

# Textile Arts Council

## Dear TAC Members,

Enclosed please find our TAC Winter/Spring newsletter. Our biannual newsletter is distributed to TAC membership only, until the publication of the next issue in 6 months.

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## Winter/Spring 2021, Volume XXXVI, Number 1

### From the TAC Chair

by Shirley Juster, Textile Arts Council Board Chair

As the world has changed since March 2020, TAC has searched for ways to adapt to new routines.

Thank you to our board members Ellin Klor and Shelley Wells for planning and hosting the hugely popular **TAC Virtual Travels**, a four-week series of videos, interviews, and hands-on workshops.

Focused on the life and times and influence of **William Morris**, the program attracted over 1,000 viewers worldwide, from places as far away as New Zealand, Italy, the United Kingdom, Argentina, and Canada. It has served as an opportunity for TAC to reach out and share with textile enthusiasts around the world as many have continued to support our Saturday lectures. Beginning with **Sara Trail's** talk in September, **Mariachiara Gasparini** in October, **Evelyn Vanderhoop** in November and **Dilys Blum** in January, our Zoom attendance has attracted larger audiences than we have had for in-person lectures in the past.



Our Saturday series will continue to be virtual through the 2021 Winter and Spring lectures:

- February 20th: **Curating Handmade: Textiles from South Asia Past and Present** with Cristin McKnight Sethi
- March 20th: **Weaving, Tradition, Art and Community** with Carol Cassidy

- April 17th: ***Embracing the In-Between: Comme des Garçon, Butoh and Ma*** with Carol McLennan
- May 15th: ***Tapestry Weaving: A Universe beyond the Everyday*** with Valerie Kirk
- June 5th: ***Ryukyu Bashofu: Banana Fiber Textiles of Okinawa*** with Kana Taira (Annual Sinton Lecture)

We have also successfully transitioned our workshops to a virtual platform. In late July, **Youngmin Lee** kicked off our season with her class on ***Maedub Korean Knots***. In August, we hosted an online session on ***Sequence Knitting***, instructed by knitter and author, **Cecelia Campochiaro**. As part of the William Morris series, we also sponsored two **May Morris** embroidery workshops with the San Francisco School of Needlework and Design. These classes reached full capacity, indicating a strong demand for online learning.

Our assortment of workshops for Spring 2021 includes:

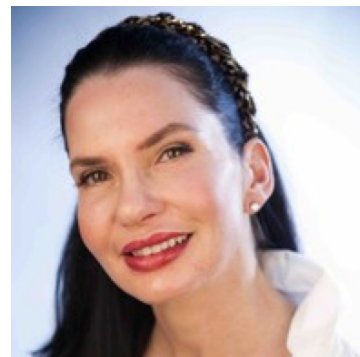
**Jeanie Low's** sold-out ***Designing Pieced Fabric***, a two-day workshop on February 16 and 23.



**Cecelia Campochiaro** will join us again for her ***Marls as Colorwork in Handknitting***, also a two-day workshop on **March 2nd and 4th**, [open for registration](#) now.

And there's more in still in the planning stages.

I am so pleased to welcome our new board member, **Anat Pilovsky**. Originally a native of Israel, Anat came to the United States with her husband more than three decades ago. As a TAC member, she immediately became an active volunteer in planning the Talk & Tea events, a committee on which she continues to serve.



The term of service for board members is three years, with the option to stand for re-election for an additional two terms. We are delighted that Renée Cocke will stand for another three-year term. Renée currently serves as chair of the development committee and the manager of our Instagram. After 6 years as treasurer, Joy Stocksdales has left the board. We are grateful to Joy for her dedication to TAC.

With gratitude to our team and dedicated community of textile enthusiasts, I am happy to be reelected to serve as board chair for one more year.

As we move forward into 2021, TAC continues to explore new ways of adapting to the current environment. With increased visibility in the worldwide textile community, we are exploring ways of bringing more information and opportunities to our members. As a first step, TAC now **records and archives** Saturday lectures for future reference to our members. We are currently in the process of establishing an [international calendar](#) of textile events and virtual textile talks to be posted on the TAC website. We hope that you will continue to share your work with our Member News, a source of inspiration for us all.



