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BIO

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Beth Knight is currently a Textile Conservator at the National Air and Space Museum. She was previously a Textile Conservator for "Girlhood (It's Complicated)" at the National Museum of American History and an Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Textile Conservation at the National Museum of the American Indian. She earned an MPhil in Textile Conservation from the University of Glasgow's Centre for Textile Conservation and a BA in Art Conservation from the University of Delaware. She is active in the Washington Conservation Guild and AIC's Textile Specialty Group. Her favorite objects stretch the definition of a textile.

ABSTRACT

Transforming the National Air and Space Museum's Mannequins

The renovation of all 23 galleries at the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) provided an opportunity for the conservation unit to re-examine our approach to displaying garments. NASM has a wide variety of garments from formal and informal attire such as flight uniforms and t-shirts to uniquely fabricated pressure suits with associated hardware components and accessories. The previously used off-the-shelf mannequins were not ideal for many of the unique garments' mounting needs and had limited options for customization. The wide range of garment materials and designs coupled with varying condition challenges informed our decision to use Ethafoam®-based mannequins as they are inert, modifiable mounts suitable for long-term display. These mannequins typically fit into one of three categories: modified Dorfman Conservation Figures, custom carved Ethafoam forms, and computer numerical control (CNC) routed Ethafoam forms based on 3-dimensional scans of objects. This presentation will highlight the collaboration between the conservation team and exhibition fabricators who brought specialized skills and expertise to create customized mannequins and auxiliary mounts to support these challenging composite and often heavy objects for display in NASM's galleries.

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