

# Belt It: Three Solutions to a Dressing Problem.

## INTRODUCTION

In March 2007 the Smithsonian's, National Museum of the American Indian opened a major exhibition in Washington, D.C. titled *Identity by Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in Native Women's Dresses*. The exhibition contains 55 dresses from the museum's outstanding collection of tribal dresses from the Plains, Plateau and Great Basin. Many of these dresses are accessorized with moccasins, leggings, earrings, headdresses, blankets and belts. Most of the belts required special mounts to secure them around the dressed mannequins while on display. While each belt required a unique mount, three general models were created to solve the problem.

**PROBLEM:**  
Belts are to be displayed over the garment.  
Belts need adequate support while on display.  
Barriers are needed to protect the dress from the belt.

**SOLUTION:**  
Twill tape belts are cinched around the dresses.  
The twill tape holds the dress in place.  
Velcro sewn to the exterior of twill tape belt holds belt mount in position.  
Twill tape protects delicate beadwork on the dress.

**PROBLEM:**  
To be effective belt mounts need to be attached to the belt.

**SOLUTION:**  
Belt mounts are stitched in place through existing holes in the belts.  
Tyvek™ strips with Velcro™ closures stabilize belts on mounts.  
Velcro sewn to inside of belt mount attaches to Velcro on twill tape.



Blackfeet Dress 13/2381, Belt 17/9666  
Photo Credit: Shelly Uhlir



Sioux Dress 02/6425, Belt 21/1916  
Photo Credit: E. Amoroso



Crow Dress 12/6406, Belt 21/6853  
Photo Credit: E. Amoroso

**PROBLEM:**  
Belt leather is cracked and inflexible.  
Cracked areas on belt require support.  
Belts need to conform to shape of mannequin.

**SOLUTION:**  
Flexible twill tape mount created to hold belt on dress.  
Semi-rigid and rigid mounts made for belts with internal weaknesses.

**PROBLEM:**  
Belts need to be held closed.  
Part of original belt fastening cannot be used.  
Unused portion of belt fastening needs to be hidden.  
Visual appearance of original fastening needs to be maintained.

**SOLUTION:**  
Velcro closures attached to mounts hold belts closed.  
Pockets made to accommodate original belt tongues.  
Polysuede tongues fabricated to replicate original tongues.

### Specific Problem and Solution:

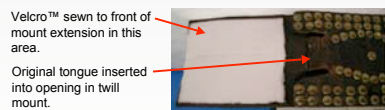
There are only four holes in the belt that can be used to attach the mount, and the tongue is torn and abraded. A semi-rigid mount is created from one side of a sheet of Corex™ that is encased in a twill tape sleeve. One end of the mount extends beyond the end of the belt, and Velcro is sewn to the outside face. Velcro is sewn to the inside face of the opposite end of the belt. A slit is made in the extension for the original tongue.



Mount stitched to belt with artificial sinew in 4 locations



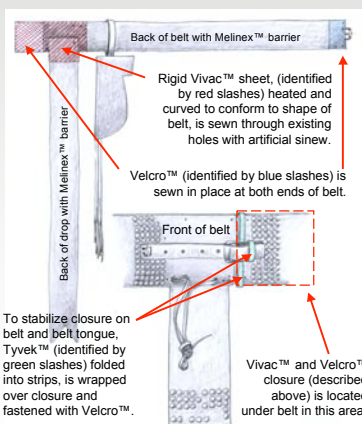
Polysuede tongue with ethafoam core is inserted through belt pin.  
Velcro™ sewn to back of mount in this area.



Velcro™ sewn to front of mount extension in this area.  
Original tongue inserted into opening in twill mount.

### Specific Problem and Solution:

A wide leather drop and knife sheath on one end of the belt cause semi-rigid mounts to distort. The tongue is worn and abraded. A rigid mount, created from Vivac™ sheet is sewn to existing holes at the heavy end of the belt with artificial sinew. The Vivac™ extends beyond the end of the belt and the extension is faced with Velcro. Velcro is sewn to the inside face of the opposite end of the belt. A Melinex™ sheet barrier lines the inside of the belt and is tacked in place through existing holes.



### Specific Problem and Solution:

The belt is pieced together in two locations with sinew stitches, and the stitches and leather are worn and fragile and require support. There are only holes through the belt at one end. Mount is made from Plastazote™ encased in Tyvek™; the belt is inserted into a sheath sewn in one end of mount and stitched through existing holes into the other end of mount.



Mount sheath, faced with Velcro™

Artificial sinew stitches hold mount to belt at one end



Tyvek™ strips, inpainted to replicate pattern, support fragile areas.

### Materials Used:

Artificial Sinew - Wax coated nylon; Corex™ (sold as Coroplast™ in the US); DMC Embroidery Floss; Acrylic Paints; Melinex™ (sold as Mylar™ in the US); Plastazote™ (sold as Volara™ in the US); Tyvek™; Polysuede - A non-woven fabric made of polyester-microfibers; Vivac™ - Clear polypropylene sheet.

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