

The East-West Center Arts Program presents

A Common Thread

Textiles from the Permanent Collection

Curator: **Michael Schuster** | Installation: **Lynne Najita**



INDIAN WEDDING BED COVER, MID 19TH C.



DILBAR KHALIMOVA FROM UZBEKISTAN, TEACHES AN OAHU STUDENT, 2005

In honor of the East-West Center Gallery's 20th anniversary and the East-West Center's 55th anniversary, this exhibition features a selection of textiles rarely seen by the general public, including new works recently donated and never before exhibited. Since its founding in 1960, the East-West Center has been the recipient of hundreds of gifts of art, reflecting the richness and diversity of the Asia

Pacific region. Heads of government and institutions, alumni chapters, artists-in-residence, professional colleagues, young scholars, and various supporters of the East-West Center continue to add extraordinary and unique works to the growing EWC collection.

The items exhibited are treasures because they represent the peoples who made them, wore them, and

preserved them. They can be heirlooms to pass on for generations or fabrics that delineate status, ethnicity, gender, and community. The aesthetic can be valued individually, but many of the items carry cultural symbolisms; some of the cloths are embedded with design talismans, offering protection to the wearer or user. Textiles have long been, and continue to be highly prized throughout the Asia Pacific region. In some cultures, men preserve the tradition and knowledge; in others, the women are the tradition-bearers, and pass the techniques along to their daughters.

Textile practices are diverse: they can be simple or extremely complex. Even a relatively simple process can involve endless hours of effort and consummate skill. Some methods have been spread by trade and cultural interaction, while others have developed indigenously. The threads used to create textiles come from a variety of sources including cotton, animal wool, silk from silkworms, and bast fibers from plants. The exhibit is arranged according to the techniques used to develop the individual items, including weaving, pounding, folding/knotting, needlework, and dyeing. Several means are often used to create a single piece. This diversity of technique has been developed in order to express the visions of artists, the interests of patrons, and the values of cultures.



LAO SILK WEAVING, DALOUNNY (AIRE) CARROLL, ARTIST, 2008

Weaving

Weaving is the foundation for creating most textiles. Weaving interlaces two distinct sets of vertical and horizontal threads, known as the warp and the weft, respectively. The warp threads are pulled taut by a loom and the weft threads are passed through and interlaced in various ways. The weaving can take place on a complex floor loom or a simpler device such as a back-strap loom. Many of the more elaborate woven designs use supplemental weave or tapestry techniques. These weavings require intricate and painstaking efforts because each thread must be laid in individually. Lao weaving is renowned for its supplemental weaves, and incorporates many auspicious symbols.



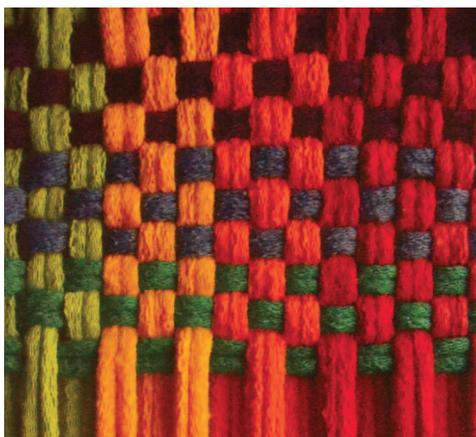
SAMOAN SIAPO, MARY PRITCHARD, 1977

Pounding

Ancient techniques for making textiles include processes that involve pounding. Felting involves shocking wool by both beating and applying hot and cold water until the microscopic hooks found in the wool fibers “lock” and form a single piece of material. Felting is particularly used in colder climates, including the Himalayan and Central Asian regions, for everything from tents to floor coverings to clothing. Examples in the collection include the slippers and hat from Tibet, where felt serves as the basis for the additional embroidered embellishments.

