



Friends of Textiles and Costume Newsletter

Message from the Chair

Philip Cheong, Chair of FTC

Dear FTC Members,

It is with pleasure and an honour to introduce myself to you as your newest Chair of FTC. I have been involved with the ROM for almost thirty-five years, starting as a department volunteer in the East Asian Section where several years later, I was invited to join the Bishop White Committee and worked on programmes and events, followed by two separate terms over the course of eight years as Chair. This committee still plays an integral role in my ROM volunteer commitments and I am also involved with the executive of the Currelly Legacy Society. My day job up until this past February when I took early retirement was with Museums and Heritage Services of the City of Toronto where I worked as a Historical Interpreter (yes, I was in period costume depending on the site), Programme Officer and finally Museum Coordinator at Todmorden Mills Heritage Site.

Growing up in Montreal, I was exposed to an environment which fostered a peripheral interest in textiles. I remember accompanying my mother as she shopped for fabrics that would be tailored into cheongsams during our vacations in Singapore and she wore these everyday even though Canada was our new home. As a teenager, instead of hanging out at the mall, my hangout was a gallery that dealt in African and tribal art as well as Canadiana and textiles. It was here that I had my first introduction to Canadian quilts, hooked rugs, and fabrics from Africa and Indonesia. I still have some of the textiles that I purchased as a university student tucked away at home.

My vision for the next few years at FTC is to grow our membership base and continue offering engaging programmes both inside and outside the ROM, even without a gallery space at present. We are exploring several new programming ideas, including joint events with other Friends groups.

Another priority is to increase contributions to our Donor Advised Fund (DAF), which directly supports the department. One of our members, Suzanne Clark, recently participated in the TCS Waterfront Marathon/Walk to raise funds for the DAF. If you'd like to support our efforts, please consider donating through [Run for ROM](#). The link will remain active until November 18, 2025, and any amount is greatly appreciated.

Please watch for announcements about upcoming Fall/Winter events, which will be shared by email. I look forward to meeting many of you in person at one of these gatherings

Lastly, it is also my pleasure to introduce Jane Liu who is the new Editor of the FTC Newsletter. Many thanks to Pat Sparrer for her splendid work on previous newsletters. Kudos to Pat and now Jane, as this job requires more work than creating a patchwork quilt in bringing together disparate authors and subjects into a finished product. There are many engaging articles to follow, and I sincerely hope that you enjoy this edition!

In This Issue

This edition highlights the upcoming exhibition Monsoon Worlds of the Indian Ocean and the ongoing Saints, Sinners, Lovers, and Fools, accompanied by behind-the-scenes insights into the photo documentation of Flemish tapestry. Together, these features illuminate the global reach of textile traditions and their enduring connections to art and identity.

We are also pleased to feature “Her Hat in the Ring: Toronto Milliner El Jamon and Her Circle” by Deirdre Macdonald, a new publication that explores Toronto’s fashion history through the life and creative legacy of milliner El Jamon.

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Bridal Fashion from the Indian Ocean

Dr. Sarah Fee, Senior Curator, Global Fashion & Textiles



Figure 1: Peranakan Chinese woman's formal wedding outfit of robe, skirt, cape, embroidered silk, Jacket: 107 x 170 cm, Skirt: 98 x 50 cm 2024.63.1.1 - .1.3 This acquisition was made possible with the generous support of the Suzanne Labarge Fund. © ROM, 2024.



Figure 2: Peranakan Chinese woman's formal wedding outfit of robe, skirt, cape, embroidered silk, Collar: 28 x 110 cm 2024.63.1.1 - .1.3 This acquisition was made possible with the generous support of the Suzanne Labarge Fund. © ROM, 2024.

A highlight for Global Fashion & Textiles (GFT) in 2024 was the accession of a rare formal wedding outfit made for a Peranakan bride of Singapore or Malacca over 100 years ago. It is comprised of a silk robe, skirt and cape densely embroidered in “Peking knots” with peonies, phoenixes and butterflies.

