

Textile Arts Council

Dear TAC Members,

Enclosed please find our TAC Fall newsletter. Our biannual newsletter is distributed to TAC membership only until the publication of the next issue in 6 months. This is the first issue to be published directly as an email.

In this Issue:

American Quilts Up Close
Preventative Conservation
Prevails During Lockdown
Remembering Diane Mott
From the TAC Board Chair

Fall 2020, Volume XXXV, Number 2

American Quilts Up Close

by Laura Camerlengo, Associate Curator of Costume and Textile Arts

Over the past two years, the Textile Arts department has been closely studying its collection of late eighteenth- through twentieth-century American quilts. Several months ago, a group of museum staffers – including textiles curators and conservators, art technicians, and photographers – gathered to review and document the American quilts in the Museums’ holdings, which number more than seventy examples. In addition to assessing the viability of these objects for display, this close examination allowed the group to gain valuable insights on some of the quilts in the Museums’ holdings.

Among the quilts reviewed was an 1861 quilt top with a “Ship of Life” pattern (Figure 1). Portrayed on this quilt, a ship anchors on the seashore, bordered by floral garlands and musical instruments. An embroidered inscription explains that the image shows “[t]he great ship of life, gliding over the seas of time, bound to the shores of eternity. She bears the bloodstained cross, with the crown of promise in view. Her anchor is cast on the Rock of Ages. The bow of the covenant is in the sky.” The



quilt’s motifs are formed by hand appliqué, where shapes are cut from pieces of cloth and stitched to give the illusion of unbroken shapes and lines on a fabric foundation. In the nineteenth century, illustrations found in printed

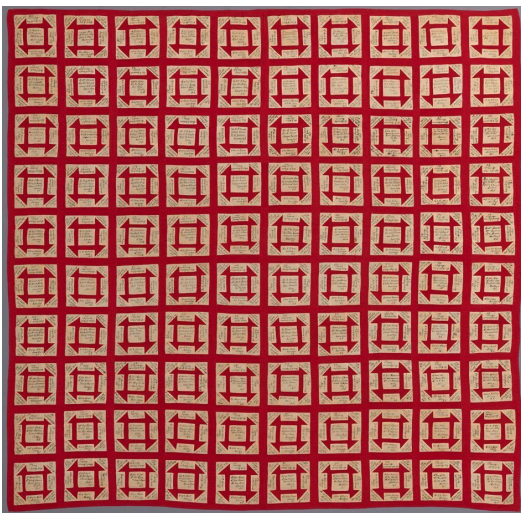
materials were sometimes copied for appliqué patterns, but some were also drawn freehand.

While examining this quilt, we observed visible stencil marks on the foundation fabric, near these appliquéd designs (Figure 2). These marks reveal that the quilt's maker, Eliza Cooper, deviated from her original design concept. The irregularity of the stencil marks is most visible above the center rainbow. When compared to the precisely rendered appliquéd designs, they suggest that Cooper rendered her initial markings on the foundation fabric by freehand.



Figure 1: Eliza Cooper (maker), American, active mid 19th century Quilt top: "Ship of Life" pattern, 1861 United States, New York Cotton; appliquéd, embroidered (chain stitch) 268 x 232.4 cm (105 1/2 x 91 1/2 in.). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of Dr. Marion W. Craig, 48208.

Figure 2: Detail of quilt top (48208), showing hand-drawn stenciling. Photograph courtesy of author.



A second quilt in the group – a ca. 1886 signature quilt – also reveals the importance of handwork in understanding quilt construction and design (Figure 3). Here, seventy blocks of white cotton plain weave are appliquéd with pieced red cotton plain weave to form a "Church Dash" pattern. Within each bordered square are several signatures and locations in dark ink. The varied locations – ranging from

Nova Scotia, Canada, to California, New York, and Rhode Island, United States – suggest the signed textiles came from myriad locations.

