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**Textiles for This World and Beyond:
Treasures from Insular Southeast Asia
April 1 – September 18, 2005**

February 15, 2005, Washington, DC — Textiles for This World and Beyond: Treasures from Insular Southeast Asia will be on view at The Textile Museum April 1 – September 18, 2005. The exhibition, which includes more than 60 objects, explores the role that textiles play in Indonesian and Malaysian daily life, and how textiles are used in ceremonies to maintain harmonious relationships with the deceased or the gods. This will be the first exhibition of a group of 19th- to early 20th-century Southeast Asian textiles acquired by The Textile Museum in the last 25 years. Many of the textiles have never been exhibited at The Textile Museum or elsewhere in the United States. The exhibition will also include 30 carved and painted wooden figurines that illustrate early 20th-century Javanese costume.

Exhibition Themes

Long before Islam and Christianity were established in the islands of Southeast Asia, the people who settled the area had developed a philosophy for existence in a highly unpredictable world. Textiles play an important part in many of these beliefs and customs which are followed to this day. Fundamental to these beliefs is the need for balance between the cosmic forces, the ancestors, and the spirits that govern sickness and death. The use of *adat*, a system of ethnically distinct customs or laws, provides the guidelines to maintain the necessary equilibrium, and textiles are central to the proper functioning of *adat*. As such, in Southeast Asian cultures, textiles can illustrate membership in a particular ethnic group, class standing, or the transition that takes place at important life ceremonies such as marriage.



Costume

The first section of Textiles for This World and Beyond looks at the role of costume within various ethnic groups and the ways in which *adat* directs their usage. Central to this section is the idea that textiles can convey what their owners cannot. For instance, on the island of Savu each person belongs to a localized male-origin group (*udu*) and non-localized female-origin group (*hubi*). The *udu* presides over the agricultural cycle and public affairs, and the *hubi* functions in marriage and funerals. People do not talk about their membership in a *hubi*, but reveal it subtly by wearing or using textile designs belonging to that group. The exhibition includes five Savu skirts that illustrate the different *hubi* blossom groups.

Color is an important feature of Southeast Asian textiles and can also be used in *adat*, as in the case of ritual ikat wrappers from the island of Sumba. The wrappers of commoners are typically blue and white, while those of the nobles contain some patterns in red. Historically, the inherent complexity of using red dye invited secrecy and reserved status for its use. The secret of fixing red dye was known only to the noble women, and subsequently its use in costume identified this privileged class.

Ceremonial Textiles

Textiles enjoy a role in all life ceremonies in insular Southeast Asia, but none more so than at funerals. Ritual textiles establish the scene as that beyond the ordinary and, as gifts, insure the benevolence of the dead in the affairs of the living. Textiles for This World and Beyond looks at textiles used for funeral ceremonies and rites, or for ceremonies to appease the spirit world. These include textiles used as shrouds, cloth hangings, or banners for the elaborate funeral ceremonies and rituals conducted by the Toraja of Sulawesi to maintain relations with the dead. These are some of the most dramatic textiles made in insular Southeast Asia, and a number of fine examples are featured in the exhibition – many patterned in large geometric forms created by warp ikat. The sheer physical dimension of these cloths suggests their societal worth. The investment in materials, time and labor is evidence of their value.

The Iban and Ibanic related peoples of Sarawak and West Kalimantan on the island of Borneo make and use large, patterned textile hangings known as *pua* in planting rituals and in ceremonies for restoring the cosmic balance. When in use, the cloths serve as invitations to the gods to attend ritual feasts. In addition to their symbolic role in rituals, there are mythical associations related to the act of weaving *pua*. The weaving of certain patterns is considered inherently dangerous, and as such only mentally and physically mature women undertake to create these patterns. The Iban and Ibanic related peoples also considered many *pua* designs to be powerful and dangerous, so woven borders were often added to the textiles to “contain” their power. The Textile Museum’s collection of *pua* includes rare examples dating to the 19th century and is one of the finest in the United States.

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Other textiles included in the exhibition illustrate how motifs, material and pattern serve to address *adat*. The exhibition includes two rare and finely embroidered *tapis* from South Sumatra. The ship symbolizes transition from one stage of existence to another – a recurring motif in many parts of Southeast Asia. Images of people, elephants, birds, horses and imaginary forms also join with the ship motifs. Such cloths were hung within a house during life transition rites, such as marriage or a boy's circumcision, and used to call ancestors to witness celebrations.