The term Peranakan refers to communities of mixed Asian heritage residing in coastal Southeast Asia. From the 16th century, men of Chinese, Arab, Indian origin settled in the multicultural ports of Southeast Asia and married local Malay women. Their descendants created unique cultures distinctly different from their forebearers and from other diasporic port communities.

Especially large and prosperous Peranakan Chinese communities in Singapore, Java, Malacca, Penang, Thailand and Myanmar created unique customs, material cultures, foodways and a dialect, Baba Malay. Dress was key to communicating both local roots and overseas ancestry. For daily wear, Peranakan Chinese women wore the “sarong-kebaya” a common female fashion in Indian Ocean port cities: a wrap-around cotton sarong paired with a long-sleeved jacket. However, for ceremonial events, Peranakan brides and grooms turned to Chinese-inspired dress and accoutrements.

“Peranakan wedding practices,” according to the National Heritage Board of Singapore,” closely resembled old wedding customs in Fujian province [southern China], from which many Peranakans hail. [Visit this site](#) to see a wedding robe which was often specially ordered from Shanghai or made by Shanghainese tailors living in Singapore.

The bride changed outfits many times over the twelve days of ceremonies. For several formal events, she dressed in a Chinese style robe, skirt and “cloud collar” or cape, with auspicious colours and symbols from the Chinese repertoire.

“Peonies symbolize spring, love, beauty and good fortune while the phoenix can represent beauty, grace, high virtue, the Empress and the bride. In the same vein, butterflies are symbols of joy, beauty, romance and thus associated with weddings. This garment is designed in the style of the Ming dynasty [with wide sleeves]. The bride was expected to strike a formal pose which required her to fold her hands in front of her and adjust the ends of the two sleeves in such a way that one slips into the other. To learn more, visit this site: [Singapore Peranakan Wedding](#).

And yet, some elements of the formal wedding dress of Peranakan brides were distinctly unique. According to Cheong Kim Ban, Peranakan-Chinese women preferred very bright pastel fuchsia and orange, and the intricately embroidered and layered collar was known as “the neck feathers of the phoenix”, rather than the more usual “cloud collar”.

The acquisition of this bridal ensemble was made possible thanks to the generosity of ROM patron Suzanne Labarge. It makes a substantial addition to GFT collections, supplementing 2011 acquisitions of batik cloth made for Peranakan communities. It is slated to feature prominently in the “Port Cities” section of the upcoming 2027 ROM-original exhibition Monsoon Worlds of the Indian Ocean. It invites several avenues of future research. Once part the collection of art collectors Zaira and Marcel Mis, it may have first left Asia with a French diplomat’s wife. Peter Lee, scholar of Southeast Asian fashion, told this writer that some garment details suggest it was most likely made for a bride in Singapore or Malacca around 1910. Future research may provide additional information on the many social lives of this stunning bridal outfit.

For further reading see the Peranakan Museum Guide, Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum.

Peranakan Silver Pillow End Plates

Philip Cheong, Chair of FTC

Next year, the ROM will unveil a new exhibit “The Indian Ocean: Monsoon Worlds” which will explore both the cultural and natural history of this vast region. One type of artefact which will be on display is a silver bolster buntal end plate created to decorate cushions used in the bridal bed. This is a unique artistic expression to the Peranakan or Nyonya communities in Southeast Asia.

Centuries back, Chinese traders and tradesmen from southern China began to settle in the Malay peninsula. The resulting inter-marriage between the Chinese and local inhabitants produced the Peranakan community, found in geographically diverse areas from Thailand through to Indonesia, but mainly in Malaysia and Singapore. This hybrid culture was specific to the region and was at once Chinese, but not Chinese, as there is no equivalence to this in mainland China.



Figure 3: Rectangular repoussé silver plate for wedding pillow. © Philip Cheong, 2023.

