

Tradition and Innovation: Batik Textiles from Java, June 15, 2001-October 7, 2001

Batik is the Javanese term for a resist-patterning technique in which wax is drawn or stamped on cloth before it is dipped in dye. In the hands of Javanese artists and entrepreneurs, this technique produced textiles which were famed throughout Indonesia and Southeast Asia – indeed, by the early 20th century, throughout the world.

Batik-making became increasingly important in Java during the nineteenth century. Two areas became known for widely differing styles: Central Java, and the Pasisir, or North coast region. For the Javanese, the designs and colors associated with these styles could reveal such characteristics as ethnicity, gender, age, marital status, and social rank.

Tradition is a strong element of Javanese batiks. While batik textiles were popular for wearing apparel throughout Java, certain designs were traditionally reserved for use only by the nobility in the courts of Central Java. The culture of the courts also influenced color: Central Javanese batiks favor sober dark blue and a wide range of browns.

Pasisir batiks were, from the beginning, more open to innovation. Java's first points of contact with the outside world were the towns along the North coast, centers of trade and immigration. India, China, the Middle East, and the Netherlands were important trading partners from the 17th to 20th centuries, and there were large populations of Chinese and Arab traders and immigrants, Dutch colonials, and *mestizo*, or mixed parentage, Javanese. All of these cultures influenced batik design, bringing new motifs and colors to mix with the old.

Each of the textiles in this exhibition tells the story of a particular tradition or innovation within Javanese batik in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Although the artists whose work is displayed here are unknown, the work itself testifies to the vibrant culture that fostered their creation.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Indonesian; Javanese
Man's turban, early 1900s
cotton: plain weave, wax resist-dyed (batik)
Museum Collection S82.232

Hats or caps made of batik patterned and solid indigo cloth were an important article of men's apparel. The hats are often made of an *iket kepala*, or headcloth, pleated up and stitched into shape on a base of the indigo dyed cloth. The batik patterned textiles in both of these hats display traditional Central Javanese motifs and colors.



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Indonesian; Javanese

Iket kepala (man's headcloth), ca. 1850-1900

Cotton; plain weave, wax-resist dyed (batik)

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.100

Cirebon, on Java's North Coast, was a center for artisans specializing in designs based on Arabic calligraphy. Carved in stone or wood, or drawn on textiles in the batik technique, these images ranged from quotations from the Koran to purely decorative elements derived from Arabic script. Cirebon was famous for its "calligraphic zoomorphs," such as the stylized doves formed by script-like flourishes in this textile. Islam had spread to Java in the 14th century, and by the 17th century was the dominant religion.



Indonesian; Javanese

Kain panjang, 1800s

Cotton

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.101

Kain panjang literally means "long cloth." Used as a hip wrapper by both men and women, the layout had many variations determined by regional preferences and by fashion. The diagonal stripes in this design are a traditional Central Javanese style, called *garis miring*. This style and color combination was originally popular in the Central Javanese courts, but this late 19th-century textile, made using copper stamps (*cap*) to apply the wax, was produced for a less elite clientele.



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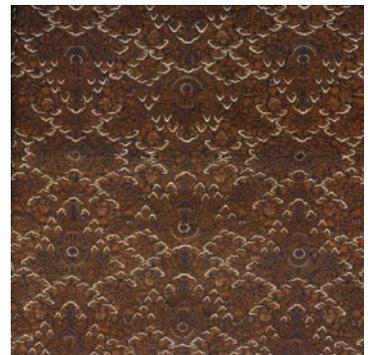
Javanese
Iket kepala, late 1800s
Cotton
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.110

Before cloth made of fine machine-spun cotton yarns was imported from India and Holland, locally made cloth from hand-spun cotton yarns was most often used for batiks. Since the hand-spun yarns tended to be thicker and have more imperfections (slubs), the locally made cloth had a rougher surface. This made it impossible to draw finely detailed designs or to control perfectly the absorption of dyes. Although this textile probably dates from the late 19th century, its crude patterning and coarse texture illustrate the problems faced by early batik artists.



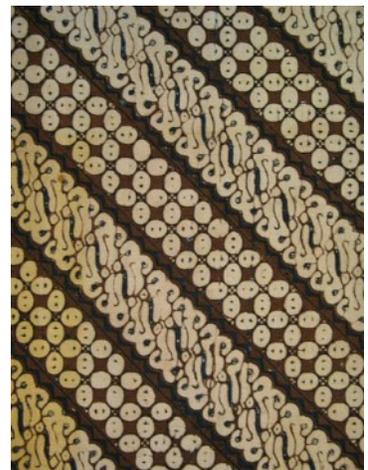
Javanese
Dodot (hip wrapper), 1800s
Cotton; plain weave, wax-resist-dyed (batik)
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.475

The two main centers of batik production in Central Java were Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Although the courts in both regions wore similar styles and patterns, the color combinations differed. The *semen* design seen here was a symbol of high status restricted to court use throughout Central Java. Dark brown and dark blue with white were the trademark colors of Yogyakarta. The Dodot is a court style of hip wrapper, made of two widths of batik cloth seamed together.