Thank you to our many dedicated members who have made an offer to volunteer in various TAC programs as part of your membership renewal. That opportunity is temporarily on hold, but your commitment to TAC and the Fine Arts Museums is truly appreciated. We look forward to meeting and working together as soon as safely possible.

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## Piecing History: The Brown and Mitchell Quilt

by Laura Camerlengo, Associate Curator of Costume and Textile Arts



Monin Brown, American, 1850 -1930. Hattie (Strawberry) Mitchell, American, b. 1854. Improvisational strip quilt, 1930s. United States. Printed cotton plain weave, printed cotton twill, silk satin, printed silk plain weave, rayon plain weave, printed crepe; pieced, quilted. Object: 198.1 x 127 cm (78 x 50 in.). Gift of the Eli Leon Trust. 2019.52.3.

In 2019, the Fine Arts Museums acquired ten quilts from the Eli Leon Trust with partial support of the Textile Arts Council Endowment Fund. Eli Leon (1935 - 2018) was an Oakland-based psychologist, writer, collector, and prominent self-taught scholar of African American quilts. Among the quilts in this acquisition is a pieced quilt by sisters and former enslaved persons Monin Brown (1850 - 1930) and Hattie



“Strawberry” Mitchell (b. 1854). Leon had acquired this quilt in 1985 from Valerie Moore Shields (1924 - 1989), a descendant of the Johnston family of Macon, Georgia, for whom the sisters had worked as nurses and maids. Through in-depth genealogical research as well as analyses of the quilt’s textiles, the quilt reveals the poignant stories of Brown and Mitchell, and the complex social, economic, and personal relationships present in the American South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Monin Brown and Hattie Mitchell were born in Virginia into slavery, but sent to Georgia during the United States Civil War (1861 - 1865).<sup>[1]</sup> Brown first appears in the Federal Census in 1880, where she is recorded as “keeping house” with her husband, Neger, a farmer, in Leon, Florida, several hours south of Macon, Georgia.<sup>[2]</sup> By 1900, both Brown and her sister Mitchell were living together with Mitchell’s son, Joseph, in Macon, Georgia, where the Census lists Brown as their head of household and her occupation as a maid.<sup>[3]</sup> In fact, both sisters worked as nurses and maids for the Johnston family of the same city. In the years prior to the Civil War, Macon was a thriving urban and industrial city, bolstering the state’s robust cotton production and trade.<sup>[4]</sup>

As domestics, Brown and Mitchell were employed in the home of William McEwen and Flewellyn Johnston, who were among Macon’s wealthiest residents. William McEwen Johnston (1850 - 1913) was born and raised in Tennessee, but made his fortune in banking in New York. <sup>[5]</sup> In the 1890s, he moved to Macon, Georgia, where he married his wife, Flewellyn Reese (1869 - 1958), in 1892. The couple bore two children, Viola Johnston Moore (1893 - 1973) and William McEwen Johnston, Jr. (1901 - 1987).<sup>[6]</sup>

Brown and Mitchell enjoyed close relationships with the Johnston family. In 1906, Mitchell accompanied the Johnstons on a yearlong trip to France and Monaco as their personal maid. On this trip, Mitchell collected leaves at places of significance to her and used them as templates for an appliquéd quilt. William Johnston participated in the quilt-making endeavor as well, penciling in place names and dates, which Mitchell then embroidered.<sup>[7]</sup> The Johnstons also bought Brown and Mitchell a home, helping them achieve property ownership, which was central to the Black economic agenda in the post-Civil War South.<sup>[8]</sup> Brown and Mitchell’s home was located within walking distance of the Johnston property.<sup>[9]</sup>