Culturally, the Peranakan Chinese followed traditional aspects of Chinese religious belief systems, customs, language and culture as it was part of their heritage, but different and distinct from the mainland. They had their own distinctive foods, influenced by the rich spices of the region, language which combined local expressions and words, and customs and beliefs adapted from the surrounding regions. In terms of aesthetic sentiments, for example, affluent Peranakan families would order porcelain dining sets from the kilns of Jingdezhen, and although the designs are strictly Chinese in the sense of the dragons, phoenixes and floral decorations, the colours are bright, often with pink or a turquoise ground, which stand out from products intended for mainland Chinese tastes.

In the realm of silverware, silver objects were decorated with traditional Chinese auspicious symbols and designs meant to bring good luck. These objects followed Malay and Javanese forms, but also included buckles, betel nut sets used for the consumption of betel nuts, ewers, and jewellery.

One type which survives in many public and private collections is the pillow end plate covers illustrated here. These were intended as decorative end plates for cylindrical bolsters and angular pillows for the wedding bed. Created by immigrant Chinese silversmiths who were well versed in the vernacular of Chinese symbolism, most of these surviving examples date from the latter half of the 19th-century and into the early 20th-century. The designs are drawn from Daoist symbolism, florals and fantastic beasts such as the qilin, whose presence denotes the passing or arrival of a great sage or illustrious leader. The birth of Confucius was supposedly foretold by the presence of a qilin to his mother. The qilin is described as having a single horn on its forehead, the scaly body of a deer, a yellow belly, a multi-coloured back, and the tail of an ox. Considered very gentle in nature, it never harms anything even to the extent of not walking on grass or eating vegetation!



Figure 4: Repoussé silver plate for wedding pillow. © Philip Cheong, 2023.



Figure 5: Repoussé silver wedding pillow plate. © Philip Cheong, 2023.

These pillow plates added to the ornateness of the pillows for the wedding bed which resembled a railed canopied bed on three sides. The bed was elaborately carved and gilded with floral symbols, auspicious beasts and scenes from Chinese mythology and stories. Tasseled curtains would be hung at the long front of the bed and at the sides, and elaborately knotted tassels would festoon the opening. These silver disks and plaques reinforced some of the symbolism found on the bed carvings and would have been sewn onto the middle of the silk pillows, embellishing them with an aura of luxury and richness, combined with the wish for many progenies, health and happiness conveyed through the decorations. The wedding bed symbolized continuity and aspirations for future generations, one in which the family name and fortune would flourish, and what better way to do this than to include symbolic silver ornaments as part of it.

A close look at four silk pieces from the gift of Mrs. Sigmund Samuel (950.100.513.A-D)

Iris Zhai, Lin-Chen family internship, Indian Ocean



Figure 6: Streamer from temple banner (four fragments), weft-patterned silk lampas (badayun jin), China, c. 1368–1699. ROM 950.100.513.A–D. The four “badayun brocade” silk pieces in grouped view. Left: 950.100.513.B Upper middle: 950.100.513.D Middle: 950.100.513.A © ROM.



Figure 7: One of the four fragments. 950.100.513. © Iris Zhai, 2025.

Imitating a design that originated during the Song dynasty (960–1279), these polychrome silk fragments feature woven honeycomb-like octagonal and circular motifs known as badayun (八达晕, “eight-directional halos”). They are representative of Ming-dynasty Song-style polychrome jin fabrics (song shi jin 宋式锦), typically characterized by a warp-faced twill or tabby ground and an extra binding warp (tejing 特经) that creates a lampas weave structure. Discontinuous colour blocks produced by short weft shots highlight key parts of the pattern.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, badayun brocades—technically complex and visually opulent—were highly prized. These compound jin fabrics were among the most

valuable Song-style silks, often used for domestic furnishings, religious objects, and paper mountings/protectors, which survived today in large quantities and good conditions with scrolls and sutras in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) and the Palace Museum (Beijing).

Weaving Technique and Materiality



Figure 8: The bottom raw edges of 950.100.513.A. The saturated colours form a sharp contrast to the faded surface. A close examination of badayun brocade distinguishes a warp-faced red satin weave ground and multiple insertions of non-structural supplementary wefts in pink, yellow, green, dark blue, light blue. © Iris Zhai.



