

Evaluating and Choosing Sheer Overlays

Camille Myers Breeze



Camille Myers Breeze is Director and Chief Conservator at Museum Textile Services in Andover, MA. Camille has a BA in Art History from Oberlin College and an MA in Museum Studies: Costume and Textiles Conservation from SUNY: Fashion Institute of Technology. She spent five years in the Textile Conservation Laboratory at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, NYC, before moving to the Textile Conservation Center at the American Textile History Museum, in Lowell, MA. Camille founded Museum Textile Services in 1999 as a full-service textile conservation studio serving collectors and collecting institutions. Contact her at info@museumtextiles.com or www.museumtextiles.com.

Textile conservators have employed sheer overlays for stabilization and preventative conservation since the early days of our field. An overlay is a sheer material placed on the object's surface with the goal of protecting the object and/or changing the object's appearance. They are sometimes used in conjunction with an underlay, either of a solid fabric or another sheer.

There are many benefits of conserving textiles with sheer overlays. They provide immediate stabilization across a large area with a minimum of stitching. Sheer overlays provide preventative care, as they offer protection from loss if the textile continues to degrade. They are easily reversed, except when applied using an adhesive. Sheer overlays are easy to learn, so their use can be taught to people at the beginning of their conservation education, and to those who do not specialize in textiles.

A good sheer overlay fabric should have many of the following qualities:

- Provide support with minimal intervention
- Blend well with the textile in color and sheen
- Match the drape of the textile
- Add minimal weight to the textile
- Be washfast and lightfast
- Be free of chemical finishes or additives
- Come in a wide range of colors and/or be easily dyed
- Be widely available and affordable
- Remain physically stable with exposure to controlled lighting
- Be compatible with the textile's fiber content

There are three main categories of sheer conservation fabrics listed in Chapter VI of the Textiles section of the AIC Collaborative Knowledge Base (AIC Wiki:) silk crepe-line, nylon net, and polyester sheers (e.g. Stabiltex®/Tetex®.) Each material has its pros and cons, regarding cost, availability, and ease of use.

Silk Crepe-line	Nylon Net	Polyester Sheers
<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low sheen Moderate transparency Good drape Good "tooth" Easily dyed <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deforms easily Must be hemmed Can cause a moiré effect \$60/yard on average Available in only 3 colors 	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good transparency Good drape Does not unravel Available in many colors Easily dyed Available in wide widths \$5/yard on average <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate sheen Stretchier in one direction Can be abrasive 	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good drape at most weights Available in many colors Can be hot cut Available in wide widths \$15-\$75/yard <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate to high sheen Moderate to poor transparency Can cause a moiré effect Not easily dyed Stabiltex®/Tetex® are difficult to buy

In an effort to create a standard protocol for evaluating and selecting sheer overlays, I created a Sheer Overlay Score Card. This tool allows MTS staff and students to weigh the relative pros and cons of each sheer material based on sets of variable and non-variable factors. Together with proper training in object handling and conservation stitching, the Sheer Overlay Score Card can help any conservator or collections-care specialists can achieve an advanced knowledge of this treatment.

I want to hear what you have to say about sheer overlays! Please take my online survey on the Use of Sheer Overlay Materials in Textile Conservation, available through July 26, 2014 at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MTSsheeroverlays>

Please touch but do not take!



Insect damage to silk taffeta before conservation (L) and after stabilization with silk crepe-line (R).



Nylon net being used to stabilize a wool flag and for color compensation.



Sheer overlays stabilize existing weaknesses and provide protection against future losses.



This beaded textile fragment was not in display condition due to the rough edges left when it was cut away from its original garment.

A Mylar tracing was made of the beaded perimeter. This tracing was used to hot cut a void in a heavy-weight polyester sheer.



The beaded textile was stitched to a fabric-covered board. The sheer overlay was placed on top and stitched around the beads.

After the polyester sheer was secured to the perimeter of the textile, it was wrapped to the back of the board and stitched down.



Want to learn more about this topic? I am teaching "Textile Stabilization Using Sheer Overlays" at the Campbell Center for Historic Preservation Studies on September 15-17, 2014.



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Textile Stabilization Using Sheer Overlays
Instructor: Camille Myers Breeze
Date: September 22-24, 2014
Cost: Tuition and Materials Fee: \$885

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Conservators employ three main types of sheer overlay to stabilize deteriorated textiles: net, silk sheer, and synthetic sheer. Each material has its pros and cons including cost, availability, invisibility, ease of use, and archival stability. The benefit of any sheer overlay is that it provides immediate stabilization as well as preventative protection. Participants will learn how to use all three of these sheer materials and, more importantly, how to determine which overlay is best for a given situation. You may choose to bring your own clean, pest-free textile that is quilt sized or smaller.

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Sheer Overlay Score Card

Score each type of overlay you are considering for your project from 1 to 3, with 1 being the lowest score and 3 being the highest. If the answer is yes, write in 3. If the answer is no, write in 0.

Object: _____

	Nylon net	Polyester sheers	Silk crepe-line
Variable factors:			
Transparency/weight			
Sheen/finish			
Drape/dimensional stability			
Matching color available? (Do not dye)			
Matching fiber content?			
Sub total			
Non-variable factors:			
Ease of dyeing	2	1	3
Ease of cutting/finishing	3	2	1
Lightfastness/colorfastness	2	2	1
Availability	3	3	2
Cost	3	2	1
Sub total	13	10	6
Final score			

Add both sub totals together to get the final score for each category. The overlay with the highest score is often the best choice.

NB: In some cases there is a single consideration that outweighs all others when choosing an overlay, such as availability or the need for custom dyeing.

http://www.museumtextiles.com/uploads/7/8/9/0/7890062/black_sheer_overlay_score_card.pdf

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The *Sheer Overlay Score Card* is available to download from the MTS Website, at www.museumtextiles.com/resources.html

You can also find all of our other MTS Handouts there, including:

Conservation Netting

Hot Cutting & Applying Polyester Sheer Overlays

Sheer Overlay Bibliography