Brown and Mitchell made their quilt by the improvisational string and strip methods. According to African American quilter Sherry Ann Byrd – whose work was also acquired by the Museums from the Eli Leon Trust – “Often, after you make a regular quilt, you have a lot of little pieces left over. Some of it is real stringy; some of it is little small triangles or odd shapes. The quilters will take those pieces, and they’ll sew them onto the piece of newspaper to make a quilt block. When they have about 30 blocks, they’ll sew them into a quilt top.”<sup>[10]</sup> In this case, after the blocks were made, they were sewn together into long strips and then varied with long strips of unpieced floral-printed fabric. This practice of pairing pieced blocks with unpieced fabrics was common practice among quiltmakers in the late nineteenth century until about 1925. The style drew inspiration from contemporary quilting patterns. These patterns were increasingly available to makers through women’s periodicals and mail-order pattern catalogues, but often showed the patterns as isolated blocks, ultimately leaving it to the quiltmaker to form the larger composition.<sup>[11]</sup>

The quilt is made from a diverse array of printed and plain fabrics, including printed cotton plain weave, printed cotton twill, printed silk plain weave, printed crepe, rayon plain weave, and silk satin. While some of the textiles may have been leftovers from other quilts, several were once dress fabrics. Some squares feature swatches of simple striped and checked fabrics; these were especially common for women’s dress during World War I, when dye scarcity made printed fabrics hard to find.<sup>[12]</sup> Additionally, the quilt includes some black novelty prints, featuring bright patterns on true black backgrounds, which were available for women’s clothing after the discovery of colorfast sulfur black dye in 1893.<sup>[13]</sup> These were used as dress fabrics, but also appear in quilts dating from 1900 to 1920. Close examination of the blocks in Brown and Mitchell’s quilt further reveals swatches of the same pattern in different colorways, suggesting that these fabrics may have been samples.

Indeed, with national interest in the development of the United States textile industry in the wake of World War I, domestic mills produced thousands of prints a year, in an array of diverse colors thanks to improvements in the colorfastness of synthetic dyes. Women, including perhaps Brown and Mitchell, often kept fabric

samples for reference in their own personal swatch books or sewing diaries, which recorded the clothes made by the women of the household.<sup>[14]</sup>

While, at first glance, the use of small fabrics or remnants might suggest thriftiness by the sisters, or perhaps even economic hardship, this method of quilting in fact utilizes an abundance of fabric, rather than a limited amount. As many quilt scholars have noted, using smaller pieces of fabric to form a large quilt was an aesthetic choice – one that Brown and Mitchell made with great aplomb and technical proficiency.<sup>[15]</sup>

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Eli Leon, *Who'd a Thought it: Improvisation in African-American quilting* (San Francisco: San Francisco Craft & Folk Art Museum, 1987), 56.

<sup>2</sup> “Monin Brown,” *United States Census, 1880*, FamilySearch, accessed January 6, 2021, [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org). Genealogical information about the sisters from the years prior to 1880 has not yet been identified, and unfortunately may never be found. During slavery, the United States Federal Census did not record the names of enslaved persons; as most Blacks were enslaved in the decades prior to 1870, the names of the majority were therefore not recorded in the Federal Census before that year. See “African Americans in the Federal Census, 1790-1930,” *African American Census Research*, National Archives and Records Administration, accessed January 5, 2021, [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov) › african-american-census-research.

<sup>3</sup> “Hattie Mitchell,” *United States Census, 1900*, FamilySearch, accessed January 6, 2021, [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org).

<sup>4</sup> Donnie D. Bellamy, “Macon, Georgia, 1823-1860: A Study in Urban Slavery,” *Phylon*, 45, no. 4 (1984): 298. From the founding of the city in 1823 until the outbreak of the War, slavery was firmly entrenched in Macon’s economic and social institutions. The majority of enslaved persons in Macon were used as domestic help, including as coachmen, footmen, maids, and butlers. In their role as domestics, rather than laborers, one contemporary visitor remarked that many enslaved persons were retained in Macon for “status, or ostentation”. This said, some enslaved persons in Macon worked in the cotton trade, helping to transport cotton from Macon to Savannah along Georgia’s waterways, while others worked in cotton mills or building the city’s railroads. For further reading, see Bellamy, “Macon, Georgia, 1823-1860: A Study in Urban Slavery,” 301 - 303.

