

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Textile Society of America Symposium
Proceedings

Textile Society of America

2000

Discussion of Recent Approaches to Expanding Textile Studies

Patricia A. Cunningham
Ohio State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf>

Cunningham, Patricia A., "Discussion of Recent Approaches to Expanding Textile Studies" (2000). *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. 785.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/785>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Textile Society of America at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Discussion of Recent Approaches to Expanding Textile Studies

Patricia A. Cunningham

We are all committed to extending the knowledge of textiles. These papers offer outstanding examples of how museum curators, an academic, and a conservator have expanded audiences and brought new materials to telling the textile story. Major themes have emerged from their papers, and are worthy of further consideration.

First, it is quite apparent that professionals in museums need to work together. Harold Mailand has shown what the conservator can bring to the curator in the interpretation of textiles. I contend that textile department and costume departments should work together, and collaborate with other departments in their institutions. I am sure that many do this now.

Second, it is clear from Gayle Strege that costumes should be thought of as part of textile collections, and that flat textiles, those that are really draped clothing, should be viewed as such, literally. Again, this is an opportunity for collaboration. In university textiles classes students should have the opportunity to become engaged with the finished product, which could be an upholstered chair or a swimsuit. Karen Herbaugh, also made this clear for the museum exhibition. Why not see the whole picture from fiber through manufactured product and end use, and maybe even reuse. The story has a beginning and an end.

Third, Deborah Brothers has shown us how academics can think outside of the box, and engage academics from a broad spectrum of fields to consider the importance of textiles. I would like to see Regional Centers for the Study of Textiles and Dress that would allow such events to occur more easily.

Fourth, these scholars have made it clear that we need to rethink how we consider textiles. But how should we think about them? They might be beautiful objects, but were they meant to be thought of as art? Was/is their usefulness to their makers and users their most important trait? Do we distort their cultural meanings by hanging them on walls. What can we learn about a culture by studying them in full--their materials, design, makers and uses. What did they mean to their makers and users; what do they mean to us now?

Dr. Patricia A. Cunningham is an Associate Professor, Consumer and Textile Sciences, The Ohio State University. She received her Ph.D. from Florida State University. She a Fellow of the Costume Society of America, serves on its national board, and is Managing Editor of the journal, *Dress*. She has published numerous articles on the history of dress and American(Ohio) woven coverlets. Dr. Cunningham has edited three books-- *Woven Coverlets: Textiles in the Folk Tradition*, *Dress and American Culture* and *Dress and Popular Culture*. A forthcoming book carries the title: *Reforming Fashion: 1850-1918: Politics, Health and Art*.