Tapa or *kapa*, as it is known in Hawaiian, is a technique found throughout the Pacific. Bast fibers, often taken from a mulberry plant, are first fermented and then pounded into sheets. The textile, or bark cloth, is then imprinted with patterned stamps, or decorated with paint or dyes. Each island culture has its own patterns imprinted on the cloth. The *tapa* exhibited (*siapo* in Samoan) was made in Samoa by internationally-renowned artist Mary Pritchard.

WEAVING DETAIL: WARP & WEFT



AYOUB KHAN, FROM INDIA, SHARING CARPET KNOTTING WITH O'AHU STUDENT, 2008

Knotting/Folding

Fibers and threads can be knotted, folded, or corded to make textiles. Basically, all knitting and crocheting are knotting techniques. Oriental rugs use knotting techniques in order to make intricate designs. The Chinese rug exhibited is based on Central Asian techniques used in most carpet making today. However, knotting is used in a variety of textiles. In Papua New Guinea, *bilum* bags are made using a knotting technique to create an expandable and flexible carrying bag. Sometimes woven cloth textiles are folded or pleated to create new sculptural forms, as exhibited in the Hmong skirt.



CHINESE WEDDING JACKET, 1930s

Needlework

Needlework, especially sewing, is used to create clothing and blankets. Patching is a process many are familiar with, where scraps of fabric are connected to one another to create an entirely new textile. The *kantha*, from Bangladesh, are made out of old white saris and dhoti stitched together with fine needlework, and then embroidered with local design elements. Korea has a well-known patch technique known as *chokakpo*. In the exhibited *chokakpo*, the artist uses the technique to create her own unique artistic vision.

The most common needlework technique for embellishing textiles is embroidery. Many of the exquisite pieces presented in the exhibit show the diversity of design found throughout the Asia Pacific region. Sometimes embroidery is done by specialists, who spend years working on a garment for the elite, using expensive gold threads; the Chinese imperial robe exhibited is an extraordinary example of intricate embroidery. However, embroidery is not just for the elite. Throughout Asia, many ethnic peoples prepare dowry items with intricate embroidery. Embroidery involves learning multiple stitch techniques. Embroidery can be combined with beading and sequins to create spectacular visual designs, as well as narrative scenes. India is renowned for its *zardozi*, originating in Central Asia, while mirror work is especially found in the desert regions of northwest India. Burma/Myanmar is known for its *shwe gyi do*, with its thousands of threads, sequins, and beads.

Dyeing

People have long desired to create designs and add color to their textiles. Long before chemical dyes were introduced in the 19th century, the art of dyeing was already highly developed using natural materials. Having a color hold fast with a rich vibrancy is essential to creating beautiful fabrics. Through trial and error, and using a host of plants and minerals, dyers were able to create textiles with the all the colors of the rainbow. Textile artists were not satisfied with merely coloring fabrics. They also wanted to control how and where color was applied to various textiles. Dyers

developed techniques such as tie-dyeing, printing, *batik*, and *ikat*. These techniques have produced some of the most elaborate and beautiful designs.

The silk Japanese wedding kimono is dyed a gorgeous red and then a silk screen printing technique is used to create a blue and gold water pattern on the sleeves and body of the garment. Indonesia is perhaps best known for its *batik*, a process using wax as a dye resist. Wax is applied to prevent colors from attaching to specific parts of the fabric, removed and reapplied several times to create detailed patterns and images.

Perhaps the most complicated technique used in dyeing textiles is *ikat*. *Ikat* is most often made by tie-dyeing the weft threads before weaving them in a twill pattern. The pattern is made by tying natural or synthetic fibers on sections of the weft threads before the threads are dyed. This process is repeated with different colored dye baths until the patterns are formed. This technique requires great skill on the part of the dyer because they must envision the various patterns that will only emerge later when the fabric is woven.



CAMBODIAN IKAT HOL, 1950s



The **East-West Center** promotes better relations and understanding among the people and nations of the United States, Asia, and the Pacific through cooperative study, research, and dialogue. Established by the U.S. Congress in 1960, the Center serves as a resource for information and analysis on critical issues of common concern, bringing people together to exchange views, build expertise, and develop policy options. The Center is an independent, public, nonprofit organization with funding from the U.S. government, and additional support provided by private agencies, individuals, foundations, corporations, and governments in the region.

