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A BASKET CASE: REPAIR OF A BAMBOO BASKET USING FALSE WARPS OF JAPANESE TISSUE AND WIRE

Candis Griggs-Hakim

A Japanese bamboo basket from a private collection was brought into the author's studio in 2001. The basket had been broken into three pieces -- top half, bottom half, and base -- by the owner's curious toddler. In the process, a 3 cm-high area of openwork in the center of the basket had been picked apart into dozens of small detached fragments, so that not a single join remained between the top and bottom halves. Complicating the repair further was the fact that the top half of the basket was relatively heavy, due to its bamboo-root handle. It was determined that the area of openwork would have to be partially recreated in order to both honor the original design of the basket and to compensate for a significant difference in diameter between the top and bottom halves.

Strong, stable, non-original warps were fashioned out of galvanized steel wire [1] set within a sandwich of mulberry tissue with wheat starch paste. Once dry, the strips were toned with watercolors and trimmed to mimic the actual bamboo warps. The false warps were then adhered to the basket interior via twists of long-fibered Tengujo tissue dipped in wheat starch paste and toned with watercolors. The stages of treatment are illustrated below.

Figure 1. The damaged basket before treatment. Not pictured are dozens of detached warp, weft, and diagonal fragments from the open-work area.
Figure 2. The largest of the detached fragments: two pairs of wefts with five barely attached warps. Twists of Tengujo tissue dipped in wheat starch paste were used to secure the warps so that the original location of the fragment could be found.

Figure 3. The same fragment after re-adhering to the basket via flat strips of Tengujo tissue, applied across the interior break edges. Note the not-yet-toned tissue twists at the far left of the fragment, and pale areas on the warps indicating lost diagonals.
Figure 4. Detail during warp repair. The area of repair is covered with silicone release paper and sandwiched on both sides with 1/8" Ethafoam and magnets while the adhesive on the tissue strip sets.

Figure 5. "False Warps" in progress. 32-gauge galvanized steel wire is stretched across a table, held down with tape and raised slightly with clothespins. Strips of mulberry tissue have been wetted with wheat starch paste and folded around the wire. These wire sandwiches were later toned with water-colors to mimic the bamboo, then trimmed to the same width as the real warps with scissors.
Figure 6. False warps in place. The warps were applied every few centimeters along the break edge of the top half of the basket first, using Tengujo tissue twists as above. Once the adhesive had set, the top half was lowered onto the bottom half and the warps adhered to the bottom half in the same way.

Figure 7. Quarter-inch thick Ethafoam wedges supported the weight of the top and kept the two halves the desired distance apart while the paste dried on the twists adhering the warps to the bottom half of the basket.
Figure 8. Once the two halves were joined, detached weft fragments from the openwork area were re-attached with tissue twists wherever possible. Here thread and wire are used to hold a segment in place while the adhesive sets. Loose diagonal fragments were not re-adhered. Additional treatment steps included adhering the base segment to the basket, toning all Tengujo repair strips and twists, and trimming off excess length from the false warps.

Figure 9. The basket after treatment. The wire-in-tissue warps helped to retain the artist's intended design, proved strong enough to support the top half of the basket, and were all but indistinguishable from the actual bamboo.
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Endnotes

[1] The author used galvanized steel wire due to its ready availability. However, stainless steel wire as supplied by beading and jewelry suppliers would have equal or superior corrosion resistance and is available in a wide variety of gauges and weaves.

Suppliers

Ethafoam (polyethylene foam, manufactured by Dow), 1/4” and 1/8” thicknesses: Conservation Support Systems, 924 West Pedregosa Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101, Tel (800) 482-6299, Fax (800) 682-2064, (www.silcom.com/~css/).

Magnets and water color paints: art supply and craft stores

Mulberry Tissue (45 gms) and Tengujo Tissue (7.5 gms): Talas, 568 Broadway, New York, NY 10012, Tel (212) 219-0770, Fax (212) 219-0735, (talasonline.com).

Silicone Release Paper: Conservator's Emporium, 100 Standing Rock Circle, Reno, NV 89511, Tel (775) 852-0404, Fax (775) 852-3737, (www.consemp.com).

Galvanized Steel Wire, 32 gauge: hardware stores

Wheat Starch- Pregelatinized: Conservation Support Systems, 924 West Pedregosa Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101, Tel (800) 482-6299, Fax (800) 682-2064, (www.silcom.com/~css/)

References


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