

Heirloom Textiles 2/6

How to make a padded hanger

Hello and welcome to the Textile Conservation Lab of the Minnesota Historical Society. We have created a series of podcasts to assist you in the storage of heirloom textiles. In this podcast we will be discussing padded hangers and how to make them.

A quick note about terminology, costumes are referred to by many terms, garments and regalia are two. Within the museum community, we commonly use the term costumes, which is the term used here.

Padded hangers are a cushioned support that will assist you in safely hanging costumes. The hanger is fabricated with a shaped polypropylene plastic hanger. Other materials necessary include spun bonded polyester batting or needle punched felt and washed cotton or cotton/poly stockinet fabric. All of these materials are reviewed in the 1st podcast "Storage Materials for Heirloom Textiles." There are readymade conservation hangers fabricated from a stable inert material called, Dow 220 Ethafoam in conservation catalogs. However, these readymade hangers are expensive to purchase. In comparison, padding your own hanger is an easy process, which can be completed for a fraction of the cost.

Padded hangers are useful for storing strong historic costumes hanging on a rack or in a closet. The hanger supports the garment with bulk and cushioning while the fabric covering helps to grip the costume and keep it in place.

Costumes suitable for hanging storage

Costumes suitable for hanging must be strong and stable throughout. Always examine the dress fabric and lining for areas of weakness or loss taking care to check under the arms, along the sleeves, waistline and all seams. Please note that dark staining, often the result of body soiling, signals an area of weakness within a costume. As a stain ages the textile becomes stiff and brittle eventually fracturing. Brittle stained areas are often found under the arms of many costumes. Pay special attention to the shoulders, they should be strong enough to support the weight of the costume, especially if it has a full heavy skirt. Finally, costumes cut with a straight grain where the warps, and wefts run horizontally, and perpendicular are suitable for hanging storage.

- Items suitable for hanging storage included.
- Strong and stable costumes throughout.
- Costumes free of stains especially dark stiff stains.
- Costumes strong enough to support its own weight.
- Costumes free of heavy embellishments such as glass beads.
- Costumes cut on the straight grain where the warp and weft run perpendicular and horizontal.

Costumes not suitable for hanging storage

Not every costume is suitable for hanging storage. Costumes that are fragile or damaged, especially in the shoulder areas should be stored flat. Heavy ornamentation be it beading or lace will pull at the lightweight fabric resulting in distortion and tears over time. Any garment with a heavy skirt can pull and distort or tear the shoulder area or the waistline. Any staining, especially under the arms is also considered an area of weakness. Knitted costumes of any kind are extremely stretchy and will extend distorting their overall shape. All knitted costumes should be stored flat or folded. Finally, any costume cut on the bias, when the fabrics grain runs diagonal making an x across the costume should never be stored on a hanger. Bias costumes are extremely malleable and will stretch and distort over time. Costumes often not suitable for hanging storage include

- Weak and fragile costumes.
- Costumes with dark stiff stains, especially under the arms.
- Heavy gowns often from the 19th century.

- Heavy beading or other embellishments especially when applied to fragile textiles.
- Knitted costumes.
- Costumes cut on the bias.

Materials to fabricate a padded hanger

You will need to purchase shaped plastic polyethylene hangers fabricated with polypropylene plastic in a suitable size. We have a supplier to order these hangers listed below. Also needed is polyester needle punched felt or spun bonded batting, and washed cotton or cotton/poly stockinet fabric.

After reviewing your costumes condition and establishing that it is suitable for hanging storage check to see that you have the right size hanger. Don't place an adult hanger into a child's garment. If a hanger is too big cut it down with a saw to the appropriate length. The most common size for adult costumes is 12 or 15 inches. Your hanger should fit within the costume supporting the shoulders.

Fabricating your padded hanger

First lay your spun bonded polyester padding or needle punched felt down on the table. Position the hanger at one end and then cut the width of hanger across batting. Next, you're felt in half and cut creating a slit up the center ending approximately 4 inches from top. Now wrap the felt around the hanger on both sides tucking the excess in underneath. Take care when wrapping the felt that you end up with a smooth package. Finally, cut a length of the washed stockinet approximately 3.5 inches longer on each side than the hanger. Place a very small nick in the center of the stockinet with your sharp scissor. Then work the stockinet over the padded hanger popping the chrome hook through the small nick. Now tuck in the ends underneath.

Inserting your padded hanger

Carefully insert your padded hanger into the costume while it is lying flat on a table. Take care not to stretch or distort the costume while doing this. Finally, check the fit to make sure it supports the costume correctly.

One final note on hanging costumes, always take care that they are at least 12 inches off the floor. If there is a flood, the bottom of the costumes will soak up the water resulting in stains that may never be reversed. Therefore, when you are choosing to hang your costume be sure it is at a safe distance from the floor.

Closing

Creating padded hangers is costly and time consuming. However, it does allow you to safely hang costumes up for long periods of time. Please refer to the conservation page of the Minnesota Historical Society's website for more information on preservation.

Minnesota Historical Society

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Podcast Series 2

How to make a padded hanger.

Material list

Plastic materials

Polyethylnene shaper hanger

Fabric materials

Stockinet, Washed in either cotton or cotton polyester blend

Polyester Batting, Spun bonded

Polyester Felt, Needle punched

Conservation Suppliers

Acme Display 1-888-439-9058 You will need to order in larger quantities from this supplier. Look for shaper hangers with chrome hooks.

www.ACMEDISPLAY.com

University Products 1-800-628-1912 Acrylic shaper hangers are carried in this catalog which are suitable for use with historic costumes.

www.universityproducts.com

Gaylord 1-800-448-6160

www.Gaylord.com

Talas 1-212-219-0770

www.talasonline.com