Dear Friends,

Chair's Report

It has been a year of changes at the ROM. We held our annual meeting in May and heard about the wonderful work our curators have done and continue to do in the areas of Textiles & Costume. It really is remarkable how much the staff has accomplished in just twelve months.

Another very busy department is ROM Membership. In an effort to increase communications and opportunities for Members to learn and explore, ROM Membership will no longer charge a $57 Membership fee to join a Friends Group when you renew membership or become a ROM Member. The future will see the opening of the Centre of Discovery, one of which will be Textiles & Fashions. We believe it is more important than ever that Friends of Textiles & Costume continue our work to bring needed funds into this important area of the ROM.

As a Friend of Textiles & Costume, you make it possible to continue FTC’s goal of an annual donation to the Burnham Brent Endowment Fund for Special Exhibitions (this year $6,000), of purchasing needed items for the Textile & Costume Section, of funding a summer intern to help the curators and textile staff ($3,200), and of generously supporting FTC’s Adopt-a-Journal program which buys important books and periodicals selected by the curators for ROM’s library.

When you renew your ROM Membership this year, please remember how important your support is for FTC. A $50 donation will help tremendously to continue support of FTC’s funding goals. Your donations can be directed to ROM Friends of Textiles & Costume and you will get a full tax receipt for all donations. You will continue receiving two e-newsletters annually, and you will become a Friend. If you wish to receive your newsletter by regular mail, please contact ROM Membership at membership@rom.on.ca or 416.586.5700.

Next year, is ROM Centennial year and Friends of Textiles & Costume, ROM Members and DMV Members (ROM volunteers) are busy creating a legacy textile. Please don’t be shy about getting involved in this exciting project. Thank you for your continued support of Friends of Textiles & Costume.

Betty Finnie-Hunt

Summer Heat has Turned FTC Centennial Textile Project into a Colourful Fall Presentation

It was a year ago that the Friends of Textiles & Costume announced that they would be looking for volunteers to assist with its Centennial Project, commemorative legacy “Textile Costume” for the ROM’s 100th year 2014. The FTC will reflect images of artifacts, events or activities representing each collection area of the museum as well architectural and artistic aspects of the ROM itself.

The FTC’s proposal has gone through several variations since that announcement but a design, with the help of Ralph Neal of Upper Canada House Interior Design, has been finalized and work has commenced on the construction of the Project’s details. The Project textile will be a multiple of pieces of fabric, triangular in shape, with the images of ROM artifacts reproduced in various textile techniques.

From 2008 to 2012, Alexandra Kim was a Curator of Collections at Kensington Palace which is home to the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection. She will speak to her experiences working with the collection which includes the wedding dresses of both Queen Elizabeth II and her sister Princess Margaret. She will also describe the preparations for Queen Elizabeth’s Diamond Jubilee in 2012.

Date: Friday, November 22, 2013
Time: 5 to 6:30 pm
ROM Eaton Theatre
Lower Level
Cost: $15.00 for ROM Members; $20.00 general public
Watch for the announcement in Members’ E-news and then register at 416.586.5700 or www.rom.on.ca/members/events

Programming for ROM’s Centennial 2014 is ROM’s 100th anniversary and we are planning a series on the history of the textiles and fashions collection. Proposed are the following programs: 50 Years Plus of Volunteering with the Collection; The Legacy of the Burnham-Brent-Vollmer Years; and, What Does the Future Hold? Watch for further announcements.

Chris Paulock spoke about her 22 years as the Conservator at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. She illustrated with examples from the collection of over 35,000 objects both within and beyond the museum’s collection of early archaeological shoes and Tudor caps to current runway fashions. Chris also spoke about the diversity of materials: snakeskin, feathers, paper, rubber or even electronic components. Examples were shown of the various conservation treatments from remedial surface cleaning of a bicorne hat to more complex localized stabilization on an 18th c. gown using a suction table.