Batik Textiles

No other country is as closely aligned to a textile tradition as is Indonesia to the wax-resist patterning technique known as batik. It constitutes the national dress and is deemed worthy as a State gift. Although it has come to stand for a nation, Indonesian batik was originally made only on Java, where certain patterns and colors came to exist within the confines of custom. Some patterns were restricted to members of the Central Javanese court and are rendered in a style and color that links the wearer to courtly relations. Along the north coast of Java, home to Chinese, Indians, Islamic traders and Europeans, as well as Javanese traders from the archipelago, a diverse clientele gave rise to different batik patterns and methods of production. Over time, these diverse patterns and color schemes came to characterize particular ethnic groups, and as such became largely inappropriate for others to wear. The batik textiles featured in Textiles for This World and Beyond exemplify the creativity and precision by which the art form was practiced in the courts and elsewhere.

The batik textiles in the exhibition are accompanied by a display of 30 carved and painted wooden figurines illustrating early 20th-century costumes from Central Java. Although diminutive in size, measuring about eight inches in height, they are rendered with minute attention to detail. The types depicted range from sultans' guards at the court in Yogyakarta to a peasant farmer and various royal court dancers. Many of the figures wear batik long cloth patterned with a *parang rusak* (broken knife) motif while others wear head cloths showing *semen* patterns of the Central Javanese region. Relatively little is known about the origin of the figurines. They were acquired by either Admiral Albert Parker Niblack or his sister, Eliza M. Niblack – both of whom were world travelers and textile collectors. The figurines were ultimately given by a family member to Mrs. Robin Clarke of Easton, Maryland, who has kindly made them available for this exhibition.



This figurine is waxing batik pattern onto cotton cloth. She uses a canting, a spouted applicator that allows the precise application of the molten wax. A brazier and pan with wax are on her right. The frame holding the cloth allows the wax to cool quickly and the worker to trace patterns if they have been waxed on the reverse. From the collection of Mrs. Robin Clarke.

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Catalogue and Support

Many of the textiles featured in Textiles for This World and Beyond were acquired by the Museum in 2000 with a grant from The Christensen Fund in Palo Alto, California. The exhibition is curated by Dr. Mattiebelle Gittinger, The Textile Museum's Research Associate for Southeast Asian Textiles. A leading scholar in the field of Southeast Asian textiles and culture, Dr. Gittinger has curated numerous exhibitions and published extensively. The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully-illustrated color catalogue. Generous support for the catalogue and exhibition was provided by The Blakemore Foundation, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Jeremy and Hannelore Grantham, Furthermore: a program of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, and Peter Reed.

Related Educational Programming

LECTURE

Saturday, March 5 • 10:30 am

“Batik Traditions from Indonesia”

Judith H. Livingston

FREE; no reservations required. Seating is limited.

ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL

Saturday, March 19 • 10:30 am & 2:30 pm

Enjoy two films exploring Indonesian art and culture followed by a discussion with Dr. Mattiebelle Gittinger, Research Associate for Southeast Asian Textiles at The Textile Museum. ***Art of Indonesia: Tales from the Shadow World*** explores Indonesia's classical period of Javanese civilization (800 - 1500 AD). Featuring the temple ruins at Prambanam and the immense “cosmic mountain” of Borobudur, and weaving together poetry, sculpture, landscape and music, the film explores the “shadow world”—the rituals, myths and performances by which the harmony of the universe is maintained. In ***Spear and Sword: A Payment of Bridewealth on the Island of Roti, Eastern Indonesia***, the origin of the bridewealth ritual is traced back to the marriage of the daughter of the Sun and Moon to the Lord of the Sea, Hunter of the Ocean. The program is 1 ½ hours and is repeated in its entirety at 2:30 pm. **FREE; reservations required. Seating is limited. Call (202) 667-0441, ext. 64.**

Presented in collaboration with the Environmental Film Festival.