Javanese
Textile, early 1900s
Cotton
Bequest of Martha B. Lisle 67.460

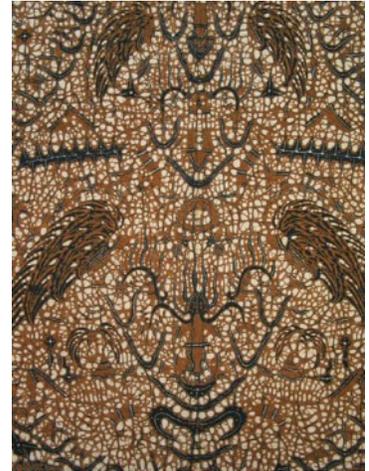
This *garis miring* diagonal design incorporates two of the oldest known batik patterns: *parang* and *kawung* stripes. Both of these patterns were among those originally reserved for the royal courts of Central Java. This *kain* has no *kepala* (head) or patterned borders, only narrow white spaces around the edges. This style, called a *kain seret* (cloth with plain borders), was originally worn by women past the age of childbearing. In the early 20th century it was adopted by many Javanese as a symbol of high social status.



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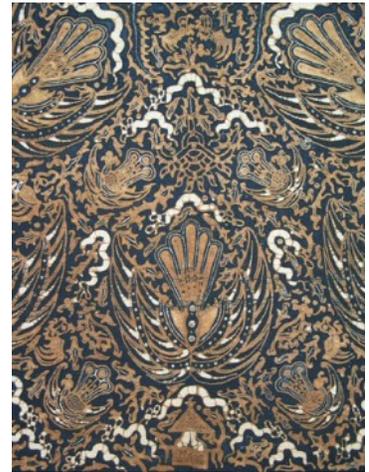
Javanese
Iket kepala, late 1800s
Cotton
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.500

The designs on these two square textiles are variations on the *semen* style. This Central Javanese style incorporates mountains, temples, plant tendrils, small birds and animals, and the single-wing (*far*) or wings-and-tail (*sawat*) motifs that refer to a mythical bird, the *garuda*. These elements are combined by batik artists in a seemingly endless variety of compositions. *Semen* compositions were originally reserved for use only by the Central Javanese nobility.



Javanese
Iket kepala, late 1800s
Cotton
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.498

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Indonesian; Javanese

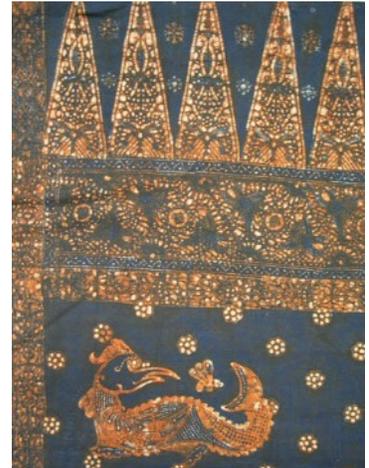
Sarong, 1800s

Cotton; plain weave, wax-resist-dyed

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.097

This *kain panjang* displays the *tumpal* (confronted triangles) *kepala* modeled on a design found in textiles imported from India. For decades this was the most popular style of *kepala* in Javanese batik. In the *badan* (field), are two repeating motifs: a small medallion and a larger animal form, based on the mythical serpent-like Naga.

Each of the design elements in this cloth has been applied with a separate *cap*. Look carefully to see the outlines of the blocks that were used to print the design for the borders around the *kepala*.



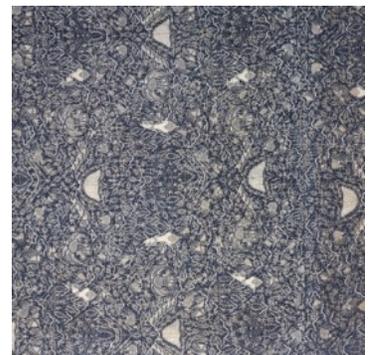
Javanese

Dodot (hip wrapper), 1890-1910

Cotton, indigo; batik

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.473

This *dodot* displays the color combination for which the Surakarta region was best known: blue, white and light brown. The cloth for this batik is very finely woven. This type of cotton material, imported from India and Europe, led to the development of intricately detailed batik patterns. The extremely smooth surface allowed batik artists to apply the wax resist with great precision and control, producing complex designs such as the *semen* design seen here. Traditionally, *dodot* have no border or *kepala* (head) designs. The overall patterning extends across the entire width and length of the cloth.



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Indonesian; Javanese
Sarong (unfinished), late 1800s
Plain weave cotton, resist wax printed (batik)
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 43.361

After the mid-19th century, batik-making flourished in both Central Java and in the Pasisir. Many North Coast entrepreneurs began to keep stocks of unfinished batiks, pieces dyed only with the specialty red dyes for which the North Coast was renowned. These would then be sent as needed to Central Java, where specialists in brown and blue dyes would add those colors, often using designs also specific to their regions. This unfinished example shows what the cloth would look like after the first waxing and dyeing, but before the second application of wax resist.