Figure 9: The special extra binding warps (tejing 特经) for binding the weft shots are obvious on the reverse of the silks. © Iris Zhai, 2025.

950.100.513.A-D as Religious objects

In addition to adorning artworks, badayun brocade silks—decorative and labor-intensive—were frequently offered to temples as religious donations. Pious Buddhist devotees considered these sumptuous textiles worthy offerings, in keeping with the long-standing practice of accumulating merit through acts of material devotion.

Monastic communities often repurposed donated luxury goods into sacred objects such as “patchwork” banners or streamers. These long, narrow, tapering fabric strips were hung in temples during ritual occasions. ROM fragments likely once formed part of such devotional streamers.

Comparable examples of complete patchwork streamers in other museum collections include:



Figure 10: The Art Institute of Chicago (L): 1955.788b & 1955.788c, made 1750–1850. © AIC.



Figure 11: Nelson Atkins Museum of Art (M): 35-191, early 18th century. © Nelson Atkins Museum of Art.



Figure 12: Metropolitan Museum (R): 65.38.7, Qianlong period (1736–95). © MET.

950.100.513.A-D as Overseas export

For an upcoming exhibition on the Indian Ocean, I explored ROM’s textile collections—particularly the gifts of Mrs. Sigmund Samuel and Louise Hawley Stone—in search of Chinese silk pieces that reflected global maritime trade. Chinese export silks, alongside porcelain and tea, were central to the emergence of global commerce across the Indian Ocean.

Between 1405 and 1433, Admiral Zheng He (郑和) led seven maritime expeditions under the Ming emperor Yongle. His treasure fleets carried silk, porcelain, and other treasures on diplomatic missions across the Indian Ocean world. In 1409, Zheng He’s fleet reached Galle, Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), where imperial envoys presented lavish gifts—including “gold and silver, utensils for religious offerings, variegated adornments, and precious banners embroidered with gold”—to local Buddhist temples.

A trilingual stone stele, now in the Colombo National Museum, commemorates this event. Despite weathering, it still records “four pairs of banners embroidered with gold thread” (织金紵丝宝旛肆对纳红贰对黄壹对青壹对). This inscription suggests a compelling connection between ROM’s badayun brocade fragments and the tradition of silk textiles used as diplomatic and religious gifts in Zheng He’s voyages.

Flemish Art in Textiles

Pat Sparrer FTC member (with additions by Kate Cooper, AGR Associate Curator)

In June 2025, Royal Ontario Museum announced the exhibition *Saints, Sinners, Lovers and Fools, 300 years of Flemish Masterworks*. Coincidentally, the Global Fashion and Textile Department received a request for updated photographic images of a Flemish tapestry in ROM's collection. ROM's tapestry dates between 1510 and 1515, approximately midway in the time period covered by the 'Saints and Sinners' exhibition.

Historically, Flemish tapestry art is a woven wall hanging produced in Flanders, primary Brussels, during the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. The tapestries, are luxurious, historically significant textiles, often depicting complicated or allegorical scenes. They are known for skillful weaving, rich design and large scale. The tapestries were in high demand among wealthy and royal patrons, representing the luxury and prestige of the era. They evolved from being a functional 'woven wall' into something more decorative than utilitarian. Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and Bernard van Orley (1487-1541) are two of the most famous Flemish artists to work in this medium.

ROM's tapestry was woven using wool warp and weft, with reds, blues and buff colours in a Gothic design; yellow silk wefts provide highlights. Except for some of the edging bands, which are probably 18th century, the tapestry is original fabric. It illustrates scenes from the famous ancient Greek epic about the Trojan War, and focusses on the exploits of Ulysses, the Latin name for Odysseus one of the Greek heroes.



Figure 13: Flemish tapestry depicting scenes of the Trojan war, Belgium c. 1510–1515. Woven wool warp and weft with silk highlights 366 × 648 cm, ROM 946.68. Gift of Leonard Fund. © ROM.



