

## NEW GALLERY

SCHOOL OF HUMAN ECOLOGY  
OPENS NEW FACILITIES TO  
HOUSE AND CARE FOR THEIR  
HISTORIC TEXTILE AND  
COSTUME COLLECTION

# DRESSES UP

## WITH TEXTILES

Story by April Redmond  
Photos by Tess Bruney

### RIGHT

Of Mayan origin, this *huipil* is made with commercial fabric and features lace with hand-embroidery. The shawl or *reboso* draped on the mannequin's arm has hand-knotted fringe created with what Americans consider to be macrame knots.



### BOTTOM

Dr. Jenna Kuttruff, curator of the gallery, proudly shows *Gumbo Magazine* contributor April Redmond the new space saving storage facilities in the textile lab. The cabinet illustrated contains rolled storage, which has the advantage of preventing rolls and creases in textiles.



The newest addition to the School of Human Ecology is a small one-room gallery devoted to the presentation of textiles and costumes.

Part of the new facilities for the Human Ecology's Historic Textile and Costume Collection, it is located in room 140 of the Human Ecology Building. The gallery sports custom-designed glass display cases, sleek grey cloth-covered mannequins and a carefully monitored climate-controlled display area. Filtered lights illuminate the display area and the glass cases. The room is grey, including the walls which double as an information source for exhibits.

The efforts of Dr. Jenna Kuttruff, curator of the gallery, are what made the gallery possible. Her dream of opening a gallery devoted to textiles became a reality after she applied for an 8-G Enhancement Grant from the Louisiana State Board of Regents and her proposal was approved.

"I felt a new gallery would enhance cultural awareness and help preserve Louisiana's past," Kuttruff said.

The gallery opened its doors with an exhibit entitled *Costumes of Mexico*. A cooperative effort of the School of Human Ecology and the

Mexican Student Association, every textile or costume on display is either completely handmade or contains decoration that is hand-embroidered or hand-knotted.

The exhibit was the inspiration of Monica Santaella, a native of Mexico and president of the Mexican Student Association. Santaella loaned her dresses and other Mexican clothing to Kuttruff for display. Most of the costumes loaned by Santaella are recently purchased dresses with hand-embroidered adornments.

"I did not want my dresses to stay in boxes so no one could see them," Santaella said.

Kuttruff selected *Costumes of Mexico* as the gallery's first display because she has always admired Mexican dress. She started collecting handwoven textiles and costumes after learning to weave on a backstrap loom and spin on a hand-spindle during a four-summer stay in Oaxaca, Mexico. Most of the items she collected are handwoven pieces of authentic Mexican dress as opposed to items made for tourists.

Kuttruff said that clothing serves several purposes. The clothing one wears can serve as an identifying



**LEFT** "Maria" the mannequin, weaves a *huipil* panel for a dress or blouse on a backstrap loom. Trique is her cultural group.

**BOTTOM LEFT** *Costumes of Mexico* was the inspiration of Monica Santaella, a native of Mexico and president of the Mexican Student Association. Santaella poses in front of a handwoven Mexican banner possibly made in the late 1800s.

**BELOW** This gallery display case features clothing indigenous to several Mexican cultural groups. Left to right are examples of dress from the Nahuatl, Maya, Tzotzil and Zapotec groups.

**BOTTOM RIGHT** Wedding bells ring for this mannequin dressed in a ceremonial *huipil* worn by members of the Mixtec cultural group in the village of Pinotepa Nacional. The garment is handwoven and embroidered. Topping off the ensemble are rayon hair-chords with tassels.

mark—allowing others to discover the economic status, cultural group and origin of the individual. Clothing can also tell a story, as a poem on display with the current exhibit illustrates. It describes the life of a Mexican weaver through her clothes; each adornment symbolizes a different aspect of the weaver's life.

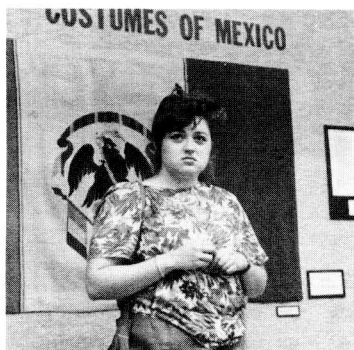
Besides housing exhibits, the gallery has an adjacent laboratory area. The lab area is climate-controlled, and humidity and temperature levels are monitored around the clock. It is also equipped with state-of-the-art storage facilities and restoration equipment. The 8 foot by 4 foot stainless steel sink is used to wash the clothes using deionized water. Other facilities allow for spot dry cleaning.

Once the textiles have been cleaned, they are kept in museum cabinets that allow for maximum support and access. The kinds of storage facilities vary in order to ensure that every piece is stored properly. There is flat storage, hanging storage, and rolled storage.

"Clothes deteriorate due to extreme changes in temperature and humidity," Kuttruff said.

She went on to describe the importance of carefully caring for textiles and making sure the deterioration of the cloth is prevented by stabilizing the level of humidity and controlling temperature extremes.

Kuttruff hopes to establish a "Friends of the Gallery" organization to help offset whatever financial expenses arise. The budget cuts may make additional equipment harder to come by, and it may make the



**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

**If you are interested in donating any textiles you have collected or presenting any ideas for exhibits, please contact Dr. Jenna Kuttruff at 388-1600 or stop by room 141 of the Human Ecology Building.**

**The gallery is open to the public from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays.**

acquisition of rare textiles even more difficult. "All the pieces we have now have been donated," Kuttruff said.

In January, a cooperative display with Hill Memorial Library entitled *A World of Dolls* will open and showcase the Dabney Doll Collection. Future exhibits may include other ethnic and historic collections in conjunction with campus and area organizations.

