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Louise W. Mackie
Royal Ontario Museum

Lotus Stack
Minneapolis Institute of Art

Frieda Sorber
Textielmuseum Vrieselhof

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TRADITIONAL TEXTILES IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS
INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH AND VIDEO DOCUMENTATION

LOUISE W. MACKIE, Curator, Textile Dept., Royal Ontario Museum,
100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ont. M5S 2C6, Canada
LOTUS STACK, Curator, Textile Dept., Minneapolis Institute of
Arts, 2400 Third Ave. South, Minneapolis, Mn. 55404, USA
FRIEDA SORBER (in abstentia), Curator, Textielmuseum Vrieselhof,
Schildesteenweg 79, 2231 Oelegem-Ranst, Belgium

As the manufacture and use of traditional hand-made textiles in their cultural contexts decreases around the world, we are trying to preserve some of the information for posterity through publication and video documentation. The work is urgent. The comparatively few age-old traditions that still survive have become the equivalent of endangered species.

Although the size and scope of each documentation project will vary according to what survives, three collaborative results are sought based on research and fieldwork. Each fulfills a distinct educational purpose and informs specific audiences, both scholars and the general public. Each will also increase the understanding of the critical role of the fabric(s) in traditional culture.

The first end product is a collaborative publication which will present the current textile practices and place them in broader historical and cultural contexts. It is intended for anyone interested in textiles and the humanities.

The two other end products are videos. The use of video is vital for documentary purposes since it records movement that is essential to manufacturing processes and cultural use. Still photos and slides are truly inadequate, as are lengthy verbal descriptions. While researchers will use video during fieldwork, the final videos for distribution will be taken by professionals.

The archival video will document patterns, manufacture and use of selected fabrics, from beginning to end, for textile specialists. It will be professionally taped following preplanned shot sequences for maximum clarity and minimal editing. A text with detailed descriptions of the video images in sequence written by the researchers will accompany the archival video for international distribution primarily to research facilities.

The documentary video with a narrative script will present the topic in the broadest context for a wider audience and distribution. The length will depend upon the project; some fabrics will be presented in 30 minute stories while others will be shown in 5 minute clips. Most of this video will be taken from the archival video with about 20 percent additional footage shot for broader cultural contexts.

In order to facilitate the initial fieldwork, methodologies have been written to serve as guidelines for collecting data. They

include both personal interviews and personal observation. Methodologies exist on handloom woven fabrics, embroideries and passementerie (trimmings).

Since there is urgency in carrying out this work, several documentation projects will be carried out simultaneously. We encourage colleagues to identify the endangered fabrics of critical significance in your own cultural and technical specialties and to begin documenting as soon as possible. We also recommend your using the methodologies mentioned above as well as shot lists for archival taping, and story lines developed for narrative documentaries. In short, we want to encourage colleagues to document with video. We believe that research and video documentation of the patterns, production and use of traditional fabrics is critical now, in the 1990s, before all evidence is lost to industrialization.

Two projects in different countries, Morocco and Egypt, are in progress. The initial project will document the patterns, production and use of silk fabrics for weddings in Fez, Morocco. Following preliminary investigations in Fez and encouragement from senior Moroccan government officials, the research and fieldwork are scheduled to begin in the fall of 1989, pending funding, and will be concluded with a publication and two videos within three years. Although the project is a collaborative effort, each team member is responsible for a self-contained portion. Project director Mackie is responsible for embroidery, Sorber for passementerie and Stack for hand woven fabrics. A Moroccan anthropologist will also collaborate. The professional videos will be produced by Mark Stanley of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts' media department with assistance from the Moroccan Cinematographic Center.

Although fabrics for weddings is the preferred scenario with its international topical appeal, it is not always feasible. In Egypt, traditional fabrics survive in different cultural contexts and locations that do not form a coherent story. Therefore each fabric will be researched and documented as a separate entity. Team members will assume self-contained areas of responsibility. The project will be implemented with the co-operation of Helwan University in Cairo. Included are co-project directors Mackie and M. El-Homossani (Research Associate, Textile Dept., Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada) and collaborators I. Abdel-Baki (Helwan University) and S. Mehrez (Egyptian collector).

Documentation of traditional fabrics is also being discussed for Turkey, Syria and Thailand. The project is immense. More scholars are needed. We encourage you to develop comparable projects in your area of expertise. We want to share the methodologies for field research and video with you. Only with a "global attack" by many committed textile scholars will documenting endangered textile traditions be achieved.