Figure 14: Top left: Ulysses unsuccessfully feigns madness to avoid fighting by ploughing salt into his fields on Ithaca. His ploy is uncovered when his baby son Telemachus is put in front of the plough. © ROM.



Figure 15: Bottom left: Ulysses exposes Achilles, who has been disguised as a woman to avoid fighting, by providing him with a sword. © ROM.



Figure 16: Right: Ulysses and Diomedes visit the Trojan court to discuss peace-terms with King Priam and Paris, but it is in vain. © ROM.



Figure 17: Centre: Ulysses and Diomedes steal the sacred Palladium statue from Troy, setting motion the eventual fall of the city. © ROM.



Figure 18: The ships visible in the upper right corner, are the fleet of the Greek heroes who have sailed to Troy to besiege the city. © ROM.



Figure 19: Court figures in rich blue and red costumes with ornate embellishments. © ROM.

Although the tapestry depicts a story set in antiquity, it was customary for art of this period to show contemporary fashions. Therefore, all the figures are dressed in rich and colourful late Gothic costume resembling, for instance, the clothes of fourteenth-century madonnas.

The tapestry has a floral border of intertwining sprays of violets, daisies, roses and grapes.



Figure 20: Tapestry border with white and pink flowers and white and blue foliage. © ROM.



Figure 21: Tapestry black border with grapes. © ROM.

Tapestry Illustrating Scenes from the Trojan War: A Photo-documentation Project

Karla Livingston, Collections Specialist, Global Fashion & Textiles

This is the story of the behind-the-scenes work and collaboration that went into photographing this very big early 16th-century Flemish tapestry. This tapestry spent many years hanging on permanent view in ROM's galleries until it was retired from display and moved into permanent storage. The initiative to photograph the tapestry emerged from conversations with an external researcher, seeking high resolution images to facilitate in-depth scholarship of the piece.

Planning and Preparation:

Before starting any new project, Senior Photographer Paul Eekoff and I will work together to determine how best to set up the photo studio and organize our workflow to allow everything to run smoothly while also ensuring object safety during the process.

For this project, after several weeks of discussion, we determined that, in addition to the photographer, we would briefly require a team of collection specialists to move the tapestry to the photo studio from storage, then have two people working in the studio during the 3-day photo-shoot to handle the textile – myself and Collections Specialist Sahana Puvirajasingam.



Figure 22: Tapestry arrives in the photo studio. © ROM.

The Setup:

The Ivey photo studio has a ceiling-mounted camera rig to shoot vertically downward—ideal for photographing large, flat textiles – while smaller detailed views could be captured using a camera stand. Paul and I had previously developed an effective technique for dealing with oversized, fragile textiles by essentially creating a giant conveyor belt of background paper that would move the object under the ceiling-

mounted camera so that overlapping images could be captured and later digitally stitched into seamless overviews.



Figure 23: Views of The Ivey Photo studio prepared for the project. Featuring the mezzanine with a ceiling-mounted camera, camera stand on the floor; Lighting array; photo paper. © ROM.



Figure 24: Two camera positions were established: one ceiling-mounted for overhead shots, and another for detailed, close-up photography. © ROM.

When we arrived with the tapestry the studio had been prepared. Lighting had been set to illuminate the tapestry evenly; seamless backdrop paper, wider than the tapestry's smaller dimension, had been sourced, and a second roller tube was prepared to allow the paper to be scrolled, serving both as a clean background and as a conveyor belt that would pass under the lens without distorting the textile and preventing unnecessary strain on the fabric. A frame of photo paper on the floor, larger than the field of view, was marked with tape lines indicating the corners and center of the frame. Additional tape lines were added for paper placement to maintain alignment across images. Finally, two separate camera positions had been established: one ceiling-mounted for overhead views and a camera stand for detail photography.