The **East-West Center Arts Program** for more than 35 years has enriched the community through concerts, lectures, symposia, and exhibitions focusing on arts of the region, and by arranging cultural and educational tours by artists who are skilled in bridging cultures.

EWC Arts Team: Karen Knudsen, director, External Affairs; Michael Schuster, Ph.D., curator; Eric Chang, arts program coordinator; William Feltz, adjunct arts specialist; Gary Yoshida, development officer; Joseph Cassidy, arts student assistant; Matthew Jewell, research intern

Mahalo: Lynne Najita, Kennedy & Preiss Graphic Design, Leilani Ng, Colorprints Inc., Daniel Bernadoni, Derek Ferrar, Shayne Hasegawa, Phyllis Tabusa, Lucy Kamealoha, Deanna O'Brien, Urie Laysler, Elizabeth Kuioka, Janice Kamemoto, Tina Tom, Patsy Hiraoka, Marie Ebesu, Jo-Ann Kok, Bradley Hirano, Reynold Balintec, EWC Facilities Management

Special thanks to all the artists and donors who have contributed the pieces shown in this exhibition.

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EWC Arts Programs are supported by the Hawai'i Pacific Rim Society, Friends of Hawai'i Charities, Jackie Chan Foundation USA, Jean E. Rolles, EWC Arts 'Ohana members, and other generous donors.

We would like to dedicate this exhibit to two of the founders of the East-West Center's Arts Program: **Jeanette "Benji" Bennington** (1934-2014) and **William Feltz**.

Benji was the first curator of EWC Gallery and a pioneer in displaying contemporary Asian arts. Bill Feltz continues to be involved with the EWC as an adjunct arts specialist and has been with the Center for over 45 years. Both founders ensured that the EWC's permanent collection includes many beautiful and unique textiles.



KOREAN CHOKAKPO TAPESTRY, LEE CHUNG-HIE, ARTIST, 1993

Special Events

In the EWC Gallery with free admission, unless otherwise noted.

Sunday, May 24, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
Exhibition Gala Opening including reception and live demonstrations of spinning and weaving by the Hawaii Handweavers' Hui.

Sunday, July 12, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated talk: **"Innovations through Hawaiian Design"** by Marques Marzan, Hawaiian fiber artist and Bishop Museum Cultural Resources Specialist.

Sunday, August 2, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated talk: **"Identify Yourself: A Sneak Preview"** by Sara Oka, Curator of Textiles, Honolulu Museum of Art. A visual discussion of the HMA's upcoming exhibition on textiles that identify social status, gender, and age.

Sunday, August 30, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated talk: **"Lessons from Water"** by Mary Babcock, Associate Professor, UHM Dept. of Art & Art History. A discussion of Babcock's work in fiber arts, mixed media, and performance art.

Sunday, September 13, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated talk: **"Threads of Hope"** by Cheri Vasek, Assistant Professor, UHM Dept. of Theatre and Dance. This talk will focus on inventive transformations that have revitalized the production and marketing of traditional textiles in India.

Sunday, September 20, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated talk: **"Textile Tales South of China's Southern Great Wall"** by Li Lundin, Chinese art specialist and scholar. A discussion of textiles produced by three minority groups in southern China: Dong, Miao, and Tujia.

East-West Center Gallery | Honolulu, Hawai'i

John A. Burns Hall, 1601 East-West Road (corner Dole St. & East-West Rd.)

Gallery hours: Weekdays: 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Sundays: Noon – 4:00 p.m.; Gallery admission is free

Closed Saturdays, federal holidays, May 25, July 5, September 6 & 7.

For further information: 944.7177 | arts@EastWestCenter.org | <http://arts.EastWestCenter.org>

Free school & group tours available

Gallery visitors interested in joining the EWC Arts 'Ohana can obtain the appropriate flyer in the gallery, by telephoning the EWC Foundation at 944.7105, or online: <http://arts.EastWestCenter.org>

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