



Museum Textile Services

Retrofitting Dress Forms

Dress forms come in a wide variety of materials and sizes. Make sure that it is smaller than the costume being mounted on it and tall enough to keep the costume off of the floor.

- Vacuum the dress form thoroughly underneath and on top to remove any dirt or pests.
- Cover the dress form with a small cotton T-shirt or a pair of panty hose. If there is a knob on the top of the form, remove the gusset from the panty hose to allow the knob to show. Carefully try the costume on the dress form. If the costume is very snug or cannot close over the dress form, it is not appropriate for this dress form.
- If the dress form is adjustable, make any necessary changes to improve fit. You can also detach panels from a metal dress form. Store mannequins may be more usable if the arms are removed or the breasts are cut off.
- Dress the bottom of the costume first. Soft legs can be added to a torso form using long underwear or other leggings stuffed with padding. If necessary, the waist band can be stitched to the dress form with needle and thread.
- To protect the costume from a wire or wicker cage, wrap acid-free paper around the cage and attach with double-stick tape. For short-term displays, bubble wrap may be used if covered with muslin.
- A skirt with a bustle or train will need additional padding to adequately support it. Nylon bridal tulle can be bunched up and stitched to the muslin to create the correct shape. For heavier fabrics, denser materials such as crumpled acid-free tissue may be necessary. Muslin or bridal tulle can be used to make a customized pillow stuffed with batting to support bustles or other extreme shapes.
- Do not use historic hoops, petticoats or other underclothes to support your mounted costume. If there is a train, place a barrier such as Mylar or acid-free paper between the costume and the floor.
- After the bottom of the dress form is prepared, move to the top. Padding can be stuffed between the dress form and the panty hose or T-shirt covering to create the correct shape. If necessary, a sheet of thin polyester batting can be wrapped over the padding to provide a smoother finished surface.
- If it is necessary to support the arms of the costume, stuff the arms of the T-shirt or cut the feet off of the pantyhose and insert padding. End the arm support above the end of the sleeve so that it is not visible, or cover with show fabric if necessary.
- The neckline of the dress form should be covered with show fabric to provide a more finished look. Knit fabric work best, and can even cover a large knob. If a wide variety of dress form types are used together, using the same show fabric on each will make the group appear more coordinated.
- Supplies needed: A dress form, polyester batting or nylon tulle, a small t-shirt or panty hose. Optional supplies: acid-free paper or muslin, Mylar, double-stick tape, needle and thread

