One of Mrs Gunvor Ingstad Trætteberg’s most challenging responsibilities during her employment as costume historian and first female employee of Norway’s Maihaugen Open Air Museum (MOAM) between 1917 and 1921 was to collect, catalogue and display seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century handicrafts. A substantial proportion of this collection was textiles, which recently formed the first half of a collaborative exhibition organised by MOAM and Lillehammer’s Art Museum ‘A Thousand Threads: A Story Told in Textiles’ (‘Tusen Tråder — en historiefortelling i tekstil’) bringing together objects and pieces of textile art from the near and distant past to illustrate the cultural history of textile expression in Norway. Maihaugen’s basement galleries opened the show with delicate fragments dating back to the Viking Age, Flemish-inspired tapestries and colourful garments created in Gudbrandsdalen around 1900.

Further down the valley in the centre of Lillehammer, the bright white spaces of the Art Museum were adorned with work by twenty-three Norwegian textile artists working between c. 1900 and the present. The changing status attributed to utilitarian and aesthetically valuable textiles was aptly conveyed by woollen panels, embroidered silk boleros, dolls, dainty slippers and cotton pillow cases, which gave way to wall hangings knotted and bound with denim, silver thread or synthetic fibres. Whether pieces were hand-crafted, industrially produced, stitched with tiny needle, or woven on looms, the Norwegian pursuit of using material culture to communicate political, religious or social sentiments was shown to have as much currency today as in times past.

The impact of the nineteenth-century’s industrial revolution on the making and meaning of textiles was represented by three site-specific artworks by two contemporary artists. Franz Schmidt’s anthropological Gudbrandsdalens Uldvarefabrik (2013) was shown in the middle of the exhibition, and commented on the advanced possibilities leveraged by the mechanical loom on the creation and availability of household cloth. Oversized photographs of Gudbrandsdalens Uldvarefabrik’s gleaming modern machinery, one of Norway’s oldest and largest manufacturers of upholstery fabric, loomed over shiny glass cabinets holding company log- and swatch-books. The implication being that, while robotic arms have replaced human hands, the pride invested in the making, selecting and using of textiles on a daily basis remains robust in a country of craftsmen and craftswomen.

Kari Steihaug’s artwork Magasin Maihaugen (2013) also employed a photograph of original and constructed garments to address the extent to which memory has long been intertwined with clothing. Steihaug’s subsequent artwork, Det rommet du sier vi ikke har (2013), was presented alongside Gudbrandsdalens Uldvarefabrik, and gently reminded us that, while contemporary life is shaped by mass production and wastage, we should try to discover new ways of putting discarded clothing to good use, just as our forebears did. The unravelled, pastel-coloured fabric tentacles of Steihaug’s
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wall hanging were strewn, draped and bundled across one wall: tightly constructed items becoming an eloquent artwork that captured and held the attention of viewers.

Norwegian textiles have long been associated with the history of women. The inclusion of Gunvor Ingstad Trætteberg’s rusty bicycle, which she used to collect textiles in Gudbrandsdalen during her trips, was propped up at the entrance to the exhibition and emphasised such a historic connection. In Norway, women were not only traditionally accountable for the creation and care of domestic goods but, since the Middle Ages, have used tapestry work to assume a position of higher status. While older tapestries, spreads and carpets reproduced Biblical motifs in double-weave, it became common during the 1800s and 1900s to imbue the woven panel with personal ideas or opinions otherwise too controversial if conveyed in pen and ink. The upstairs and downstairs galleries of the Art Museum exhibited a range of tapestry art by talented professionals, including Frida Hansen, Hannah Ryggen, Else Marie Jacobsen and Brit Fuglevaag. These women were among the many who embraced an ancient medium to express their hopes and fears in a world where women struggled to locate or secure their sense of self. Hansen’s tapestry The Rose Garden (1904) was exhibited in the older part of the art gallery, with few barriers, thereby allowing the viewer to closely observe the artist’s freer, less restrained approach towards the soft, delicate and volatile quality of thread. As the ‘second women’s movement’ grew during the 1970s, the art of tapestry became a communication form of choice, as shown by Brit Fuglevaag’s tapestry which reproduced giant female genitalia as a comment on the ever-pressing issue of women’s sexual rights.

In this rich exhibition, a spectator with even the most rudimentary knowledge of textiles was encouraged to enjoy the history of a thousand threads without the diversion of extensive documentation. An informative leaflet in English and labels in Norwegian provided a foundation from which one could progress and enjoy the artworks of the latter half. A chronology, terminology and handout with biographical data would have been useful, but online searching can provide answers to lingering questions. This sensuous and rich exhibition gave a complicated subject the space and attention it fully deserved.