<sup>5</sup> “W. McE. Johnston, of Macon, Is Dead,” *Atlantan Georgian*, December 16, 1913, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>, accessed January 6, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> The Johnstons were prominent civil and social leaders in the city of Macon, and their activities were widely recorded in contemporary papers in both Macon and Atlanta. Newspaper articles found in *The Macon Telegraph* (1895 – 1902), *The Augusta Herald* (1912), and *The Atlantan Georgian*(1913), <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>, accessed January 6, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Hoffberger, Roger Manley, and Colin Wilson, *Tree of Life: The Inaugural Exhibition of the American Visionary Art Museum* (Baltimore: American Visionary Art Museum, 1996), 214.

<sup>8</sup> See notes in Eli Leon Ledger, UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. See also, Karen Cook Bell, *Claiming Freedom: Race, Kinship, and Land in Nineteenth-Century Georgia* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 64.

<sup>9</sup> See also, “Brief News: White Friends Willed Macon Negro’s Property,” *Jackson Herald*, November 26, 1931, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>, accessed January 6, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Hix, “The Beautiful Chaos of Improvisational Quilts,” *Collectors Weekly*, July 13, 2011, <https://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/quilting-jazz-with-a-needle-and-thread/>, accessed January 5, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Brackman, *Making History: Quilts and Fabric from 1890 – 1970* (California: C&T Publishing, 2008), Kindle edition, Chap. 1, “Learning Lessons from the Past”.

<sup>12</sup> Brackman, *Making History: Quilts and Fabric from 1890 – 1970*, Chap. 1, “Ginghams: Checked, Plaid, Striped, and Plain.”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. 1, “Black Novelty or ‘Neon’ Prints.”

<sup>14</sup> Kaila Temple, “Chic Cuts: The Abercrombie Fabric Swatchbook,” *Historic Deerfield* (blog), Historic Deerfield, July 12, 2018, <https://www.historic-deerfield.org/blog/2018/7/12/chic-cuts-the-abercrombie-fabric-swatchbook>, accessed January 4, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Brackman, *Making History: Quilts and Fabric from 1890 – 1970*, Chap. 3, “The Scrap Look.”

A Little Goes a Long Way:  
A Padding Project for Costume Storage  
by Laura Garcia-Vedrenne and Trish Daly

In October, Laura Garcia-Vedrenne, Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Textiles Conservation, began the conservation of a 1903-1905 Callot Soeurs dress (54.79.1a-b). The treatment consisted of interventive stitching to stabilize the garments. However, when Laura saw the amount of tissue that was needed to properly pad the garment while in storage, she suggested incorporating a

second phase to create a passive padding solution to extend the life of the garment.

Creasing is a problem that conservators think about when putting objects in storage since it can cause permanent deformation of textile fibers. Padded solutions are often used to provide additional support to textiles that lack a strong structure. This prevents areas of breakage on creases, which occurs when fibers reach a weakening point that causes splits and holes.

Some of the drawbacks of using solely tissue as padding is that it often proves challenging to support three-dimensional and multi-layered objects because of its tendency to deflate. Though tissue can be re-fluffed or replaced with newer and more resistant sheets, it requires periodical monitoring and can be time-consuming. Furthermore, fragile objects may require gentler solutions that stiffer tissue paper cannot provide (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Padding solutions: rolled tissue for temporary use versus long-term padded tubes and cushions.

In this case, the weight of the silk panne velvet and the large amount of fabric on the skirt, as well as the fineness of the tulle appliqué and lace from the sleeves, directed the choice of materials for the padding elements. These were made of archival batting and needlepoint felt, covered with silk habutai to provide a smooth surface that allows pads to be easily slid in and out of the object without snagging. Overall, it was important to keep the storage solution free from adhesives, to use conservation-grade materials, and to avoid any bulkiness that would impede the garment's return to its location on a drawer. It was deemed necessary to support the waist and the folds on the skirt with four snakes (long tube pads) of two different sizes. The bodice required a custom-made torso pad as well as two arm pads (small tubes) for the short sleeves (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Sleeve before and after a custom-made arm pad has been inserted.