However, close inspection of the handwriting, which is consistent throughout many of the squares, suggests that the signatures likely came from few scribes, or perhaps even a single one (Figure 4). According to the quilt's donor, the textile was a gift to their grandfather, minister Robert Stewart, from his parishioners when he left Nova Scotia for San Francisco in 1886. While many signature quilts date to earlier decades of the nineteenth century, this example is consistent with the creation of signature quilts in western Canada and the United States in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As the fashion for signature quilts faded in the east after the Civil War, they appeared in the then-newly settled west, creating a revival period for quilts of this style during the 1880s and 1890s.

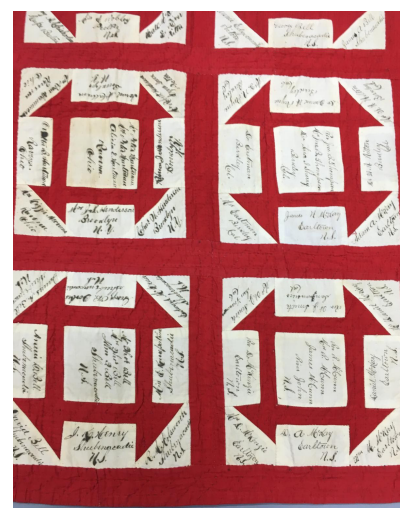


Figure 3: Quilt: "Churn Dash" pattern with signatures, ca. 1886 United States, or Canada - Nova Scotia Cotton, ink; pieced, appliquéd, and quilted 229.9 x 226.1 cm (90 1/2 x 89 in.). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of Mrs. J.R. Stewart, 1980.81.1.

Figure 4: Detail of quilt (1980.81.1), showing signatures. Photograph courtesy of author.



While quilt faces can reveal much about their construction, so too can quilt backings.

This quilt top features a “Radiating Star” pattern comprised of numerous, multicolored diamond- and triangle-shaped silk and cotton fabrics, which are pieced to make the resultant composition appear to radiate from its center (Figure 5).

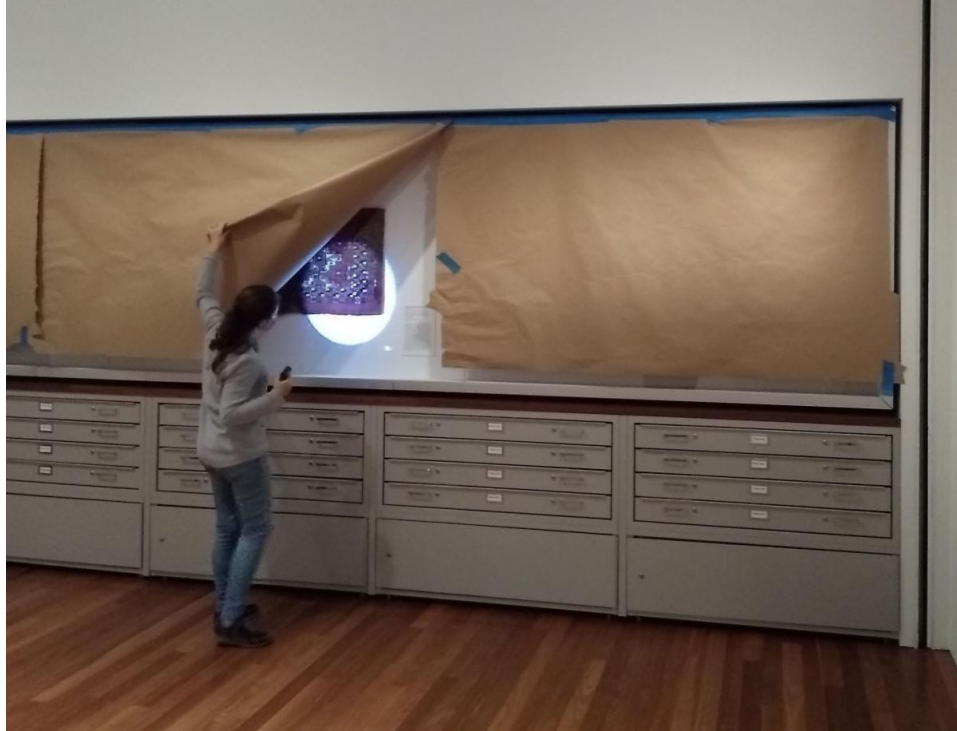
Strips of brown cotton plain weave, cotton chintz, and wool plain weave back the silk fabrics through a technique known as foundation piecing (Figure 6). By this technique, running or straight stitches secure fabric pieces together over a stabilizing base layer of fabric or paper. Sometimes called string piecing, the technique is frequently used for patterns with small strips, as seen in this quilt. Although indigenous to American quilt makers, foundation piecing was contrary to paper piecing, the preferred template method in Europe, especially in England. By the latter technique, a paper shape is wrapped in fabric and basted; the shape is then stitched to other paper-backed shapes with small overstitches or whipstitches. Women’s periodicals of the time frequently promoted paper piecing in their patterns for silk patchwork quilts, as their patterns often copied European sources. But, as this quilt substantiates, these patterns were not necessarily reflective of the homegrown quilt-making practices of Americans.