Kitty Corbet Milward
University of Edinburgh


The Fashion and Textile Museum dedicated its summer exhibition to Mexico’s centrally important textile tradition, the long, rectangular multipurpose shawl called a rebozo. It is a lovely idea to showcase one type of object, especially a non-European kind, and to explore art, culture, identity and fashion from that starting point. One of the show’s aims was to demonstrate ‘the key role textiles have played in promoting Mexican culture worldwide’, and the exhibition designers made the space atmospheric of the country through use of immersive set decorations, such as a freestanding walk-through shrine, coloured paper bunting and architectural pieces.

The exhibition began with a room of historic information and rebozos before moving into an exploration of the shawl’s manufacture and cultural importance, and ending upstairs with contemporary designer and artists’ responses to the shawl. There were treasures on loan from the Franz Mayer Museum in Mexico City, such as an exquisite eighteenth-century silk rebozo embroidered with dancing figures (Fig. 1). Many of the pieces throughout the exhibition had never been displayed in the UK before, coming from the Museum of Textiles, Oaxaca, private collections and the British Museum’s collections.
Rebozos began in Mexican regions before the Spanish arrival as backstrap-loom woven, warp-faced shawls featuring long fringed or elaborately knotted ends. As the textiles evolved in competition with Spanish imports, ikat, or yarn-dyed patterns developed and became part of rebozos’ design features. Specialisms evolved: weavers who created the main shawl length were a different person to the specialist knotter who intricately fringed the ends. The shawl became an integral part of china poblana, traditional Mexican women’s dress. Rebozo looms featured on the walls, but information on the equally important dyeing process was lacking. How was the astonishing piece incorporating twenty different ikat designs in one rebozo dyed, for example? On a list of the stages of making a rebozo weaving came second last, yet almost no attention was paid to the other processes. Information on the main fibre types of wool, cotton and silk was equally patchy.

The exhibition had clearly been put together with enormous knowledge and input from Mexican specialists and institutions. However, this resulted in some curious lacunae from the museological perspective of a viewer not immersed in the same cultural traditions. The press release called the rebozo ‘the classic Mexican shawl made famous in 20th century culture by artist Frida Kahlo’, the exhibition’s poster girl (Fig. 2). The first room tucked Kahlo into a corner case with no introduction nor explanation of who she was and her significance to wearing rebozo, even though there were mannequins wearing traditional dress ‘inspired’ by Kahlo. If her dress was advertised as ‘a political statement of solidarity with the labourers of her country’ the exhibition did not interpret this aspect in the caption text. Some audience knowledge could be assumed but the curatorial view on Kahlo’s importance to rebozo would have contextualised the relevance for this exhibition, in the way a whole corner of the next room explored contemporary Mexican singer Lila Downs and her extensive rebozo collection (Fig. 3).

The rebozos themselves were wondrous, textiles of great visual and technical beauty. The strength was in ikat-dyed examples, but they ranged through simple plain-weave cotton to embroidered wool, and the impressive rebozo de plumas, with feathered ends instead of fringing. It was also an excellent choice to display some shawls on sculpted heads modelled on an older woman whose dignified, weathered beauty lent gravitas. Black-and-white photos complemented the textiles by showing the inventive ways...
Mexicans use the lengths in everyday life for adornment, warmth, carrying children and any number of personal expressions, from cradle to grave. The rebozo is a bag, buggy, beauty aid and garment in one. Their accustomed wearers make it look as natural and unconscious as breathing (Fig. 4).

These evocative images formed a trail leading upstairs to the artistic section, showing the contemporary responses in various media of Mexican and UK artists (including Francisco Toledo, Graciela Iturbide, Carla Fernandez, Zandra Rhodes and Kaffe Fassett) to the rebozo’s cultural importance. The difference in cultural immersion again showed clearly here. Pieces by Mexicans included witty, innovative twists on the rebozo, especially the clothing incorporating this ancient textile in fresh ways. Many works, though interesting, had a hazy relationship to rebozo, making the textile in the responsive piece a generic shawl or piece of cloth. The question of what makes a rebozo, now, was implied but not addressed.

While unevenly realised, ‘Made in Mexico’ brought a vibrant cultural textile tradition to life in London with great effect and verve. And of course, the show was housed in the bright pink building designed by renowned Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta, himself a rebozo aficionado. It was a fitting setting for an energetic exhibition.