This kind of project would often be completed by the beloved team of volunteers at the Textile Conservation Lab. Unfortunately, the volunteers have not been able to return onsite since the museum's closure in mid-March, so it was time to get creative with innovative solutions to make best use of the allocated time for the project. After discussion with the Textile Conservation team, it was considered reasonable that, for once, the archival materials could travel outside of and back to the museum! Laura proceeded to provide specifications and diagrams, as well as measure and prepare the materials for delivery to Trish Daly.

Trish has previous experience making patterns for the FAMSF collection, including some book display stands for last summer's project from the Achenbach Collection. She is knowledgeable about adjustability, so she was considerate enough to leave all ends on one side of each pad open, leaving room to easily change the length and the amount of stuffing. She also tacked the needle-felt in place on the padded torso so it would not shift as adjustments were made.

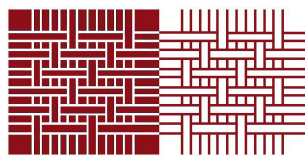
This project was a good reminder of the object-based nature of a conservator's work and of the importance of having access to the collection. It also proved



that good communication between team members is key to achieving satisfactory results. Furthermore, the garment has been properly supported, promoting best care and standards for storage within the FAMSF collection (Figure 3). To top it off, Trish was thrilled to have an opportunity to help us out: “I was only too happy to take on this project for the Textile Lab. This beautiful dress was always a favorite of mine, and I miss the Museum, the staff and volunteers, and being part of the Lab activities!”



Figure 3: Overall picture showing placement of pads.



Contact the Textile Arts Council by email, at [tac@famsf.org](mailto:tac@famsf.org), or by phone 415-750-3627. Help us keep our records up-to-date. Please let the TAC office know if you have changed your email or mailing address. Your information is confidential, and you will only receive TAC and Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco news and updates. Don't let your TAC communications go to the spam filter—add [tac@famsf.org](mailto:tac@famsf.org) to your email contacts.

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#### Image Credits:

- Composite image top left: May Morris's notes and sketches for embroidery lectures; c. 1899-1902; 20 x 13 cm; hand-written pen on paper
- Composite image top right: May Morris (previously known as 'Jane Morris'); Edward Burne-Jones; Society of Antiquaries of London: Kelmscott Manor
- Composite image bottom: Nightdress sachet embroidered silk, with Apple Tree; 1890; designed by May Morris. Morris & Co. Coloured silks on green. © Victoria & Albert Museum, London.
- Designing Pieced Fabric workshop: Courtesy of Jeanie Low.
- Marls as Colorwork in Handknitting workshop: Courtesy of Cecelia Campochiaoro.
- Monin Brown, American, 1850 -1930, Hattie (Strawberry) Mitchell, American, b. 1854. Improvisational strip quilt, 1930s. United States. Printed cotton plain weave, printed cotton twill, silk satin, printed silk plain weave, rayon plain weave, printed crepe; pieced, quilted. Object: 198.1 x 127 cm (78 x 50 in.). Gift of the Eli Leon Trust. 2019.52.3.
- Padding Project Figure1: Conservation Padding solutions: rolled tissue for temporary use versus long-term padded tubes and cushions. Photograph courtesy of the author.
- Padding project Figure 2: Sleeve before and after a custom-made arm pad has been inserted. Photograph courtesy of the author.
- Padding Project Figure 3: Overall picture showing placement of pads. Photograph courtesy of the author.



de Young museum: [Golden Gate Park \ 50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Drive, San Francisco, CA 94118](#) \ 415-750-3600 \ [deyoungmuseum.org](#) \ Hours: Tuesdays–Sundays, 9:30 am–5:15 pm



Legion of Honor museum: Lincoln Park \ 100 34th Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94121 \ 415-750-3600 \ [legionofhonor.org](#) \ Hours: Tuesdays–Sundays, 9:30 am–5:15 pm