BATIK

The art of batik involves treating the surface of a cloth with wax to make it repel dye, usually requiring several stages of waxing and dying to achieve the desired colours and designs. Although primitive forms of resist dyeing are known to have existed in ancient Persia, Egypt, China and Japan, the art of batik making is considered to have reached its peak in Indonesia. The traditional skill, thought to have been introduced to Southeast Asia via caravan and sea routes, was developed with increased sophistication over hundreds of years in the courts of Yogyakarta and Solo in central Java. Retaining their controlled, orderly, geometric patterns in natural soga brown, indigo blue, black and cream, Javanese batiks played a central role in the rank-conscious society.

While batik has survived centuries of religious and colonial change in Indonesia, it is a comparatively recent arrival to the adjacent Malay Peninsula, where initial experimentation led to the emergence of a cottage industry during the 1900s. Primarily produced in the East Coast states of Terengganu and Kelantan, Malay Peninsular batiks bear a closer resemblance to the varied palette of bright colours and free designs found in Cirebon, Pekalongan and Lasem, than to the mainly monochromatic Javanese batiks. Both block-printed and hand-drawn batik production flourished in Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula because of readily available raw materials: cotton, beeswax and natural dyes derived from local plants. Although certain motifs and designs were reserved for royalty, batik can generally be considered a unique cloth, as it transcends the boundaries of social status. Worn by nobility and peasants alike, batiks are employed in ceremonial rituals as well as in daily life.

Calligraphic batiks

The origins of batik bertulis, or calligraphic batiks, in Southeast Asia are enveloped in mystery. Most pieces found in museums and private collections have not been properly ascribed because few production centres were properly documented and the pieces themselves were most likely obtained through various intermediaries. While most of these cloths are attributed to Indonesia, in locations such as Demak, Cirebon, Palembang or Jambi and even a Chinese workshop in Palmerah, Jakarta, there is nothing to suggest that they were not employed widely throughout the Indo-Malay Islamic world. Although most batik bertulis are characterised by the predominance of blue, there are many examples which have been dyed a rich red, a popular symbol of courage within the Malay world.

The inscriptions found on calligraphic batiks are mostly in Arabic. Examples of those with religious importance are the Basmallah, the Shahada, the names of God, the Prophet Muhammad, and the names of the Archangels. Common decorative motifs are inscriptions in the form of inglas, birds and lions, as well as reversed or mirrored calligraphy. Other inscribed batiks consist of pseudo-
BATIK

Involves treating the surface of a cloth with wax to make it repel dye, usually ages of waxing and dyeing to achieve the desired colours and designs. Although resist dyeing are known to have existed in ancient Persia, Egypt, China and Japan, aking is considered to have reached its peak in Indonesia. The traditional skill, xen introduced to Southeast Asia via caravan and sea routes, was developed with tion over hundreds of years in the courts of Yogyakarta and Solo in central Java. ntrolled, orderly, geometric patterns in natural soga brown, indigo blue, black and sks played a central role in the rank-conscious society. s has survived centuries of religious and colonial change in Indonesia, it is a t arrival to the adjacent Malay Peninsula, where initial experimentation led to t cottage industry during the 1900s. Primarily produced in the East Coast states Kelantan, Malay Peninsula batiks bear a closer resemblance to the varied palette and free designs found in Cirebon, Pekalongan and Lasem, than to the mainly ranese batiks. Both block-printed and hand-drawn batik production flourished in Malay Peninsula because of readily available raw materials: cotton, beeswax and d from local plants. Although certain motifs and designs were reserved for royalty, be considered a unique cloth, as it transcends the boundaries of social status. Worn uts alike, batiks are employed in ceremonial rituals as well as in daily life.