HILARY DAVIDSON
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‘Clothes Tell Stories: Working with Costume in Museums’ is a web-based resource (called a ‘Costume Workbook’) launched in 2013 by the Costume Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) (Fig. 5). Developed by members of a Working Group within the Committee, mainly curators and conservators working in museums worldwide, this website is aimed at museums which lack costume specialists, as well as general readers interested in historic dress. Well illustrated with high-quality images, zoom-in capability, detailed captions and a clean and intuitive design, the website contributes to the growing body of e-resources for exploring the narrative power of dress, reflecting the apparently unceasing interest in collections of textiles and clothing. With a focus on practical advice about how to use dress collections to ‘tell stories’, the content of the workbook is organised into three main strands: ‘Working with Clothes’; ‘Displaying Clothes’ and ‘Telling Stories with Clothes’ (Fig. 6).

The first strand builds on the research strengths of the ICOM Costume Committee that has produced valuable multilingual references, such as the ‘Vocabulary of Basic Terms for Cataloguing Costume’ and

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**Fig. 5.** Home page of the online resource ‘Clothes Tell Stories: Working with Costume in Museums’, hosted by the ICOM Committee for Costume. http://www.clothestellstories.com By kind permission of the ICOM Committee for Costume.

**Fig. 6.** The workbook page of the website ‘Clothes Tell Stories’ is organised into three main strands: Working with Clothes; Displaying Clothes; and, Telling Stories with Clothes. http://www.clothestellstories.com By kind permission of the ICOM Committee for Costume.
Guidelines for Costume’. ‘Working with Clothes’ provides essential guidance for keeping a museum costume collection accessible for interpretation and display. It covers subjects such as: materials’ identification, collecting policy, terminology, labelling, documentation, preventive care, health and safety, handling, storage and pattern making. The identification of materials is enhanced particularly by two papers: ‘Identifying Sprang Sashes’ (by Carol James) and ‘Identification of Lace’ (by Ursula Karbach). ‘Identification of Fibres’ (by Brigitte Herrbach-Schmidt) provides a good starting point but a more detailed classification of natural and man-made fibres, and a broader discussion of other approaches to fibre ID, from ‘low tech’ to ‘high tech’ to complement the ‘burn test’ mentioned, would be beneficial. ‘Identification of Fabrics’ (also by Brigitte Herrbach-Schmidt) features excellent diagrams and images of fabrics and structures. What is lacking is the overview that would help users distinguish between the structures, woven versus non-woven, and the techniques by which these structures can be achieved. It would also be useful to have included the more recent publications developed for a similar audience by the Dress and Textile Specialists (DATS) UK network to the list of references. A broader range of surface decoration techniques, in addition to the useful resource on embroidery stitches (by Ursula Karbacher and Anne Wanner-Jean Richard) would further enhance the value of this website.

The importance of identifying materials and techniques becomes clear in the following two papers ‘Take a Closer Look at Costume’ (by Pernilla Rasmussen and Britta Hammar) and ‘Dress and Personal Narrative’ (by Maria Wrońska-Friend). These provide a real taste of what the website is about. ‘Take a Closer Look at Costume’ argues that it is the study of materials, cut and sewing techniques, combined with the garment’s ‘biography’, that enables its history to be told. This argument is substantiated by the discussion of the construction and materials of the European dress and their meaning, beautifully illustrated with extensively annotated images.

In contrast, ‘Dress and Personal Narrative’ discusses the importance of documenting the personal narrative of a garment’s owner and its potential for the exhibition narrative. As an example, Wrońska-Friend cites the 2006 exhibition of Hmong dress ‘From Laos to Australia’, organised by the School of Anthropology at James Cook University in Cairns, Australia. By bringing owners’ voices into the museum narrative, displayed dress can provide a link between the past and current issues faced by their owners; establishing links between the past and the present is recognised as a challenge in exhibiting so-called ‘ethnographic collections’ of living peoples.

The ability of dress to provide physical manifestations of social relationships is further developed in the section ‘Displaying Clothes’. This section deals with the practical aspects of exhibitions, such as planning, transportation, design of the exhibition space, label-writing, making of mannequins, costume reconstruction and the use of digital media. ‘Mannequins for Costume Display’ (by Katia Johansen) will be of particular value to smaller institutions that often lack the budget to commission museum-quality mounts. It offers practical tips on mannequin-making and customisation techniques, while discussing these solutions in the context of the representation of dress and the body. This section would benefit from information about the types of commercial mannequins that are safe for use with historic dress, and from having a basic list of recommended versus harmful materials, that could accommodate any budget. ‘Digital Costume Display — The King’s Costume’ (also by Katia Johansen) complements the emphasis on the representation of the clothed body and the materiality of clothing. She demonstrates how information and communication technologies (ICT) can provide greater access to costume collections to a broader, and perhaps different, audience,
and reduce the physical damage to the museum garments. With a growing spread and appreciation of digital technologies, it is clear that there is a need for evaluation of the physical and interpretative implications of on-screen display.

