Throughout history, textiles have played an important part in the daily lives and traditions of all peoples and cultures. Textiles are both utilitarian and decorative. Because they are functional, many are lovingly used.

As babies we are wrapped in cloths; in marriage we are clothed in special fabrics and dresses which are often saved for future generations; in death we are bundled in ceremonial textiles; everyday we adorn ourselves with both ordinary and special textiles.

Because textiles are used and are made of organic materials, they are very susceptible to damage. Textiles are also extremely varied in material and technique – they can be silk, cotton, wool, bark, synthetic and can be woven, felted, braided, and decorated with all sorts of materials like wood, shell, metallic beads, gems, horn, and feathers.

Particularly in a tropical climate, textiles are easily damaged by high humidity and mold, strong light, dust and dirt, pollution, and insects and rodents.

For Further Information:
The Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles
Conservation Department
is happy to share our knowledge and reply to your inquiries.
Please contact us: 02.225.9430 #131-134
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The textiles you collect and have in your home usually fall into 3 categories:

1. Textiles you display
2. Textiles you wear and use regularly
3. Textiles you store and keep long term

Textiles you display could include examples of pha sin, phanung, ceremonial cloths and other clothing that you consider part of your history and collection, and chose to enjoy decorating your home.

Textiles you store for the long term often include pieces such as wedding dresses and cloths, special family textiles, and prized collection pieces.

All textiles, whether on display or stored, are subject to deterioration from many environmental factors. These can include damp insect-infested storage areas, or brightly lit and exposed hanging displays.

Once a textile is badly damaged, it might be too fragile to repair. Some damages such as holes and dirt can be repaired, but other times textiles are damaged beyond repair.

What is a conservator?

An art conservator is trained to preserve, protect and prolong the life of artefacts. Conservators use preventative methods first to reduce the risk of damage to art. If an artifact is damaged, conservators conduct ‘treatments’ to repair the art.

Conservators are like doctors for artefacts. Conservators receive many years of training and are guided by ethical standards. Such as: minimal treatment and intervention; reversible and non-damaging treatments; archival and long life materials; and full documentation and research.

One word of advice is

“an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”

Just like our human health, we take precautions to protect ourselves from disease through inoculations, cleanliness, and safe environment. It is the same for textiles. If you use preventative measures, then you can prevent the bad damage from occurring. Then future treatment or ‘surgery’ is not needed. Treatment of damages is often impossible, or extremely expensive.

Your textiles can be damaged by many factors: light, temperature, humidity, dust, dirt, insects, poor storage and display. So in your home, steps can be taken to modify and control the climate, light, and insects for both display and storage.

These guidelines are an introduction and helpful checklist for caring for your textiles.
LIGHT
One of the greatest threats to textiles is light – both UV sunlight and incandescent, fluorescent and halogen indoor lighting. Light causes textiles to lose color, and become dry, brittle and fall apart. Light damage is cumulative over time, and CANNOT BE REVERSED OR FIXED.

Conservation Tips
• Protect your textiles from sunlight. Use curtains and shades on your windows. Do not use strong spot lights.
• Cover a textile on display with a clean piece of muslin if you are away.
• Limit the months that you display each textile. Rotate your collection by displaying different pieces, and safely storing them in between.

POLLUTION AND AIRBORNE DIRT
General dirt and dust are like small knives, cutting into the fibers of textiles and damaging them. Air pollution damages textiles and affects the dyes.

Conservation Tips
• Keep a clean storage area. Check it 2-3 times a year, to make sure there is no moisture, dirt, or insects. Vacuum the shelves and floor, and then mop with disinfectant.
• Vacuum your textiles using a protective nylon screen. Regular vacuuming will remove a lot of dust and insects.

TEMPERATURE AND RELATIVE HUMIDITY
Relative humidity is the amount of moisture in the air. Hot temperatures and high humidity, typical of Thailand, accelerate the deterioration of textiles and provide a desirable climate for insects, mold, mildew and corrosion.

