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**Harpies, Mermaids, and Tulips:
Embroidery of the Greek Islands and Epirus Region
March 17 – September 3, 2006**

November 22, 2005, Washington, DC — Harpies, Mermaids, and Tulips: Embroidery of the Greek Islands and Epirus Region will be on view at The Textile Museum March 17 – September 3, 2006.

The exhibition includes approximately 70 embroidered textiles created between the 17th and 19th centuries for bridal trousseaux and domestic life. The textiles on display are from island groups located in the Ionian and Aegean seas surrounding the Greek mainland, and from the Epirus region on the western Greek coast. While the geographic area where these textiles were made is relatively small, they are incredibly diverse in design, structure and function. The exhibition will explore how and why people living so close together produced such divergent styles of embroidered textiles, offering a unique window into Greek island societies at the intersection of two worlds: the Latin West and Ottoman East. Objects include colorfully-embroidered bed tents, bed curtains, large covers, and pillows, as well as handkerchiefs and embroidered panels from women's clothing. All of the textiles, except for two loaned objects, are from The Textile Museum's collections. Many were collected by the Museum's founder, George Hewitt Myers, in the early part of the 20th century.

Exhibition Themes

The Epirus region and the islands in the Aegean and Ionian seas were located in a pivotal position and at a cultural crossroads along major trade routes between West Asia, the Black Sea and Europe during the early modern period. Consequently the region was exposed to and assimilated artistic influences of the two principal cultures vying for political dominance during the time, the Venetians and Ottomans.



Skirt border (detail)
Crete
Early 18th century
The Textile Museum 81.50
Acquired by George Hewitt Myers
in 1925

An attractive and informative example of Greek Island rural craft, the embroideries featured in Harpies, Mermaids, and Tulips demonstrate the complex interactions between the creative energies of an embroiderer, her community, and her exposure to the political, economic, and social environment in which she lived. The exhibition will explore what these embroidered textiles look like, how they were made, how they were incorporated into the lives of islanders, and how they reflect those lives. The exhibition will also look at how traditional textiles can be influenced by outside factors such as politics and trade, and how these factors contribute to the diversity of embroidery styles that emerged over time and the range of uses of these textiles.

Use of Embroidered Textiles

Embroidered textiles played an important role in Greek Island life during the 17th and 18th centuries – conveying information about the family’s wealth and status, as well as a woman’s embroidery skills and thus her “worth” as a bride. The textiles featured in Harpies, Mermaids, and Tulips include borders and panels from women’s clothing, handkerchiefs, bed tents, pillow covers and bed covers embroidered in silk thread. Elaborate, embroidered bed tents served as a focal point of the home, which was often one-room with the master bed prominently on view to all who entered. The bed tent provided privacy from the rest of the house and also served as a medium for displaying a woman’s embroidery talents. Women on Crete were especially known for their long skirts decorated with intricately embroidered borders. Few intact skirts survive, however borders were often passed down as family heirlooms and keepsakes.

Influences on Design

The color and variety of styles and the sometimes whimsical motifs of Greek Island textiles have an inherent aesthetic appeal. Historically scholars have linked the textiles of Epirus with those of the Greek Islands because of the many similarities in materials and stitches. Embroidery in both regions features foundation fabric made of linen, silk thread and fine stitches making up stylistically similar design patterns.

From a design standpoint, these embroidered textiles can be seen as remarkable examples of the power of these island communities to assimilate foreign influences into their own native folk traditions. The colors and designs of textiles from Epirus, which was under Ottoman rule for almost five centuries, reflect a strong Ottoman influence—tulips, scrolling floral branches, people dressed in Ottoman fashion, and motifs closely resembling Ottoman *saz*-style leaves. Many textiles from Aegean Islands show evidence of a strong Italian influence, such as the multicolored and complex floral and figurative compositions seen in embroideries from Crete, which was, for centuries, a Venetian colony. The two-tailed mermaid motif, first used in Medieval Italian art to symbolize the lure of “wicked”

women, was later severed from its original meaning and used in Italian Renaissance art; Cretan embroiderers further adapted it for use in skirts and bedcovers.

On the islands of the Cyclades and northern Dodecanese, embroidered textiles featured geometric patterns of stylized leaf, star, tree and bird motifs – distinctively reflecting the local textile traditions, yet unique from island to island due to the turbulent political and administrative history of this group of islands.

