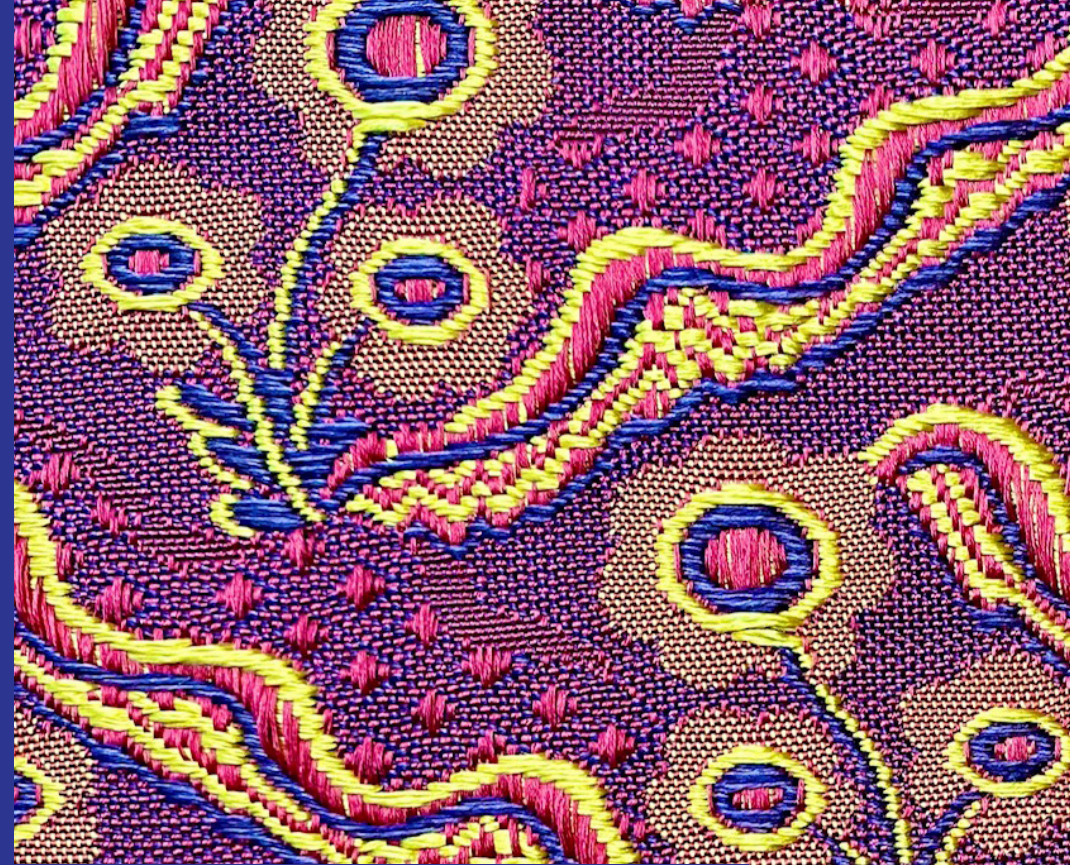




Above: James Sharples, *Martha Washington*, c. 1796. Pastel on paper. Bequest of Daniel Wadsworth, 1848.19.



FOLLOW THE thread

The Wadsworth Atheneum's Costume and Textiles collection encompasses 2,500 textile objects and 5,000 costumes and accessories, ranging in time from Coptic to contemporary and in size from thimbles to tapestries.

Please visit www.thewadsworth.org/followthethread to learn more about the Costume and Textiles collection and be a part of the museum's Follow the Thread initiative.

This lecture is presented with support provided by the Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation Fund at the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Front Cover: Detail, reproduced silk drogue liseré textile used by Chin in her replica of Martha Custis Washington's purple silk gown, courtesy of the scholar.