We look forward to continuing our close study of the Museums’ American quilt collection in the coming months, as the Museums re-open to both staff and the public.

Figure 5: Jacob Demarest (maker), American, active 19th century Quilt top: “Radiating Star” pattern, 1887 United States Silk, cotton plain weave, cotton chintz, wool plain weave; foundation pieced, backing 210.8 x 193 cm (83 x 76 in.) Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of Mrs. J.W. Russell, 54033.

Figure 6: Detail of quilt top (54033), showing foundation pieced backing. Photograph courtesy of the author.



Examination of a hanging textile during on-site walkthrough.

Preventative Conservation Prevails During Lockdown

by Laura G. Garcia-Vedrenne and Julie McInnis

The Textile Conservation Lab has remained busy throughout the museum's closure. Some of our projects include updating our documentation on recent conservation treatments, reviewing the lab's history, editing our training presentations for technicians and security staff, and attending several virtual courses to keep us updated in our field and to contribute to our professional development. We are also working on an extended cleaning and renaming of our digital files, which has already allowed us to find documents faster while working from home.

With the museum's closure, one of our main concerns was to maintain the standards of our Integrated Pest Management Program. We wanted to ensure that common museum pests were not presented with any opportunities to devour the constitutive (and tasty!) materials within our collections. This matter is particularly important for the Textile Department because objects often include fur, feathers, and animal hairs, which are rich in proteinaceous content that insects like to feed upon. Considering the reduced movement of visitors and staff and large areas of the museum being relatively quiet, our team hypothesized that insect activity could increase. To counteract this concern, we decided against lowering museum lighting in the majority of spaces and increased our vigilance with frequent on-site walkthroughs.

A small team of essential staff, including a member of the Textile Conservation Lab, completes checks on all galleries and storage rooms multiple times a week at both the de Young and the Legion of Honor. These checks include close visual inspection of high-risk items and monitoring strategically-placed blunder sticky traps, which are pieces of cardboard that support a glue surface that can capture insects wandering around a specific area. By identifying any potential threats and logging our findings, Collection Care Specialist Julie McInnis is able to analyze the data, monitor and balance the risks, and target any potential areas of concern. In such cases, it is necessary to work as a team on an appropriate plan to implement immediate and long-term solutions that ultimately safeguard the collection. As part of the preventative conservation measures implemented during lockdown, the number of sticky traps has increased, periodic checks are scheduled more frequently, the particularly vulnerable artworks such as wool tapestries have been de-installed, and some storage solutions have been revisited to provide better protection.

B. Diane Mott, September 1946 - April 2020



Curator of the de Young Museum's Textile Department until her retirement in 2009

B. Diane Mott passed peacefully on Saturday, April 11, at her home in Athens, Georgia.

Diane will be fondly remembered as an intrepid traveler, passionate textile scholar, and generous friend. She was born in 1946 and raised in Casper, Wyoming, where she developed a deep love of nature. Diane received her B.A. from the University of Michigan in 1969. Her interest in Islamic cultures led her to volunteer with the Peace Corps in 1970, and she spent the two years working in eastern Turkey. She returned to the USA in the late 1970s, living in Atlanta, where she got her first museum experience working with historic textiles at the Atlanta Historical Society. Diane went back to Istanbul, on a Fulbright Scholarship and spent several years in the Topkapi Museum studying Ottoman court textile production as part of a doctoral program. Turkey, and the dear friends she made there, would remain close to Diane's heart forever.