ks k bertulis, or calligraphic batiks, in Southeast Asia are enveloped in mystery. Most museums and private collections have not been properly ascribed because few were properly documented and the pieces themselves were most likely obtained eremaries. While most of these clothes are attributed to Indonesia, in locations rebon, Palembang or Jambi and even a Chinese workshop in Palmtah, Jakarta, suggest that they were not employed widely throughout the Indo-Malay Islamic most batik berlulis are characterized by the predominance of blue; there are many e dyed a rich red, a popular symbol of courage within the Malay world. tions found on calligraphic batiks are mostly in Arabic. Examples of those with e are the Basmalah, the Shahada, the names of God, the Prophet Muhammad, e Archangels. Common decorative motifs are inscriptions in the form of taqwin, w as reversed or mirrored calligraphy. Other inscribed batiks consist of pseudo- calligraphic motifs, which bear inscriptions resembling Arabic letters that do not form meaningful words. The pseudo-calligraphic design may have been deliberate or a result of the craftsperson’s naive interpretation of Arabic lettering. Another common design feature is an arrangement of magical numbers and a network of framed diagrams and patterns. Perhaps only the maker knew the significance of these elements, but users of the cloth seem to have accepted a degree of mystery about them. The strong conviction behind the protective properties of batik bertulis stems from a firm belief in the powerful meaning behind each inscription.

A number of suggestions have been made for the actual uses of these calligraphic batiks. Some ideas are more plausible than others. Square pieces of batik bertulis are commonly worn as men’s head cloths, called the saka kepala. Head cloths were worn in many parts of Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula, an integral part of tradition and culture. References to them are made in classical Malay literature such as the Hikayat Raja Muda in which the young king Raja Muda wears a head cloth embellished with the Islamic creed when he sets off to seek a wife.

While some have suggested that calligraphic batiks may have been used as prayer mats, others say it would be inappropriate for a Muslim to kneel on words with religious significance. It is more likely that these clothes were used to cover or wrap Qur’ans for storage. In reverence of the meaningful inscriptions on these calligraphic cloths, Muslims would practise great care in their placement and handling. If worn on the body, a Muslim would first cleanse himself or herself with ritual ablation (sunuk) and at all times will not allow the cloth to fall below the waistline.

Long, rectangular calligraphic batiks are often referred to as kero mung in Java and were largely used as shoulder cloths or shrouds. Like their square counterparts, these were also fashioned into turban-like head cloths for men. Some sources consider it appropriate that these rectangular batik berlulis were laid over the deceased prior to burial. They may have also acted as temporary canopies over coffins or tombs. There is also a possibility that they would have been hung over marital beds or bridal thrones. Carried as banners during religious processions or battles, these clothes could have very well served in struggles for independence. The batik berlulis are a testimony to the faith of both the makers and users and attest to the importance of Islam in Southeast Asia.

The pelangi or plangi cloth (the former is used in the Malay Peninsula and the latter in Indonesia) refers to textiles with a pelangi (literally ‘rainbow’) effect which is achieved through a resist-dye method that does not require the use of wax. Pelangi patterns are not printed, drawn or painted onto the cloth, but instead are achieved by a method where designs are reserved on textiles by a process of tying, gathering, stitching and sewing before dyeing. Motifs produced as a result of tying and gathering are known as pelangi, whereas motifs produced as a result of sewing and stitching create impressions known as tirik. It is most likely that the pelangi was inspired by the tie-dyed bandhani cloth, produced in Gujarat and Rajasthan and brought to the region by Indian merchants. Plangi, which is also known as batik pelangi, is often used as a shawl or breast-cloth.
Calligraphic panel
Malay Peninsula
20th century AD / 14th century AH
104 x 77 cm
2004.13.35

Textiles such as this batik bertulis, inscribed with Qur'anic verses, are highly regarded for their protective qualities. They were once essential to the daily life, ceremony and ritual of Muslim communities throughout Southeast Asia. This cloth is resist dyed with the complete Surah al-Fatiha. It also includes a medallion containing the name of Allah, two medallions containing the name of the Prophet Muhammad, and a medallion containing the word "Âmin"
Calligraphic batik
Java
20th century AD / 14th century AH
93 x 88 cm
1998.1.4081