Catalogue and Support

Harpies, Mermaids, and Tulips is accompanied by a full color catalogue co-published by The Textile Museum and Scala Publishers. The catalogue retails for \$35 and can be purchased at The Textile Museum Shop, online at www.textilemuseumshop.org or by calling (202) 667-0441, ext. 29. Generous support for the catalogue and exhibition was provided by The Coby Foundation, Ltd., New York.

Exhibition Curator

The exhibition is curated by Sumru Belger Krody, the Museum's Associate Curator of Eastern Hemisphere Collections. With the support of a Getty Research Grant, Ms. Krody conducted research at museums in Greece and England during the summer of 2003. The exhibition and accompanying catalogue present Ms. Krody's findings as they relate to The Textile Museum's holdings of Greek Island embroideries and predominantly features textiles from the Museum's collections. The Textile Museum has a long history of presenting comprehensive exhibitions of embroidery that are scholarly yet accessible to the general public, including the exhibition Flowers of Silk and Gold: Four Centuries of Ottoman Embroidery, presented in 2000 and also curated by Ms. Krody.

Related Educational Programming

GALLERY TALK & TOUR

Saturday, March 18 • 11:00 am

Join exhibition curator Sumru Belger Krody for a tour of the exhibition Harpies, Mermaids, and Tulips: Embroidery of the Greek Islands and Epirus Region. **FREE; no reservations required. Limited to 35 participants.**

ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL

Saturday, March 25 • 10:30 am & 2:30 pm

Enjoy two films exploring Greek art and culture followed by a discussion with Sumru Belger Krody, Associate Curator of Eastern Hemisphere Collections. ***Thread of the Needle*** takes place in Ano Ravenia, a Greek mountain village where young men leave to find work, learn a trade or serve in the Army but young women may only leave their fathers' homes to enter those of their husbands. Unmarried girls remain in the village among the elderly folk, meeting together to embroider their trousseaux and chat. In a rural Greek community such as Ano Ravenia, women are not free to express opinions in public. ***Thread of the Needle*** gives viewers an opportunity to sit in on a casual sewing session where the young women talk about their wishes and problems—most of which revolve around marriages that will change their lives forever.

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The Aegean islands of Greece are known for their pristine beaches and traditional villages. The film ***Voice of the Aegean*** uses archival material to trace the roots of the islands, including recent wars, poverty, and emigration. Through dialogue with the islanders, we learn of their own broad concerns. At another level, the film emphasizes the importance of nature in our lives and the value of beauty of the Aegean.

The program is 1½ hours and is repeated in its entirety at 2:30 pm. *Presented in collaboration with the Environmental Film Festival.* **FREE; reservations required. Seating is limited. Call (202) 667-0441, ext. 64.**

ARTS FOR FAMILIES: GREEK LIFE

Saturday, April 1 • 1 - 4pm

Bring the whole family to explore the exhibition Harpies, Mermaids, and Tulips, and enjoy a performance related to traditional Greek culture. Try your hand at a make-and-take activity that reflects the exhibition's techniques. **FREE; no reservations required.**

CELEBRATION OF TEXTILES

Saturday, June 3 • 10 am - 4 pm & Sunday, June 4 • 1 - 4 pm

Visitors of all ages are invited to explore the textile arts and cultures of the world through a multitude of activities and demonstrations in the Museum's exhibitions, historic buildings and garden. Use cloth and thread to create an embroidery inspired by textiles in the exhibition Harpies, Mermaids, and Tulips. Presented in connection with the Dupont-Kalorama Museums Consortium's Museum Walk Weekend. **FREE; no reservations required.**

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Founded in 1925 by George Hewitt Myers, The Textile Museum is an international center for the exhibition, study, collection and preservation of the textile arts. The Museum explores the role that textiles play in the daily and ceremonial life of individuals the world over. Special attention is given to textiles of the Near East, Asia, Africa and the indigenous cultures of the Americas. The Museum also presents exhibitions of historical and contemporary quilts, and fiber art. With a collection of more than 17,000 textiles and rugs and an unparalleled library, The Textile Museum is a unique and valuable resource for people locally, nationally and internationally.

The Textile Museum is located at 2320 'S' Street, NW in Washington, DC. The Museum is open Monday - Saturday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm and Sunday 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Admission is free; suggested donation is \$5.00. For further information, call 202-667-0441.

For more information or images, please contact Cyndi Spain Bohlin at 202-667-0441, ext. 17, or by email at cspain@textilemuseum.org or visit www.textilemuseum.org/about/pressroom.htm.