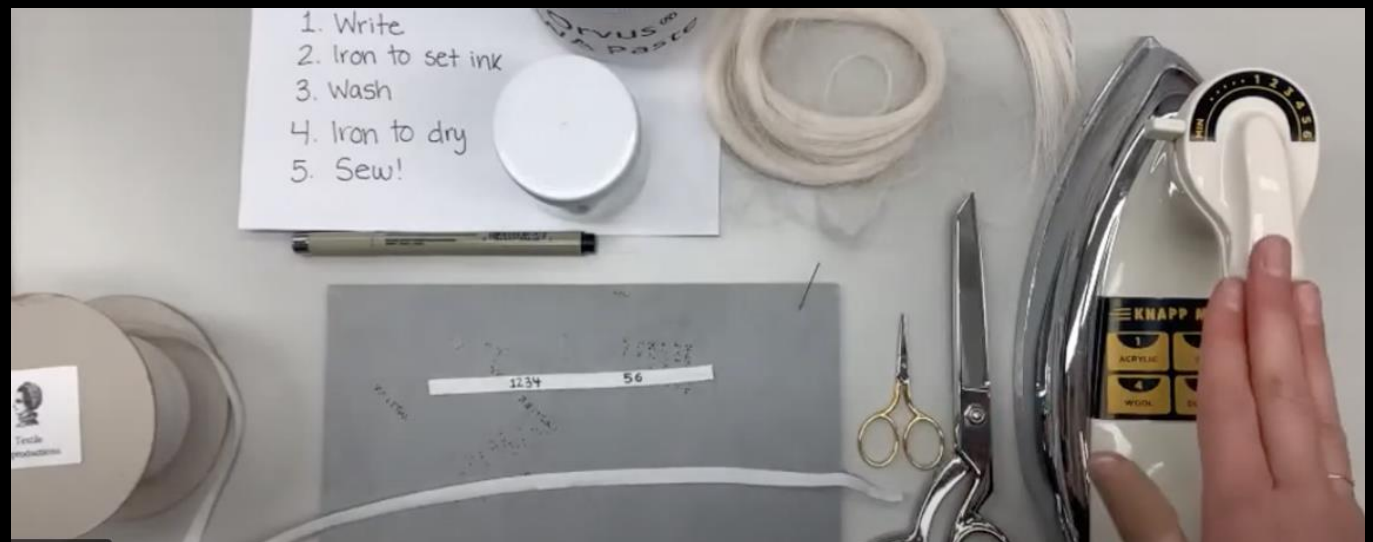
- Flat Storage, Rolled Storage, Velcro Support, Hanging Storage, Mounting Textiles, Mechanical Surface Cleaning) <https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/conservation-preservation-publications/canadian-conservation-institute-notes.html>

STASH <http://stashc.com/the-publication/>

MuseumPests.net <https://museumpests.net/>.

# Labeling

- Write accession numbers on labels that can be sewn or tied to a textile
- Avoid safety pins
- Label in areas that can be easily found while in storage but hidden while on display



Watch this super handy video (with attached materials list):  
<https://connectingtocollections.org/labeling-lightning-round/>

# PART III.

# Pests & Pesticides

# Common Pests

- Carpet beetle (larvae): eat proteinaceous fibers- wool, silk, fur, feathers
- Silverfish: eat starches- starched fabrics and cellulosic fibers, typically linen or cotton
- Clothes moths: eat proteinaceous fibers- wool, silk, fur, feathers

**NOTE:** all pests may be attracted by food stains (new and historic) and grime: keep storage and exhibit spaces clean!



# Common Pests



# Common Pests



# Pesticides

- If you are surprised something (such as fur, feathers, or wool objects) haven't been affected by pests, be wary!
- Historically, toxic heavy metals, including lead, arsenic, and mercury were applied to textiles-particularly wool and fur in anthropology collections- to prevent pest infestation.
- Heavy metals can only be identified using scientific testing- CCAHA can advise!
- If you are suspicious of pesticide use, wear PPE and wash your hands and surfaces after handling a textile.

# Pesticides

- Moth balls are poison.
- If a textile smells like moth balls, allow it to air out under ventilation or in an open room with air exchange as long as possible until no smell is detected.
- Label the textile enclosure: even if you can no longer smell the moth balls, some residues can remain.
- Always wear PPE and wash your hands.



# Conclusions

**When to contact a conservator?**

## **When to contact a conservator:**

- In the event of a collection emergency, such as fire or flood
- If you suspect or want to confirm the use of pesticides
- When mounting highly complex or fragile textiles
- When new damage occurs
- In the event of pest infestation
- **Whenever you have a question or just need advice!**

**We are here to help!**

# Thank you!

## Questions?



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