 WADSWORTH ATHENEUM
MUSEUM OF ART

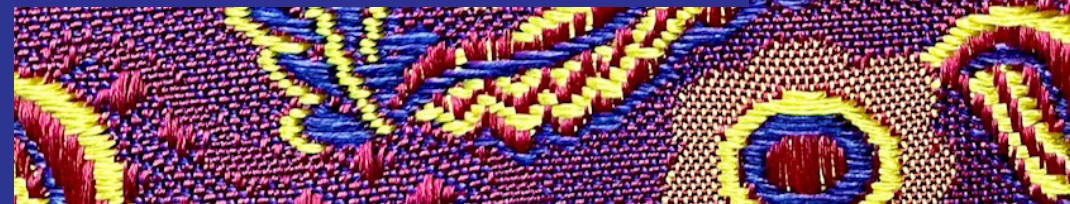
Off the Dressmaker's Needle: Recreating Martha Washington's Purple Silk Gown and Recovering the Lives Within

with Cynthia E. Chin

Sunday, September 15, 2024 • 2pm



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM
MUSEUM OF ART



Off the Dressmaker's Needle: Recreating Martha Washington's Purple Silk Gown and Recovering the Lives Within with Cynthia E. Chin

September 15, 2024 • 2pm • Avery Theater, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

The recent work of early American art and material culture historian Cynthia E. Chin, PhD, involves an in-depth study of a purple silk gown owned by Martha Custis Washington (1731–1802), the inaugural first lady of the United States (1789–1797). In the collection of New Hampshire Historical Society, the garment is one of three surviving gowns worn by Washington. The dress underwent multiple periods of reconstruction and refashioning beginning in the 1750s–early 1760s. It is currently structured as a one-piece fitted back round gown with robings, circa 1775–1780, from a much older European silk drogue liseré textile. Through extensive research of the original gown, Dr. Chin observed important details about construction, alterations, and stylistic approach, which informed her replication of the garment as it likely appeared in its earliest form. Her process included commissioning Gainsborough Silk Weaving Company Ltd. in Suffolk, United Kingdom to reproduce the original vivid textile. The rewoven silk was then draped, cut, and stitched by hand to Washington's measurements when she was young—one of many new discoveries. Expanding our understanding of eighteenth-century fashion, Dr. Chin's research and replication methods illuminate the stories of the people who made, wore, and cared for the original Washington gown.



Left: Cynthia E. Chin installing her replica of Martha Custis Washington's purple silk gown in the exhibition, *New Nation, Many Hands*, at the Wadsworth.

Opposite: Portrait of Cynthia E. Chin, photograph by Andrew Kirk.

About the Scholar



Dr. Cynthia E. Chin is an early American art and material culture historian specializing in dress, textiles, identity, and collecting. She was a 2023–2024 Winterthur Fellow and a 2020–2021 Research Fellow at the Washington Presidential Library. Dr. Chin earned her doctorate in early American material culture from Georgetown University in 2020 after having served as the Special Assistant to the President and CEO at George Washington's Mount Vernon/The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association and as a legislative advisor to a Member of Congress in the U.S. House of Representatives.

As a current PhD researcher at the University of Glasgow, she examines how private collections, individual collectors and curators, and museum acquisitions strategies shaped notions of "early American" dress and textiles 1600–1830. An advocate of replication as a valid research method, she incorporates embodied knowledge in her academic practice, focusing on early American women's dress in British North America and Scottish kilts and kilt-making.

Adding a background of business to her academic and museum experience, Cynthia served industry and public sector clients in strategy consulting at Deloitte Consulting LLC and independently for PwC. She and her husband live in New Jersey in a ca. 1730 house along Washington's victory route from the Battle of Trenton.

New Nation, Many Hands

On view until July 13, 2025

Acknowledging the complexities and contradictions of the era of American independence, *New Nation, Many Hands* presents a cross-section of objects from the permanent collection that shaped emerging American identities and the ongoing fight for freedom in the early days of the United States. These objects reveal stories of the people who created, used, cherished, and benefited from them during a formative moment in American history.