The narrative power of textiles and dress is further exemplified in the final section of twenty papers. They are listed below to show the international scope of ICOM’s Costume Committee: a prince’s coat from the Royal collection in Denmark (Katia Johansen); Empress Eugénie’s lace dress, St. Gallen, Switzerland (Ursula Karbacher); legends woven in huipils of Guatemala (Lorena Bianchi); political fashion dress by Zuzu Angel, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Hildegard Angel); ponchos of indigenous peoples of Chile (Isabel Alvarado); professional identity of medical nurses explored through uniforms, Canada (Christina Bates); stories told by two purses, Amsterdam (Sigrid Yvo); the story of Anna-Maria, the Queen’s midget, told through her wardrobe, Denmark (Katia Johansen); the meaning and materiality of the misers’ purses, USA (Laura L. Camerlengo); parental wishes embodied in children’s clothes, China (Li Xiaojun); experiences of the 1950s teenagers told through clothes, Argentina (Analita Yaker Vale); the year 1962 remembered through clothes, ICOM (Costume Committee members); examining contemporary tastes in clothing of the 1970s, Munich (Brigitte Herrbach-Schmidt); examination of stylistic development of lace, St Gallen (Ursula Karbacher); dress traditions of Barbados (Allison Callender); exhibiting underwear of the Soviet Period, Russia (Margot Schindler); reconstruction of historic dress as a tool for social reintegration, Belgium (Claire Derriks); theatre costume, Moulins, France (Katia Johansen); working with artists to reinterpret the dress collection, UK (Joanna Marschner). Finally, a popular paper explores costume-related English expressions, reminding us that textiles and dress still serve as powerful metaphors. The ICOM Costume Committee is to be congratulated for developing the workbook ‘Clothes Tell Stories’ as an innovative and stimulating resource for exploring the history of textiles and dress.

Luba Dovgan Nurse
Independent scholar, weaver and conservator

Reference
1 Accessible via the DATS website http://www.dressandtextilespecialists.org.uk/


Curator Amelia Peck and colleagues from seven Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) departments presented this wide-ranging exhibition showing finished trade goods (and implicitly the types of production) available on the global market over three centuries. Spread through one of the museum’s prime temporary exhibition galleries, the exhibition primarily drew on MMA collections, supplemented by pieces from public and private collections in Canada, the Netherlands, England, as well as elsewhere in the USA. The list of lenders complemented the exhibition theme by demonstrating more recent circulation and collection of textiles.

Monumental reproductions of Bohemian etchings depicting the seventeenth-century Dutch ships at their wharfs introduced visitors to the sail-powered, sixteenth- to eighteenth-century, global markets. In the first gallery an animated map showed the major maritime trade routes and ports of call of the period’s European trade economy, and the extent of the Portuguese and cascade of Dutch, French, Spanish, and English traders that quickly followed. Aptly the gallery’s theme was ‘The Portuguese Trading World’, in which the trade of embroidered whole-cloth silk quilts and printed cottons produced in India were brought to Europe’s attention by...
Spain and Portugal. One particularly striking textile, a silk quilt depicting a ship, visually reinforced the importance of shipping to the movement of textiles.

These opening galleries set the exhibition’s themes. These included the movement — of designs/motifs/imagery, fabrics, dyes — in multiple directions and the interplay of cultures and cultural symbols that were one of the results of this exchange. The labels for many pieces described the transfer and transformation of motifs; some pointed out their cultural origins. Biblical, Chinese, and classical imagery were sometimes combined in a single piece, as for example in a tapestry woven in Peru. With the exception of a few overtly religious pieces (including all those displayed in the ‘Trade Textiles in Religious Contexts’ gallery), images seemed to have been used without regard for meaning.

The galleries that followed took the viewer on a nearly global tour. Galleries were arranged by theme, rather than by chronology; some themes were more explicitly presented than others. For example, the text panel in ‘Looking East Looking West’, discussed fashion, power, and prestige, implying that all objects in that gallery would be clothing. The gallery included some costume, but there were an equal number of flat textiles. The panel emphasised how curiosity and prestige went from both east to west and west to east.

‘Textile Traditions & Trade in Mexico and Peru’ focused on embroidered and tapestry-woven textiles, illustrating the wide range a single technique can produce. The inclusion of the Mexican and Peruvian pieces in these galleries highlighted (wordlessly) how Anglo-centric art history and design history are in the United States. Why should the relationships between the cultures of Latin and South America and Spain as reflected in textiles be a surprise to an educated American?