Square calligraphic batiks (batik bertulis) were most often worn by Muslim Southeast Asian men as head cloths. This does not, however, rule out the possibility that they had other ceremonial uses. The inscriptions, whether Qur’anic or in the form of prayers, as well as the talismanic and numeral grids on the cloth, are believed to have properties that would protect the wearer from sickness or injury.
Inscribed batik cloth
Java
19th - 20th century AD / 13th - 14th century AH
238 x 89 cm
1998.1.4075

Long, rectangular calligraphic batiks such as this are known as kerudung in Java. The kerudung, literally meaning shroud, were worn wrapped around the head or draped on the body as a shoulder cloth. Other possible uses were as temporary covers for coffins or tombs in funerary rituals, as well as ceremonial hangings or banners.
Calligraphic batik
Java
20th century AD / 14th century AH
103 x 82 cm
1998.1.4029

This resist-dyed cotton batik is adorned with hand-written Arabic calligraphy. The legible inscriptions include the words “wa al-shams” (and the sun), “wa al-qamar” (and the moon) and the names of the four archangels: Jibril, Iza'ir, Israfil and Mikail. These words and names are accompanied by four organic shapes contained in the four squares at the centre of the cloth as well as tables and numbers. Also written is “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his Messenger”, and “Ali”, “Abu Bakr”, “Omar”, “Uthman” at the corners.
Batik berulu is adorned with handwritten Arabic calligraphy, to include the words "wa al-shams" (and the sun), "wa al-qamar" (and the moon), and the names of the four archangels: Jibril, Izrail, Israfil and Mikra'il. They are accompanied by four organic shapes contained in the four folds of the cloth as well as tables and numbers. Also written in "There is Muhammad is his Messenger", and "Ali", "Abu Bakr", "Omar", vers

Ma's ceremonial headdress
West Sumatra
20th century AD / 14th century AH
22 x 9 cm
1998.14165

Ceremonial headdresses are worn throughout the Minangkabau heartland of Western Sumatra. They take a variety of forms, differing from village to village. The salaak is one of the most important forms of male headdress in Minangkabau society. It is usually made of a folded rectangular cloth about a metre in length and is characterised by its flat top which is said to signify that the wearer should treat everyone equally. This example is fashioned out of a batik cloth, treated with starch to stiffen it.
Sarong
Java
19th century AD / 13th century AH
169 x 94.5 cm
1998.1.4122

The traditional art of batik is thought to have been introduced to Southeast Asia via caravans and sea routes. It was developed with increased sophistication over hundreds of years in the courts of Yogyakarta and Solo in Central Java. This silk sarong is adorned with floral and foliate motifs, as well as birds and butterflies in blue and dark green against a light brown background. The palette indicates that the sarong was most probably made in Java, where such natural colours are most popular.
batik is thought to have been introduced to Java and sea routes. It was developed in over hundreds of years in the courts of Central Java. This silk sarong is adorned with motifs, as well as birds and butterflies in against a light brown background. The sarong was most probably made in Java, tours are most popular.

Sarong
Malay Archipelago
20th century AD / 14th century AH
170 x 117 cm
2004.13.37

The pelangi technique was most likely inspired by a tie-dyed Indian cloth known as the bandhant, produced principally in Gujerat and Rajasthan. The technique involves resist-dyeing without the use of wax. On pelangi, the design is not printed, drawn or painted onto the cloth, but instead is achieved by a method where patterns are reserved on textiles by a process of tying and gathering before dyeing. Motifs created by seving and stitching create impressions known as tritik. The word pelangi literally means rainbow, and the results are typically a riot of colours. This sarong, however, is adorned with simple pelangi and tritik patterns of leaves and bamboo shoots reserved in the original colour of the cloth.
EMBROIDERY