Javanese
Man's turban, 1800s
Cotton
Museum Collection S82.233

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Javanese
Slendang, early 1900s
Cotton
Gift of Marshall H. Gould 46.306

Innovation occurred in the techniques used to make batik cloth as well as in the design. This *slendang* includes the traditional central diamond shape devoid of pattern, outlined with a hand-drawn diagonal ornament called *cimukirran*. The patterning of the outer area, with leaves and flowers on spiraling stems, shows breaks in the design that can be attributed to use of a *cap* (stamp made of copper strip) to apply the wax resist to the cloth.

Women were traditionally the makers of hand-drawn batik, or *batik tulis*. Men only came into the industry with the introduction of *batik cap* in the mid-19th century.

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Indo-European; Javanese; Indo-Chinese
Sarong fragment, 1910
Cotton plain-weave batik (wax-resist print)
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.482

This sarong's design of water lilies, swans, cattails, and butterflies is in the Indonesian-European tradition. The layout, with the whiplash curves of the lily stems, also appears to have been influenced by the European art-nouveau style. The sarong could be wrapped to show off either the light or the dark area, depending on the mood of the wearer and the occasion for which it was worn.

The same design is used in both the *kepala* and the *badan*; the only difference between the two areas is in the use of color. Batiks like this were cheaper to produce, as the pattern drawer was paid for only one design.



Indonesian; Javanese
Sarong, 1900-1910
Cotton
Gift of Mrs. Samuel S. Durfee 23.308

The traditional colors of Pasisir (North Coast) batiks are the bright blue and red seen in this sarong. Although by the date of this batik's manufacture, the "tree of life" *badan* (field) pattern was considered traditional, it had originally been inspired nearly a century earlier by colorful trade cloth from India. Diagonal bands separating two floral motifs in the *kepala* (head) are an innovation of the 1880s, while different border designs -- the top border straight and fairly narrow, the bottom border wider with a scalloped edge -- became popular after about 1910.



Lien Metzelaar, Indonesian
Sarong, ca. 1900
Cotton plain-weave batik (wax-resist print)
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.481

By 1900, batik artists had developed a repertoire of styles that combined colors, motifs, and layouts to appeal to each of the many cultures found in Java. The combination of strong red, dark green,



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and blue, seen in this sarong, was preferred by Javanese of Arab descent.

The large floral composition seen in the *kepala* (head) and *badan* (field) is a variant of the bouquet designs introduced in the late 19th century by Indonesian-European batik artists and entrepreneurs. By about 1910, many workshops began producing simplified batiks such as this one, in which the same floral design was used in both the *kepala* and the *badan*.

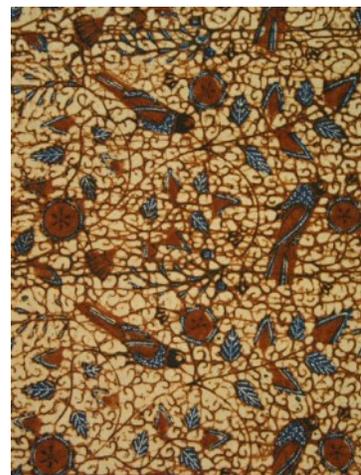
Indonesian
Sarong, ca. 1910
Cotton; batik, tiga negeri style
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.477

This sarong is an example of *tiga negeri*, a type of batik in which the work was divided among three towns, each applying the patterns and colors for which it was best known. The work in this piece probably began on the North Coast in Lasem, where the large designs of the floral stems and birds of paradise and the floral borders were done in the famous Lasem red. The blue details were added in Kudus, while the final reddish-brown *soga* dye and the traditional tendril pattern of the ground were done in Central Java, possibly Surakarta.



Javanese
Sarong, early 1900s
Cotton
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.479

Perhaps made for an older woman, this sarong combines traditional Central Javanese colors -- blue, brown, white -- and a traditional North Coast *badan* (field) pattern of tendrils and birds with a floral bouquet *kepala* (head) in the European-influenced North Coast style. Another stylistic innovation, the scalloped floral border at the lower edge, may have been derived from lace trim seen on the clothes of European women in the late 19th century. This combination of design elements may also indicate that the wearer had family ties in both the Pasisir and Central Java.



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Javanese

Shoulder cloth (slendang) or hip wrapper, early 1900s

Cotton; stamped (tjap) batik

Bequest of Martha B. Lisle 67.456

One of the oldest designs in the batik tradition is the *Parang rusak*, seen in the middle of this textile. Originally reserved for use within the courts of Central Java, by the late 19th century it was also available to commoners. This *slendang* combines the traditional Central Javanese field pattern and colors with a floral border derived from the work of innovative North Coast batik artists.



Javanese

Sarong, 1800s

Cotton; stamped (tjap) batik

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.107

Another traditional Central Javanese pattern is the *ceploken*, made up of quatrefoil medallions. Like the *kain*, this textile was probably made in the late 19th century, when patterns that had originally been reserved for the nobility were in common use throughout Java and were being exported to neighboring islands.

