

The Textile Conservation Laboratory

About the Laboratory

The Textile Conservation Laboratory at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine was established in 1981 with a mission to conserve two sets of 17th century tapestries that were early gifts to the Cathedral. The Lab soon grew to take in works of varied origin and type.

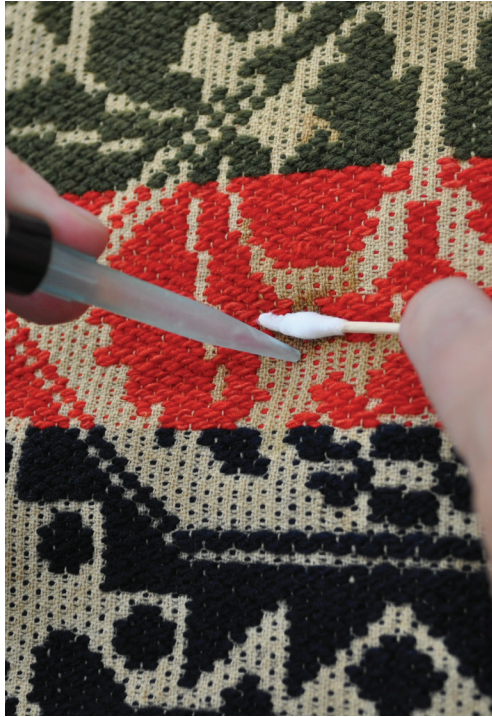
Today, leading museums, institutional and corporate collectors, galleries and individuals with personal collections bring textiles of all kinds to be conserved. The generous space of the Lab, located inside the Ithiel Town Building on the Cathedral's Close, provides the potential for conservators to treat objects of any age, size and type.

Since the beginning, the Lab has been committed to training the new generations of conservators and continues this work through a robust internship program. Many former employees have gone on to head conservation labs around the world and interns frequently move on to museum positions.



Our Process

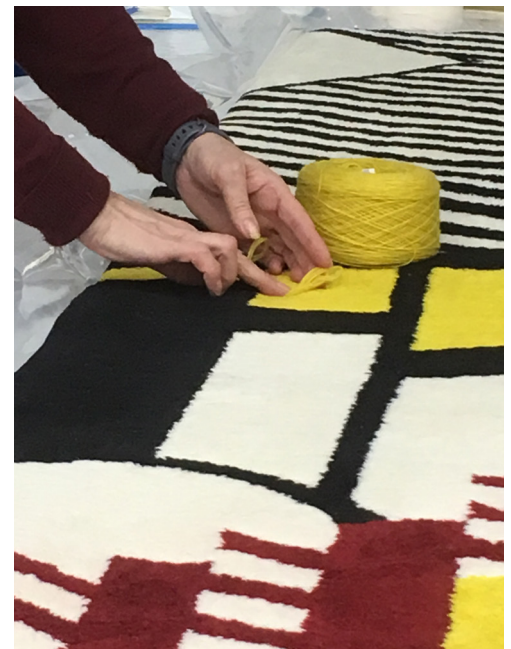
Every textile that comes to the Lab for treatment is carefully analyzed for its conservation needs. The goal of the Textile Conservation Lab is to preserve the integrity, provide stabilization and support, and minimize further deterioration of each object.



Research is undertaken to understand context and ensure the accuracy of the conservation work. Conservators consider the fibers, structural stability and test a variety of cleaning options to gather information on the materials and permanence of dyes.



Potential methods for removal of soiling and stains, and environmental issues are taken into consideration. Larger pieces may be surveyed on site and fragile collections viewed in situ to assess their condition.



Following the American Institute of Conservation Code of Ethics, proposals are made based on best practices and the needs of the textile. Information gathered during examination determines the suggested course of action.

This may include preventive recommendations, such as supportive storage or environmental guidelines, interventive conservation from surface to wet cleaning, stabilization through stitching or adhesive treatments, or hanging/mounting options.

Discrete restoration may be considered where appropriate. Treatment options, time, and cost considerations are included in a written report for each client.

Cathedral Collection

The Barberini *Life of Christ* tapestries were first donated in 1891, one year before Cathedral construction began. They are unique—the only set made from preparatory cartoons, or designs, by baroque court painters Pietro da Cortona and Francesco Romanelli. While the conservation of the set had been ongoing for the past 30 years, their treatment became priority after two were fairly burned during a fire in 2001. In 2017, the ten conserved tapestries were hung together for *Woven Monuments of Baroque Rome*, an exhibit in the Cathedral chapels to celebrate the culmination of the conservation effort that was supported by the NEH,NEA, the Coby Foundation, the Kress Foundation and other generous donors.

Donated to the Cathedral in 1954, the *The Acts of the Apostles* tapestries depict events in the New Testament's Book of Acts and are based on designs from Raphael originally commissioned by Pope Leo X and woven by Flemish master weaver Pieter van Aelst between 1517 and 1521 to fill the lower walls of the Sistine Chapel. After years of hanging in the Cathedral experiencing expected wear, the Textile Conservation Lab plans to continue the extensive cleaning and treatment of *The Acts of the Apostles* that is long overdue.



Miraculous Draught of Fish, tapestry from *The Acts of the Apostles* series, early 1690's

The Lab was founded with start-up grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Kress Foundation, the Getty Grant program, and the Municipal Council for the Arts. Today, grants fund continuing work on the Cathedral's collections.

Recent clients have included the Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, NY; the Harvard Club, NY; the Josef & Anni Albers Foundation; Bronx Family Courthouse; Washington Cathedral; Rough Point, Newport, RI; the Lichtenstein Foundation; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Contact Us

Learn more about the Lab's work or the opportunity to have your beloved textiles conserved at this renowned facility.

e: textilelab@stjohndivine.org
p: 212-316-7523
stjohndivine.org/art/textile

The Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine is the Cathedral of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. It is chartered as a house of prayer for all people and a unifying center of intellectual light and leadership. People from many faiths and communities worship together in services held more than 30 times a week; the soup kitchen serves roughly 25,000 meals annually; social service outreach has an increasingly varied roster of programs; the distinguished Cathedral School prepares young students to be future leaders; Advancing the Community of Tomorrow, the renowned preschool, afterschool and summer program, offers diverse educational and nurturing experiences; the outstanding Textile Conservation Lab preserves world treasures; concerts, exhibitions, performances and civic gatherings allow conversation, celebration, reflection and remembrance—such is the joyfully busy life of this beloved and venerated Cathedral.



#StJohnDivineNYC
@stjohndivinenyc

The Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine
1047 Amsterdam Avenue,
New York, New York 10025
stjohndivine.org | (212) 316-7490