



DECEMBER 2017

# INCHES, FEET, AND FUN

## *Four Tape Measures*



### VISIT THE BMA

and enjoy changing  
exhibitions in the BMA's  
Berman Textile Gallery.

Artist unidentified. *Hot Air Balloon and Basket Tape Measure*. Late 19th–early 20th century. United States or Europe. Metal, cloth. 2½ x 1¼ inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Gloria B. and Herbert M. Katzenberg, Baltimore, BMA 2013. 113

A windmill, a pig, a pear, and a hot air balloon have next to nothing in common. But take a close look at these pocket-sized objects. A strip of cloth attached to a metal loop slips out of a slot at the bottom of the windmill. Another ribbon-like strip rolls out from under the belly of the pig. Still another pokes out of the hot air balloon. And a fly sits on the skin of the pear, tempting us to give it a pull. And if we do? Out comes a tape measure—a long narrow strip of cloth, marked with inches and centimeters.

These four whimsical tape measures were tools used by people who sewed everything from clothing to curtains and didn't want to bother with a stiff ruler or a long, unwieldy yardstick. The cloth tape could lie flat on a table but was also flexible enough to wrap around a person's waist or bend around a pillow. It could be pulled out of its casing as far as necessary to measure a short hem or a long sleeve, and then rolled back inside when the job was done.

How to make the tapes disappear? Imagine grabbing the knob on the windmill and spinning the vanes around to see the tape slide back into its slot. Crank the pig's tail, and move the stick on the balloon's gilded basket to rewind its tape. Give the fly a little tug and feel a spring pull the tape back into the pear and out of sight. With these unique and delightful tools at hand, you'd be smiling as you sewed.

### CHALLENGE

Find an object that is purposely made to look like something else: for example, a backpack shaped like a dog's head. How did the designer combine the function of the object with the form?

Search "figural tape measures" online. See tape measures in the form of animals, household items, clothing, human figures, buildings, food, flowers, musical instruments, and modes of transportation. Draw an original design for a figural tape measure, and explain in writing where the tape is located and how it is pulled out and rewound.

Compare and contrast the purpose, form, size, and materials of tape measures designed for carpentry work with those used as sewing tools.



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### *Four Tape Measures*

Artists unidentified. Late 19th–early 20th century. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Gloria B. and Herbert M. Katzenberg, Baltimore. Top, left to right: *Hot Air Balloon and Basket Tape Measure*. United States or Europe. Metal, cloth. 2½ x 1¼ inches. BMA 2013.113. *Pear and Fly Tape Measure*. Germany. Plastic, cotton. 2½ x 1¼ inches. BMA 2013.115. Bottom, left to right: *Windmill Tape Measure*. United States or Europe. Metal, cloth. 2¼ x 1¼ inches. BMA 2013.135. *Pig Measuring Tape*. United States or Europe. Brass or bronze, cotton. 2 x 1¼ inches. BMA 2013.126