Diane added another dimension to her textile knowledge by pursuing an MFA under the direction of renowned weaver Greg Kaufman at the University of Georgia in Athens. Her subsequent time in Atlanta as a post-doctoral student was enriched by her side gig working at the Centers for Disease Control where she made a new group of lifelong friends. Diane's refined eye and passion for textiles was a perfect fit for her eventual career as a textile curator, first at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston from 1991-1998, and later at the M.H. De Young Museum in San Francisco. She retired from the DeYoung Museum in 2009.

Diane delighted in meeting new people and was a friend to all, whether they be scholar or taxi driver. She will be remembered for her unique personality and ebullient sense of humor. Diane deeply loved her parents, Jean and Harold Mott, and will join them in body and spirit at the Highland Cemetery in Casper, Wyoming.

Memories of Diane

Harry Parker, the director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco at that time, unexpectedly called with an invitation to dinner with someone he wanted me to meet. He was ready to fill the position of curator of textiles and had been interviewing in search of the right person. That person turned out to be Diane Mott. That dinner included lively, candid conversation along with the lovely wine. As I was chair of TAC at that time, he wanted me to explain TAC's support of the department and the collection, which I was more than happy to do. When I learned Diane had spent her Peace Corps years in Turkey, stayed on, was fluent, and maintained many friendships there, I was impressed,

having spent many of my summers in Turkey working on an archeological project. It turned out we had several mutual friends in the museum world there. She told me later that TAC's commitment to the museum and the love of textiles was the tipping point to her accepting the position.

–Susan York

Diane hired me in 2002 and I worked closely with her for seven years. She had a fantastic eye, and even though her academic interests focused on Ottoman velvets, she exercised a broad knowledge of myriad textile traditions, techniques, and world cultures. During her tenure, Diane acquired a number of a very important textiles for the Museums' collections, including [three exceptional Ainu robes](#), a [superb Yoruba crown](#), an [important collection of Iban ceremonial cloths \(pua\)](#) from Sarawak, and one of the most significant acquisitions in department history: the [full set of ecclesiastical vestments](#) created for the royal chapel at Versailles.

Some might be surprised to know that she was a stickler for detail as a supervisor. Diane initiated a project, which she supervised me on, to completely reorganize our collections database and create standardization for cataloging.

–Jill D'Alessandro, Curator in Charge of Costume and Textile Arts

Our paths first crossed in the early 1980s when Diane came to the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a graduate intern to continue her research on Turkish and European velvets. So began a nearly four-decade friendship that I cherish. From our early days exploring New York City, to her generous and invaluable companionship while introducing me to the joys of her beloved Istanbul, to our bittersweet travels in Wyoming last summer, Diane was an incredible partner in delightful adventures and wild escapades. It was almost useless to set an agenda, as Diane's ever-inquisitive nature would often lead us way off course in pursuit of something that had caught her attention or that came to mind, but resulted in a memorable, sometimes hysterical, outing that frequently proved better than our initial plans. I greatly miss my kind and steadfast friend, generous colleague, and citizen of the world.

–Alice Zrebiec, Curatorial Consultant, Santa Fe, NM. Former curator Metropolitan Museum of Art; Avenir Foundation Curator of Textile Art, Denver Art Museum

On a work-related trip from Boston to San Francisco, Diane took me in and ended up nursing me through the night, as I had become quite ill with a virus. Her gentle care in my time of great discomfort and vulnerability opened my eyes to her capacity for compassion and empathy. As we can all see her life in greater relief through so many tributes, Diane's concern for the well-being of others was a defining aspect of who she was.

