



Mary Jose prepares a Vietnamese skirt for framing at Fabric of Life

handle with care

**Preserving
textiles and
the stories
behind them**

Textile conservator Mary Jose offers a window into other cultures through exotic, handmade materials at her gallery and shop at North Adelaide.

Mary has been a specialist in her field for more than 20 years and has worked for museums and galleries, corporations and private collectors both in Australia and internationally.

"I think my background helps people have faith in what they are buying here...I can tell them who made it, where it's from, the whole story about the fabric," she says.

Her shop - The Fabric of Life - sells textiles from Asia, Africa and Central Asia including scarfs, shawls and hand-tied silk patola from West Bengal and Gudjarat. She has collected intricate suzani (meaning "needle" in Persia's Farsi language) wall hangings from Uzbekistan and also specialises in batik textiles made by Aboriginal artists from Ernabella in SA's far north.

Mary has built strong relationships with some of the textile makers and travels overseas once a year to source products.

"Textiles are such an integral part of many cultures and it's really rewarding working with the makers," she says.

Key contacts include Asaf Ali in Kashmir who is teaming up with British textile historian Jenny Housego to produce handmade goods. Mary also visits Ali Mohmed Isha from Bhuj in India, who makes beautiful tie-dyed shawls.

Mary's main interest, however, is still textile conservation and her knowledge is unparalleled in Adelaide. She studied fine arts in Australia before travelling overseas and doing a post-graduate diploma in textile conservation at the University of London. On return to Adelaide, she worked at Artlab for seven years and later ran her own private practice before opening The Fabric Of Life in 2003.

She carries out all her conservation work here, including specialised cleaning, fixing damaged textiles and mounting and preparing materials for framing and display.

The Fabric of Life, 141 Melbourne St, North Adelaide, phone 8361-7965