GALLERY TALK & TOUR

Saturday, April 2 • 11:00 am

Join exhibition curator Dr. Mattiebelle Gittinger for a tour of the exhibition Textiles for This World and Beyond: Treasures from Insular Southeast Asia. **FREE; no reservations required. Limited to 35.**

CELEBRATION OF TEXTILES

Saturday, June 4 • 10 am - 4 pm

Sunday, June 5 • 1 - 4 pm

Celebration of Textiles is an annual weekend festival of hands-on fun and learning for all ages. Visitors are invited to explore the textile arts and cultures of the world through activities and demonstrations in the Museum's historic building, exhibition and gardens. Local artists will show and teach *batik* resist-dyeing, weaving, spinning, knitting, textile patterning and felting. A sheep-shearing demonstration will take place, and a Southeast Asian cultural performance will complement the exhibition *Textiles for This World and Beyond: Treasures from Insular Southeast Asia*. Refreshments will be available for purchase. **FREE.** *Celebration of Textiles is part of Museum Walk Weekend, sponsored by the Dupont-Kalorama Museums Consortium.*

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LECTURE

Saturday, June 11 • 2:30 pm

“Endowed Cloth: Textiles from Insular Southeast Asia”

Dr. Mattiebelle Gittinger

Long before Islam and Christianity were established in the islands of Southeast Asia, the people who settled the area had created a philosophy for existence in a highly unpredictable world. The exhibition Textiles for This World and Beyond examines the role that textiles in Indonesia and Malaysia play in daily society and how textiles are used in ceremonies to maintain harmonious relationships with ancestors or the gods. Dr. Mattiebelle Gittinger, The Textile Museum’s Research Associate for Southeast Asian Textiles and curator of the exhibition, will introduce these concepts and discuss the complexities and nuances of textile creation and use in Southeast Asia.

Fee: \$12/TM members; \$15/non-members. Advance registration required.

Call (202) 667-0441, ext. 64.

LECTURE

Saturday, June 25 • 10:30 am

“From Java to Japan: The Influence of Indonesian Fabrics on Japanese Textiles”

Ann Marie Moeller

FREE; no reservations required. Seating is limited.

LECTURE

Saturday, June 25 • 2:30 pm

“Art and Courtly Patronage in Indonesia”

Dr. Helen Jessup

The royal courts of Indonesia have long been generators and guardians of the country’s diverse cultural heritage. From the earliest kingdoms of Srivijaya and Mataram through the Eastern empire of Majapahit to the present, courts have fostered decorative arts, music and dance. The court patronage of artists to produce items such as batik cloth, musical instruments, or manuscripts stimulated textile artists, metalsmiths, craftsmen, painters, illustrators and scholars. Dr. Helen Jessup is an independent scholar and curator specializing in the art and architecture of Southeast Asia and the author of several books, including Court Arts of Indonesia. In this lecture, she will discuss ways in which the arts flourished in Indonesian courts and achieved new levels of refinement under princes who encouraged artists to build upon indigenous traditions.

Fee: \$12/TM members; \$15/non-members. Advance registration required.

Call (202) 667-0441, ext. 64.

LECTURE

Saturday, July 9 • 2:30 pm

“Silk for Spices: Indian Textiles in Eastern Indonesia”

Dr. Ruth Barnes

Maritime Southeast Asia has been a part of an international trade network for centuries, involving virtually all Indonesian societies. Over time, the peoples of Indonesia have adopted and adapted outside influences into their textile traditions. For example, patterns found in some Indonesian bridewealth cloth can be directly linked to *patola* textiles, double-ikat silk cloths traded from India and now kept as clan treasures. In this lecture, Dr. Ruth Barnes will use historical and ethnographic evidence to examine the role of Indian textiles in the societies of Eastern Indonesia, from the 14th century to the late 20th century. She will present the economic conditions in which Indian trade textiles assumed a major role, while investigating the absorption of the cloth into local Indonesian culture. A textile researcher and curator in the Department of Eastern Art at The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, England, Dr. Barnes has carried out extensive field research in Eastern Indonesia and has a particular interest in early Indian Ocean trade.

Fee: \$12/TM members; \$15/non-members. Advance registration required.

Call (202) 667-0441, ext. 64.

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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 at 202-667-0441, ext. 17, or by email at cspain@textilemuseum.org or visit www.textilemuseum.org/about/pressroom.htm.