Extensive trade in Southeast Asia meant that many local crafts were not practised in isolation. Exposed to a host of foreign influences, inspirations, styles, materials and techniques; these cultural exchanges resulted in the refinement and enhancement of the local craftsman’s skills. Embroidery refers to ornamental needlework and the application of decorative materials, including gilt yarns, gilt paper, gilt lace, gilt strips, sequins, beads, mirror chips (mica), tassels, silk threads and other materials to the surface of a cloth. Most of these materials were imported from China and were extensively used in the many different types of Southeast Asian embroidery. The preferred base materials in Southeast Asian embroidery are usually dark-hued velvets, silks or wool felts.
EMBROIDERY

Southeast Asia meant that many local crafts were not practised in isolation. Of foreign influences, inspirations, styles, materials and techniques; these cultural ideas in the refinement and enhancement of the local craftsman’s skills. Embroidery was needlework and the application of decorative materials, including gilt yarns, gilt strips, sequins, beads, mirror chips (mica), tassels, silk threads and other materials to cloth. Most of these materials were imported from China and were extensively used in different types of Southeast Asian embroidery. The preferred base materials in embroidery are usually dark-hued velvets, silks or wool felts.

Sarong
Sumatra
19th - 20th century AD / 13th - 14th century AH
125 x 108 cm
2005.9.38

A woven cotton sarong featuring horizontal bands of brown, red and blue. The bands are embellished with couched gilt thread in various organic and geometric motifs and scrolling tendrils, as well as gilt lace, suggesting that this may have been a ceremonial item.
Men’s trousers
Terengganu, Malay Peninsula
20th century AD / 14th century AH
94 x 77 cm
1998.1.4126

Throughout Southeast Asia, Chinese ceramics, silks and embroidery were treasured as import goods, as well as inspirational sources of textile and regional craft design. This pair of trousers displays distinctive Chinese influences, firstly in the use of silk damask as a base fabric and, secondly, in the design repertoire and craftsmanship. Only the lower part of the trousers is embroidered. The top was intended to be folded and twisted to secure it around the waist.
At Asia, Chinese ceramics, silks and embroidery were treasured as import goods, as well as of textile and regional craft design. This pair of trousers displays distinctive Chinese influences. Ikat damask as a base fabric and, secondly, in the design repertoire and craftsmanship. Only the sers is embroidered. The top was intended to be folded and twisted to secure it around the waist.

Sarong
Malay Peninsula
20th century AD / 14th century AH
97 x 80 cm
1998.1.4124

This silk sarong is embroidered with gilt yarns, silk threads and metal sequins in a variety of floral and foliate motifs. The kepala hair is adorned with the quintessential pucak rebung (bamboo shoot) motif. The art of embroidery was most likely introduced to Southeast Asia from China. Chinese embroidered items were highly favoured as status symbols, as were fine Chinese ceramics.
Embroidered cover
Deli, Sumatra
50 x 50 x 20 cm
20th century AD / 14th century AH
1998.1.4190

Textiles have long been an important part of ceremonial practice in communities throughout Southeast Asia. The velvet or wool-felt base is in Southeast Asian embroidery imported from Europe, while the gilt threads, silk yarns and gilt lace were imported from China and India. The four sides of this square cover are made of red felt and embroidered with gilt threads and mirror roundels in a decorative floral and foliate motif. The top of the cover consists of a simple striped cotton fabric.
Embroidered sarong
Malay Archipelago
19th century AD / 13th century AH
164 x 107 cm
1998.1.4119

The Dutch East India Company is known to have stamped textiles, in order to monitor their movement and to collect the duties imposed by their exclusive control over the spice and textile trade in Indonesia. This sarong was stamped "G.J.Van.H.K & Zonen - Holland - ...tezolzeek" prior to being embroidered in blue, pink and cream silk threads. More prominent is the quintessential pucuk rebung motif.