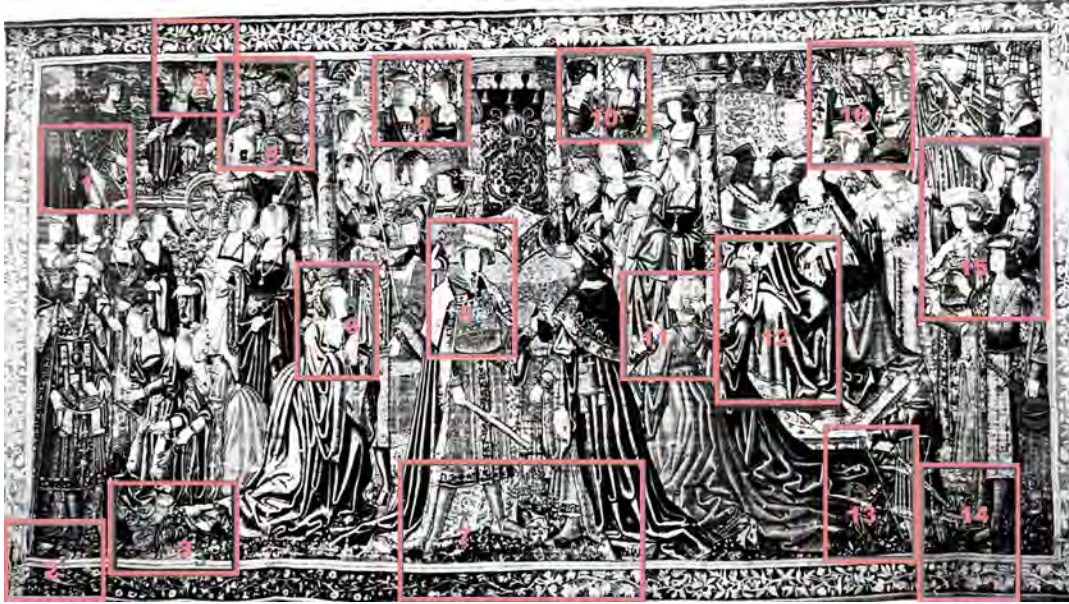


Figure 25: Detailed shooting diagram overlaid onto old black & white overview image to guide both full and close-up shots of key elements. © ROM.

The researchers provided a detailed shooting diagram that they had mapped out onto old photographs. We would use these to ensure that both full views and close-up shots of key narrative and decorative elements would be captured. This also allowed us to optimize the movement of the object as well as camera placement.



Figure 26: Collection Specialists Sahana Puvirajasingam, and Karla Livingston, unrolling tapestry. © ROM.

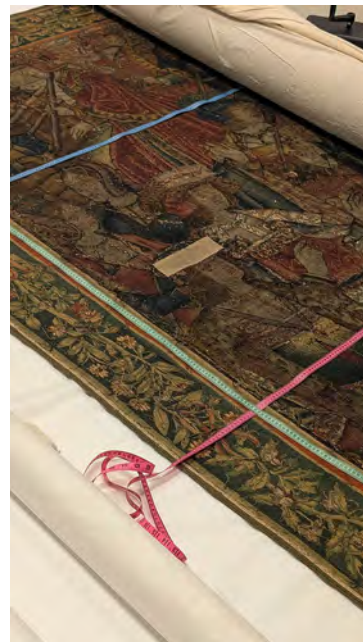


Figure 27: Setting up details using tape measures to mark borders. © ROM.

The workflow proceeded in meticulously choreographed stages:

- Unroll approximately 1 meter of the tapestry.
- Lay measuring tapes at the borders of each detail.
- Adjust the camera stand to photograph key detail sections from floor level.
- Repeat this process until the maximum field was reached.
- Move to the mezzanine and capture section overview from above.
- Introducing a second tube, partially re-roll the area that had been completed, simultaneously scrolling the studio paper underneath.
- Drag the paper to bring the setup back to the starting position.
- Repeat steps for the next section.

We continued this process over the next few days, starting with the back of the tapestry and repeating it for the front.

