
“TOUR IN A CART”

by Sarah Gates and Anne Getts

The conservation labs at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco receive a lot of visitors. The multi-room textile lab covers more than 2500 square feet, and among its amenities are an eighteen foot high hoist for hanging flat textiles, a “wet room” with sloped floor and drain, a “dye room” with stove top, fume hood, and large capacity RO water system, and soon a Mellon-funded overhead camera.

Because the textile conservators are not always present during tours, they have put together a surrogate “tour in a cart” – which is a designated, wheeled Metro cart that houses examples of textile conservation treatments.



The cart is kept in the lab and used as an educational tool to showcase the various responsibilities of the lab. This includes preventive projects such as custom storage supports for complex hats and shoes, as well as stabilization treatments on smaller textiles.

The cart enables many subjects to be introduced for discussion: archival storage materials and methods, deterioration of textile materials over time, modular storage, textile technology and fabrication techniques, construction of faux accessories or missing parts for display, safe handling techniques, design for safe handling, and not least of all, the costs of safe storage and the space it requires.



Included on one of the shelves is a notebook with information on each textile, e.g. date, culture, a description of why it is being showcased, etc. This enables non-conservators to access the cart when conservators are absent and allows everyone, from the chief curator to the technicians, to put the cart to good use when leading visitors through the lab.