Conservation Tips
• Maintain a steady temperature between 60-70 F and 50-60% Rh.
• If mold occurs, immediately take the textile outside and place in the sun for 1-2 hours. Do not leave in sun longer than 2 hours. The sun will fade the colors. Sun will dry out the textile and kill the mold. Then carefully brush or vacuum the mold particles off the textile.
• If mold and mildew have already caused dark staining, consult an expert about possible cleaning.
• Use a dehumidifier to extract moisture from rooms where you store or display textiles.
• Use a simple fan to circulate air and prevent the growth of mold.
INSECTS

Moths, carpet beetles, silver fish, termites and mice can all damage textiles. Silk and wool are the most vulnerable to infestations. Good housekeeping and regular checking is the best remedy to protect your textiles.

**Conservation Tips**

• Examine textiles before you bring them into your house to make sure there are no insects. Vacuum them before display or storage.

• Place sticky traps in the corner of your storage area and around the house. These will capture some of the insects that are coming and going, and show you if there is a problem.

• If you find carpet beetle, moth, silverfish or termite – you have a problem. Consult with a fumigation company immediately.

CLEANING AND HANDLING

Unlike the clothes you wear everyday, historic textiles should NOT be regularly cleaned. Sometimes cleaning can be more harmful than leaving the textile as is. Proper cleaning techniques for textiles require the expertise of a professional conservator, who can test and decide if the textile can be cleaned.

**Conservation Tips**

• Vacuum your textiles carefully through a polyester screen. (Like the screening in windows) Place the protective screen mesh over the textile and vacuum through it. Vacuum gently. You can also vacuum textiles that are hanging on the walls with this method.

• Wash your hands before handling your collection. We have lots of dirt and oils on our hands.

• Textiles can be damaged by careless transport. Gently roll, pleat and support textiles with clean cloth when moving them around.
STORAGE

Safe, clean, insect and mold free storage is very important for the long term care of your textiles.

• Do not store textiles in or near a bathroom or other room with running water. Place them in the coolest and driest place in your home.

• Do not store textiles sealed up in plastic bags. Plastic traps moisture and causes mold and mildew.

• Store textiles in a dry, cool and dark room. Wrap them in clean white cloth.

• Try to use non acidic materials for the storage and display of your textiles. The acids in wood and paper cause textiles to discolor brown and become brittle. Do not use regular cardboard, tapes, nails, plastic, brown tubes.

• If acid free boxes and tubes are not available, then use PVC pipes or cardboard tubes wrapped with silver foil. Line boxes and trunks with foil and clean washed sheets. These provide a protective layer or buffer. Roll textiles and then wrap in clean washed sheets or cotton muslin.

• Wood shelves and drawers can be sealed with 2 coats of water borne sealant, such as polyurethane varnish.

• Store small textiles flat. Layer between pieces of clean cloth.

• Clothing can be stored in clean closets or armoires. Use a strong wooden hanger and wrap and pad it in polyester batting and clean muslin to make it more supportive for the garment.

• Make a muslin dust cover for each garment. Do this even if they are stored inside a closet.

• Do not store garments in the plastic bags from the dry cleaner. These deteriorate and become sticky.

• If your garment is heavily decorated or beaded, do not store in the hanging method. This will cause distortion and damage. Instead, place flat and padded on shelf or in box.

DISASTERS – FLOODS AND FIRE

Immediate attention is very important after a disaster. This can help save the textile.

• When textiles are flooded and wet, handle with extreme care. Wet textiles are very heavy and can tear.

• Blot wet or damp textiles with clean towels. If full of dirty water, rinse the textile with clean water and dry flat, using fans. Cover with thin cheesecloth to absorb other dirt.

• Soot and smoke are difficult to remove from textiles. Vacuum carefully. Air outdoors to try and remove odor.

• Contact a professional conservator for further advice.