‘Chinese Silk Exports & Trade Textiles in Japan’ focused on materials, with two-thirds of the objects made of silk — woven textiles for hangings, garments and furnishings. The back third of the gallery focused on the printed cottons and ikat produced along the Indian Cormandel coast. It served as an excellent prologue to ‘Indian Painted & Printed Cottons: Inspiration & Imitation’ which provided numerous examples of how these fabrics were fashioned into hangings, garments and quilts. In a three-piece series, this gallery provided some of the most striking examples of influence and dissemination. A Lyon ‘lace-patterned’ silk lampas was the inspiration for two painted and mordant-dyed Indian fabrics. One of the Indian pieces was designed for the western market and the other for the Indonesian market. The Lyon silk label noted that its design was inspired by an Indo-Persian or Ottoman mihrab; thus these fabrics reflect the influence of Islamic cultures. A jacket on loan from the ROM, worn by the King of Siam’s Royal Guard and made from printed cotton produced on the Coromandel Coast for the Thai market, illustrated how the textile motif was created to be used as the coat back.

‘Trade Textiles in Religious Contexts’ included trade textiles incorporated into ecclesiastical garments, a Hindu temple hanging, a Buddhist robe (Fig. 7), an altar front, and a synagogue ark curtain. The contrast between the parade of chasubles in the centre of the room and a painted and resist-dyed Peruvian Lenten curtain was extremely evocative (Figs 8 and 9).

‘A View of the World from Versailles’ displayed tapestries and a set of furniture with tapestry show covers produced in Beauvais in the late eighteenth century. Less aesthetically rich than the other galleries, these pieces showed how the fashion for the ‘exotic’ was interpreted by one of the more traditional parts of the textile world.

Most of the exhibit gave the impression that the cross-cultural influences happened because of and for fashion and style. Behind the influences were the conquests of one culture by another and the battles that often ensued. The text panel in ‘Conquest, Conflict & the Global Textile Trade’ discussed this, although the textiles shown seemed to
glorify the battles. The pieces shown in the adjacent gallery, ‘Textiles, Colonialism & the Slave Trade/East India Goods for the North America’, also illustrated some cultural clashes. The exhibition concluded with a Chinese embroidered palampore (Fig. 10). This piece can be seen as closing the circle, as it featured the central tree design that had originated in China, was then used as design in Europe for pieces made in India, and
then, in this piece, was made in China in style and technique that would appeal to Europeans and Americans.

One of the curators’ biggest challenges for this exhibition must have been balancing the information they presented to accommodate the interests and knowledge base of a wide range of visitors. It raised the question of what those not steeped in the textile world would make of the exhibition. Judging from who was in the galleries during our visits and from conversations with a few non-specialists who had seen the show, it seems that the exhibition made its point with them: that trade goods were actively developed and produced for the tastes of a specific market and not selected from previously established wares. If non-specialists left with that understanding, and perhaps a greater appreciation of the beauty and importance of textiles in many cultures, then the exhibition was a success.

As ‘textilians’ (people working in textile-based professions), it was difficult to write this review because a summary of the intellectual themes and brief description of some of the particularly salient textiles can never do justice to the visual richness. (Gasps were heard as visitors moved from one gallery to another.) For textile lovers, the exhibition was both an overload and lacking. The quality and range of the textiles selected was overwhelming, in a powerful and positive way. At the same time, these created a desire to know more about techniques and makers, as that information was limited in the labels. In the end, perhaps that was a mark of success. The exhibition raised many questions and made one want to learn more about the cultures, histories, and techniques shown. It is hoped that it will inspire future exhibitions exploring more textile connections between some of the cultures only referenced in this exhibition, such as the Edo people, represented only by an Edo sixteenth-century ivory salt cellar depicting four Portuguese men. As many of the objects, including that

**Fig. 9.** Lenten curtain, Peru (Chachapoyas), before 1775, SL.13.2013.9.1, 80.7 x 86.2 in (205 x 218.9 cm). Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History.

**Fig. 10.** Chinese palampore, silk satin embroidered with silk, China (Guangzhou) for the European or American market, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 1750–1800, 47.63, 108 x 90 in. (274.3 x 228.6 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Louise Housman, 1947. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
one, could have been the centre of an entire exhibition, the MMA curators are to be commended for drawing together so many threads to create a tantalising exhibition. An eponymous book, edited by Amelia Peck, with contributions by Amy Bogansky, was published in 2013.1

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**Reference**