While at the Costume Institute Chris worked on over 60 exhibitions with a wide range of topics and a diversity of artifacts such as “Rock Style”, “Poiret”, “Superheroes” and “Alexander McQueen”. She outlined issues with the exhibition “Dangerous Liaisons” where the greatest challenge was attempting to evoke character and animation to static mannequins in period rooms.

During her tenure at the CI, it was necessary for Chris to investigate and research topics such as modern materials and 18th c. painted and embroidered costumes. She presented a number of these types of artifacts. She explained the challenges with the conservation of contemporary pieces and the thermoplastic properties of new materials, surface coatings or ephemeral elements riddled with inherent vice. It was necessary through the years to develop identification techniques, treatment options as well as storage solutions for these new materials in the collection. As a response to these issues Chris organized and hosted various symposia at the MMA which provided a forum for conservators, scientists and curators to discuss these issues.

"Chinese Rank Badges"  
Dr. Sarah Fee, Curator, Eastern Hemisphere Textile & Costume

FTC Presentation, May 3, 2013

The ROM owns one of the world’s premier collections of Chinese costume and textiles, close to 2,700 items. Of these pieces, 380 are insignia badges, better known as “rank badges” or “Mandarin squares.” From Ming times and up to 1911, square badges were worn by government officials on the outside (front and back) of their dark surcoats to communicate rank in the official Chinese bureaucracy. Animals were used to represent the 9 grades in both Civilian and in Military branches. All the intricacies of Chinese cosmology are expressed in these colorful -- and often whimsical -- squares, which were fashioned through tapestry, couching and/or embroidery. The general format places the animal at the center of the composition, standing on earth or rock which jut from waters, while sky and clouds fill the upper reaches. The animal looks over its left shoulder to a red sun disc, said to represent the Emporer. The exception is the top badge, the Emporer’s insignia. Instead of the sun disc it is a yellow square, or a “mandarin square.”

The badge is divided into 9 sections or “grades” which represent the 9 ranks in both Civilian and in Military branches. Animals were used to represent the grades: bears and leopards. The ROM owns 71 such badges.

In 2012, T&C embarked on a project to prepare the badges for an anticipated web display. Thanks to the efforts of technicians and volunteers, the badges were all photographed, re-catalogued and re-housed in state-of-the-art storage.

950.100.80.4-C Insignia badge, 5th civilan rank silver pheasant, with Buddhist and precious objects, tapestry and painted detail, ca. 1800-1850. Difference being that the animal looks over its right shoulder to view the sun disc.

Civilian officials’ symbols were all birds, perhaps because their wisdom took them closer to the heavens. The ROM holds 252 examples of civilian badges of all 9 ranks; represented in the greatest number are the 3rd and 4th ranking Silver and Gold Pheasants, distinctive for their long, jagged tail feathers. Military officials climbed in rank through physical feats and were fittingly represented by strong mamals, including lions, bears and leopards. The ROM owns 71 such badges. In 2012, T&C embarked on a project to prepare the badges for an anticipated web display.

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Photo credit: ROM
Chloé Sayer, Veronika Gervers Research Fellow

Chloé Sayer, will be the next Veronika Gervers Research Fellow. The title of her research is Living Throughts: Cloth, Dress and Identity through Mexican History. Her research will culminate in an exhibition in the Patricia Harris Gallery in 2015 to coincide with the Toronto Pan Am Games.

Karen Donaldson, Collections Management Intern

Last spring as a Collections Conservation and Management student at Fleming College I did a curriculum-based internship under studio technician, Karla Livingston. I assisted in the installation of art pieces in the gallery, mount making, storage upgrades, and inventories of the collection. My main project entailed rehousing part of the archaeological collection.

I have an undergraduate degree in Costume Studies from Dalhousie University. I have worked as a costumer for theatre, dance, and film in Toronto as well as a costume designer, pattern drafter, stitcher, and co-ordinator for many companies including the Canadian Opera Company, Mirvish, and Bravo. I also have my own swimwear line, Minnow Bath, which is inspired by my Madagascar research. I have my own swimwear line, Minnow Bath, which is inspired by my Madagascar research.

Karen working on an installation for BIG

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