



Museum Textile Services

Customizing Mannequins

Historic garments require proper support to ensure safe display. They are often small, have a complex profile that was created with the aid of foundation garments, and are fragile even when they appear to be in excellent condition. Here are some tips on how to customize a commercial mannequin or dress form for museum display.

- Mannequins should be covered with a smooth, archival fabric such as cotton stockinet or nylon pantyhose. This protects the costume from jagged edges, peeling paint, etc. Pantyhose also provide arms, should they be needed.
- To fit pantyhose on a mannequin, first cut out the gusset. Slip the hose over the top of the mannequin and pull the waistband down. Center the leg holes at the shoulders so that the legs fall like arms.
- Slip padding underneath to create the proper form. Stuff the legs of the pantyhose to provide arm support. Always use archival materials such as polyester batting, acid-free tissue, and nylon bridal tulle to build a costume support. Non-archival materials such as bubble pack, thick paper, etc. may be used for very short-term displays (up to one week) as long as there is a barrier of fabric between them and any historic costume.
- To make a store mannequin fit a small woman's bodice, cut off the breasts. Cover the holes with plaster or duck tape. Then use the pantyhose method to build up an appropriate profile.
- If you only have female mannequins and you need to dress a male costume, this method can be used to create a masculine torso. Choose a thick padding such as ¼-inch polyfelt from University Products to create a smooth line up to the bust. Add padding underneath as necessary.