–Catherine Tutter

From the TAC Chair

by Shirley Juster, Textile Arts Council Board Chair

September 2020

The past months have been challenging for all of us in ways we never anticipated. With tremendous sadness, we found it necessary to cancel all TAC in-person events since March. However, with a renewed sense of purpose, we put our efforts into revamping our programming to make it accessible to all of

you, from any location. We are becoming experts in staging our lectures, workshops and study groups online, and can now offer those programs on a year-round basis.

Expanding upon our regular programming in August, we presented a series of events around the work of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement. The program included videos, interviews, and hands-on workshops spread out over a four week period. The programs attracted over 1000 viewers world wide from as far away as New Zealand, Italy, the UK, Argentina and Canada

In late July, we hosted the first of our online workshops: Youngmin Lee's *Maedub – Korean Traditional Decorative Knots*, followed by Cecelia Campochiaro's *Sequence Knitting* in August.

The Ethnic Textiles Study Group has successfully transitioned to virtual meetings, complete with group discussions and member presentations of personal textiles.

Lastly, beginning this month, we resumed our regular Saturday lectures via Zoom:

September 26, 2020: [Youth Voice Through Textiles](#) with Sarah Trail, founder of the Social Justice Sewing Academy
(a recording will be made available to TAC members in the near future)

October 24, 2020: [Rolling Roundels: Development and Evolution of the Medieval Chinese-Central Asian Textiles](#) with Chiara Gasparini, Assistant Professor of Chinese Art and Architectural History, University of Oregon

November 21, 2020: [Northwest Coast Wool Textiles: Cultural Use History and Contemporary Revival](#) with Evelyn Vanderhoop, Haida Textile Artist

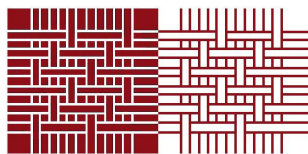
Beginning with the October lecture, we will resume our normal pricing policy. Lectures will be free to TAC members, but with a \$5 for students and members of FAMSF, and a \$10 fee for the general public. A Zoom link will be emailed to all TAC members closer to the date of each lecture.

Our ability to adapt has opened new possibilities for TAC. Our board members and active volunteers continue to research innovative ways of offering new and varied programs to our membership. Our only sad notes regarding events are the postponement of our domestic and international tours and the cancellation of this year's Textile Bazaar. We look forward to repeating the great success of the 2019 bazaar in 2021.

Should every cloud have a silver lining, the TAC membership has truly stepped up to demonstrate their commitment to our community. We outdid ourselves in fulfilling the need for personal protective equipment for the museums' security staff, and I am quite sure that the security staff at the Fine Arts Museums has the most fashionable assortment of handcrafted textile masks in the Bay Area.

Our Member News publication has been a source of inspiration and enjoyment as we hear from members and admire their projects from afar. I hope that you will continue to share your work with us. You are a talented group, and we love hearing from you.

Thank you for your unwavering support over the last six months and for your continued support and participation in the coming year.



Contact the Textile Arts Council by email, at 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 to your email contacts.

Event listing policy: In addition to events sponsored by TAC or FAMSF, lectures by a TAC member at FAMSF or another museum may be submitted for inclusion in the TAC E-News.

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- Figure 1: Eliza Cooper (maker), American, active mid 19th century Quilt top: “Ship of Life” pattern, 1861 United States, New York Cotton; appliquéd, embroidered (chain stitch) 268 x 232.4 cm (105 1/2 x 91 1/2 in.). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of Dr. Marion W. Craig, 48208.
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 - Figure 6: Detail of quilt top (54033), showing foundation pieced backing. Photograph courtesy of the author.
 - Preventative Conservation: Examination of a hanging textile during on-site walkthrough. Photograph courtesy of the author.
 - Diane Mott: Please see <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/athens-ga/b-diane-mott-9127694>.
 - Frida Kahlo: Nickolas Muray, "Frida in Blue Dress, New York City," 1939. 12.6 x 9.4 inches (32 x 24 cm). The Hecksher Family Collection © Nickolas Muray Photo Archives.
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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