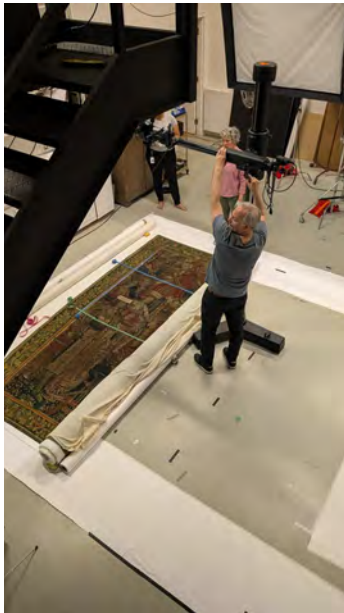


Figure 28: First detail. © ROM.



Figure 29: Senior Photographer Paul Eekoff adjusting camera to capture key details. © ROM

In the end, we were able to capture the whole scene in three large sections that would then be stitched together digitally, creating a composite digital image of the complete work, as well as high-resolution documentation of its key scenes and decorative elements. The work required an intense amount of concentration; it was physically demanding due to the size and weight of the tapestry. It was also very dirty, a result of centuries of accumulated dust and debris captured within the weave of the tapestry. Despite this, it was also a fun and collaborative project.

Her hat in the Ring: Toronto Milliner El Jamon and her Circle by Deirdre Macdonald

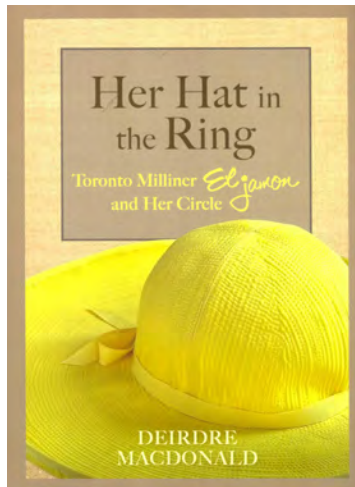


Figure 30: Cover page of the book. © Karla Livingston.



Figure 31: Deirdre Macdonald © Karla Livingston.

This book portrays the remarkable life and work of **Lily Jamon (1918–2009)**, the Ukrainian Canadian milliner known professionally as El Jamon, whose bold and innovative designs broke with 1950s fashion norms and helped transform Toronto's cultural landscape.

From her hardscrabble upbringing in rural Manitoba and her early years as a textile worker in Depression-era Winnipeg, to her celebrated career designing dramatic hats for her clients—eight exceptional women profiled in this book—Lily's story is one of resilience, reinvention, and artistic courage.

In 1953, the Stratford Festival invited her to become its first milliner, a position she held for more than a decade. A single mother, Lily and her daughter Natasha—a leading fashion model—became Toronto trendsetters who influenced Canadian fashion and culture.

This book celebrates the story of an unsung Canadian artist and the women whose lives intertwined with hers through their shared love of her hats.

Deirdre Macdonald was born and raised in Toronto and educated in both Toronto and Halifax. She has lived and worked in England and Kenya, and has spent periods teaching high school English in Toronto.

Macdonald has contributed to community newspapers and newsletters, writing primarily about people and places. Her work is characterized by her keen eye for detail and her ability to capture the spirit of individuals who have shaped their communities.

Deirdre Macdonald explained that the inspiration for this book began with a visit to the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), arranged by Dr. Alexandra Palmer, the museum's Nora E. Vaughan Fashion Costume Curator and Chair of the Veronika Gervers Research Fellowship in Textiles & Costume (now retired).

"I was invited to view the ROM's El Jamon collection of twenty-seven hats," Macdonald recalled. "This visit launched my formal research."

During this visit, Karla Livingston, a senior collection specialist, guided Macdonald through selected pieces from the El Jamon collection, offering insights into the textiles and construction techniques used in Jamon's designs.

"By the time I left the ROM," Macdonald reflected, "I was hooked on Lily's emerging story."

Please consider joining our committee

Friends of Textiles & Costume

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Alternate accessible formats are [available upon request](#).

Friends of Textiles & Costume is organized by ROM's Department of Museum Volunteers to provide support for the Museum. ROM is an agency of the Government of Ontario.

The logo for the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), consisting of the letters "ROM" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.