

THE ART OF IKAT: A CAMBODIAN RENAISSANCE

សិល្បៈគម្ពាញ្ញាហ្លួលៈ
ការរស់ឡើងវិញនៅកម្ពុជា*

*Khmer transliteration: Selpak Tombanh Hol:
Kar Ros Lerng Vinh Nov Kampuchea

Enter the woven world of Cambodian silk ikat, *hol* in Khmer, a resist-dye weaving technique and century-old textile craft. While sericulture and weaving have been activities grounded in villagers' lives in the countryside, royal workshops also produced refined silk textiles to supply the Cambodian royal court. This exhibition looks into this rich heritage, tracing the formation of the textile collection at the National Museum of Cambodia in the first half of the twentieth century and its subsequent loss during and after the Khmer Rouge regime in the late 1970s. The art of ikat weaving is examined in terms of cultural, technical and visual significance, also considering its survival and resilience in contemporary times.



TEXTILES OF THE NATIONAL
MUSEUM OF CAMBODIA:
HISTORY AND HERITAGE

The Musée Albert Sarraut (future National Museum of Cambodia) was inaugurated in Phnom Penh in 1920 under the French protectorate. Under the leadership of French polymath George Groslier, the institution gathered pre-Angkorian and Angkorian ancient statuary art, ceramics and silverware, as well as ethnographic objects, textiles and textile tools. The first textile object to enter the collection in 1918 was a silk satin hip wrap (*sampot*) purchased in Phnom Penh. By the 1960s, the collection counted 415 pieces, which included handwoven silk textiles with a vast majority of ikat hip wraps (*sampot hol*) and religious canopies (*hol pidan*), as well as a smaller number of royal brocaded textiles (*sarabap*), Cham ceremonial pieces (*kanseng chraboch*), theatre (*lakhon*) and dance (*robam*) costume elements, and cotton protective cloths. In 1970, Cambodia plunged into a civil war. The Khmer Rouge seized power in 1975, turning the country into a communist peasant dictatorship. The National Museum closed until the regime's collapse in 1979. The textile collection was left unattended. After the museum reopened in 1979, more than three-quarters of the textiles were missing, including all the polychrome ikat skirts and ritual hangings, most likely due to looting.

THE ART OF IKAT
(HOL / ហ្លួល) WEAVING

In Cambodia, weaving is an artisanal women-led cottage activity, which young women learn early in their family. In the 1970s, the civil war and the Khmer Rouge regime nearly stopped silk practices to the benefit of industrial cotton weaving. In the post-conflict era, the art of ikat resumed in Takeo and Kampong Cham provinces and was re-launched in the tourist area of Siem Reap in the late 1990s. Ikat derives from the Malay term *mengikat* (to bind). It is a resist-dye weaving technique. Cambodian weavers practice the weft ikat technique on silk. Weft threads are wound on a frame and tightly wrapped in specific areas using thin strips, which prevents them from being dyed. The weft is then dyed in one colour (commonly in red, yellow, and blue). Repeated rounds of tying and dyeing help to achieve a variety of polychrome patterns. The dyed threads are interlaced with a silk warp on a three-shaft floor loom, forming an irregular 2-1 twill textile with vibrant hues and kinetic designs. It takes a minimum of three months to create a piece.

The *Sampot hol*, commonly worn at the temple and for weddings, features small and large stylised fauna, flora and geometric motifs, finished with decorative bands. Embedded with figurative scenes inspired by the life of the Buddha, *Hol pidan* canopies are offerings to monks to adorn temples, depicting celestial beings, mythical animals, temples, and vegetal motifs such as the tree of life, a practice which has mainly stopped. *Pidan* textiles are still produced in a handful of workshops for foreign and tourist clients.



IKAT, IMAGINATION AND RE-CREATION

This exhibition invites **OUM Sophea**, **Fonki** and **SOK Linda** to an artistic dialogue with the National Museum of Cambodia's pre-1975 textile heritage. Faced with missing objects, these creators have found inspiration in the museum's remaining archives (photographs, descriptions of textiles and motifs found in object index cards, and old cataloguing records). Each with their specific sets of skills, they imagine 3 original pieces – woven, painted, printed and assembled – which are not reproductions of lost textiles, but contemporary interpretations of the unique Cambodian ikat art form.

CREDITS

Curator: Magali An Berthon

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This exhibition is part of the TEX-KR project funded by Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions – Horizon 2020, agreement 10102513, with additional support from the Asian Dynamics Initiative at the University of Copenhagen and the Design History Society.

SPECIAL THANKS

Oddur Hansen & Archana Sharma from Københavns Universitetsbibliotek, Anne-Laure Roussille, Rémi Buono, Eva Andersson Strand & Marie Louise Nosch.

www.traditionaltextilecraft.dk/exhibition-tex-kr

EXHIBITION

22 February – 31 May, 2024

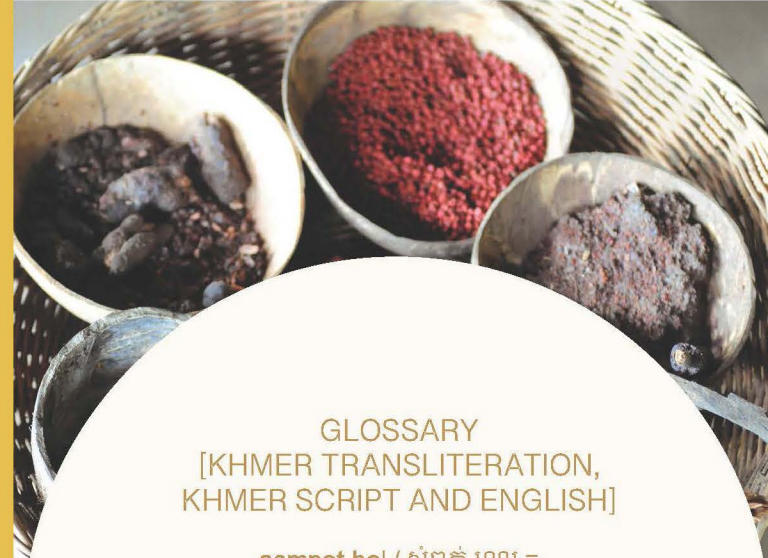
Royal Danish Library /

Copenhagen University Library, South Campus
Karen Blixens Vej 7, 2300 Copenhagen

Opening hours

Mon-Thur: 8 am - 7 pm

Friday: 8 am - 6 pm



GLOSSARY [KHMER TRANSLITERATION, KHMER SCRIPT AND ENGLISH]

sampot hol / សំពត់ ហួល =
silk ikat hip wrap, usually polychrome,
worn for ceremonies

hol pidan / ហួលពិដាន =
pictorial ikat canopy with figurative and
auspicious motifs

chong kiet / ចងកាត =
to tie

tbanh / ត្រហញ =
to weave

kbach / ក្របាច់ =
ornament

sampot sarabap / សារហាប់ =
silk textile brocaded with metallic thread

saut / ស្មុត្រ =
silk

sombork prohout / សំបកព្យារហួត =
garcinia tree bark to obtain a yellow dye

chompu chrôlôk / ដុម្បូជុវលក់ =
annatto seeds to obtain an orange dye

leak khmer / លើខឌុម៉ង់ =
stick lac excretions of an insect
to obtain a red dye

daem trôm / ដើមត្រុំ =
fermented indigo leaves to obtain a blue dye

makleua / ម៉ាត្រើ =
ebony fruit to obtain a black dye