

Caring For Native Weavings

Placement

Navajo and Pueblo textiles should be kept away from direct sunlight or high intensity artificial lights. This placement inhibits fading or bleaching and damage to the naturally or artificially dyed wool yarns. Valuable textiles should also be kept away from open windows, exterior doors, house plants and pets, etc., as dirt, dust, grime and insects may lead to serious problems. Likewise, it is better to avoid placement of the textiles near the kitchen, the fireplace or heating registers so that grease and soot deposits can be avoided. The organic fibers in these textiles may also absorb odors from foods, cigarettes and perfumes.

Changes in the relative humidity and temperature cause swelling and the shrinking of the wool yarns. In uncontrolled conditions the yarns will swell, distort, and embrittle in ways that cannot always be reversed or changed. It is best to avoid placement of the textile in the bathroom, or on an exterior wall and in other areas that have more severe fluctuations in temperature and humidity.

Cleaning

Regular vacuuming of both sides of the textile will help remove loose dirt and dust on the surface and will also diminish the chance of insect infestation by removing clothes moths and carpet beetle insects, larvae, and eggs.

Vacuuming should be done with the textile placed on a flat surface. A nylon or polyester screen (common, non-metal window screen works great) can be used between the vacuum nozzle and the textile to prevent threads and fragments from being pulled into the vacuum.

Washing is **never** recommended. Some of the reasons include: 1) many of the dyes found in Navajo and Pueblo textiles are water soluble, 2) most detergents are somewhat alkaline which further contributes to the deterioration of the protein found in the fibers, 3) wet wool is extremely heavy and susceptible to uneven stretching and straining, especially on weaker yarns, and 4) agitation of the wet yarns can cause felting of the yarns which changes the surface appearance and texture of the textile.

Some Navajo and Pueblo textiles may be dry-cleaned, but it is essential that all dye colors be tested before the cleaning process begins. A dry-cleaner experienced with these **specific** textiles should do the testing and the hand-dip rather than the use of a tumble machine should be used. The collector/owner should be aware that the dry-cleaning process does remove some natural oils from the wool in addition to the stains. It is always recommended that a professional hand-clean the weaving, and the museum shop staff can provide a referral. It is worth noting that collectors often assume that a Persian rug expert can also clean and care for Navajo and Pueblo textiles, but this simply is not the case.

Insects

The best control of insect pests in textiles involves regular examination and vacuuming. Carpet beetles and clothes moths are the most common domestic pests. The voracious larvae prefer quiet and dark environments to complete their life-cycle. Optimal conditions and plenty of food (the textile) enable the adult insects to lay eggs that develop into larvae within a few weeks. If an infestation is suspected, the textile should be isolated and placed in a plastic bag as quickly as possible to prevent the spread to other articles and furnishings.

The Heard Museum recommends the freezing method to control insects. The process involves: 1) containment of the textile in a plastic bag and removal of as

much air as possible before tying the bag closed (the bag contains the infestation and prevents condensation on the textiles when it is removed from the freezer), 2) placement of the bagged textile in a freezer that is capable of going down to below freezing, at least -4° F, (a chest freezer is preferred as the critical low temperature remains more consistent), 3) freezing the textile for 48 hours (the door to the freezer should not be opened during the process as this will upset the temperature). 4) after removal from the freezer the plastic bag should remain closed until the textile has reached room temperature (condensation will form on the outside of the plastic bag rather than on the textile), 5) the process should be repeated to insure that the insect egg, larvae and adult stages have been killed, and 6) after final removal from the plastic bag the textile should be carefully vacuumed to remove insect debris. This non-chemical process is very effective and is safe for Navajo and Pueblo textiles.

Repair And Reweaving

All treatments of repair and reweaving should be documented with a report and photographs. This record of the before and after condition is very important and should be kept with the textile even if ownership changes. The decision to repair or reweave depends a lot on the history of the textile, the type of damage that has occurred, and the type of use that is expected. The museum shop staff can provide referrals to well-known experts in this field.

Display

Textiles should have limited exposure to the agents of deterioration (light, high temperature, fluctuating relative humidity, air pollutants, dust, insects, and rough handling). It is best to alternate display and storage time through a rotation system. For example, 3 months on one side, 3 months on the other, and 6 months stored

away. If the textile is intended to be used as a rug and is placed on the floor, an uncolored pad should be used in addition to rotation and regular vacuuming on both surfaces.

Choosing to hang a textile requires the consideration of several factors including the type of textile yarns and structural condition of the specific textile. Antique weavings are often not strong enough for hanging. Hanging minimizes many forms of staining and wear but, because hanging a textile for extended periods of time will result in stretching and distortion, it is important to limit the hanging time. Three to four months at a time is recommended (changing sides halfway through). Also it is generally advised to hang a textile with the warp threads in the vertical position as they are generally stronger.

The Velcro method of hanging is preferred. A 1 ½ to 2-inch wide Velcro strip works best. However, repeated removal and re-attachment can loosen yarns, disfigure the yarn structure, and can cause structural damage. It is important to remember that this is considered a temporary mounting system. If a more permanent mounting is desired, the soft-sided Velcro can be *carefully* sewn to the textile, with the hook side being attached to a wooden board. Hanging a textile directly to the wall using nails or tacks is not recommended.

Storage

It is advised to remove mountings when the textile is going to be stored for a long period of time. If it is small enough, storage in a flat position is best. If the textile is large, then rolling is the best alternative because folds will eventually cause fibers to weaken or break (folds should never be ironed out). A cardboard tube that is made of archival, acid-free cardboard or a standard cardboard tube that has been covered with aluminum foil, may be used. The textile should be carefully rolled in the direction

of the warps. Coverings made of washed muslin may be used over the rolled textile to provide protection from dust and grime. The ends of the roll should be left open so that air is allowed to pass.

-Works Cited:

Odegaar, Nancy, Dr., "Some Comments On The Care Of Navajo Textiles",
www.arizonastatemuseum.org