

ABSTRACT

Overcoming the Challenges of Mounting a 39 foot long Painted Textile with a Magnetic Mounting System

Presenters:

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How does one mount a unique 39 foot long (11.9 meters) painted textile from Tibet? However, the uniqueness of this painted textile is not just due to the type of artifact, but also its dimensions. The textile was mounted for an exhibition, *Awaken: A Tibetan Buddhist Journey Toward Enlightenment*, in Richmond, VA.

The length is a critical part of the piece's iconography, which shows side-by-side deities, all menacing in appearance, as allies not adversaries, facilitating the practitioner's spiritual progress. The painting on this 18th century textile was created with opaque watercolor on the cloth. The painting is surrounded with rows of silk damask, as well as a pleated, double-layer ruffle along the bottom. This textile likely hung on the walls of a monastery's main assembly hall.

Mounting this wonderful artifact had been a challenge for the museum. The entire textile needed to be fully viewed. Additionally, the curator wanted to have it installed where it would go around a corner, allowing the viewer to be surrounded by the textile. The obvious mounting system for the requirements of this exhibit was a magnetic slat with the magnetic system placed behind the textile. A system that needed to be on the object prior to delivery to the museum.

From the start, it was clear that the painted textile needed to be rolled onto two large-diameter tubes. This required a flexible ferromagnetic material due to the long length of the textile, the need to be rolled for transport, and to bend at the corner. The installation would begin at the center of the mount installed on the wall, working each side out, one at a time. This ensured the proper positioning, another challenge for such a length. Textiles, even painted ones, are insufficiently stiff, requiring additional support along the upper edge when on the tube.

With the help of the VMFA's carpentry team, two spools using black iron pipe and plywood were assembled and mounted onto two rolling carts. This provided a stable support from which the artwork could be attached to the mount. At each step of the process and the selection of tools for the installation was the desire to remain as simple as possible. An understanding was known that too many moving parts could complicate the process and jeopardize the safety of the artwork.

The many challenges of creating an appropriate and elegant solution using a magnetic mounting system, the ease of installation, and the joint relationship between museum conservators and mountmakers and contract conservator will be discussed in this talk.

BIO



Gwen Spicer is a conservator in private practice since 1995 and Fellow of AIC and the Flag Research Center. She earned her MA in Art Conservation from Buffalo State College, and has since taught and lectured around the world. In her private practice, she assists many individuals and organizations of all sizes with storage, collection care, and exhibitions; and has become known for her innovative conservation treatments. A recent project was overseeing the inaugural textiles displayed at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. She wrote the book *Magnetic Mounting Systems for Museums and Cultural Institutions* published in 2019, receiving an AIC publication award in 2020.



Tim Harriss is Senior Art Handler at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia. Since he joined the team in 2012, Tim has worked on dozens of major exhibitions at the museum and has traveled domestically and abroad as a courier and installer. Prior to joining the VMFA, Tim spent over two decades as a carpenter and fabricator. He is also a professional visual artist.