

## *A Tribute to Miss Lucy II: Asian Textiles from the Museum's Collection,*

June 14, 2002-October 13, 2002

This exhibition, the second of four dedicated to showcasing Miss Lucy Truman Aldrich's collecting vision, brings together exceptional examples of artistry and technical skill from China, Tibet, India, Indonesia, and Thailand. Many of the textiles represent areas of great depth within the collection; however, a few pieces stand alone – perhaps due to the great difficulty in accumulating a mass of artworks from regions that were less accessible in the 1920s and 30s than they are today. Miss Lucy traveled widely throughout Asia and acquired textiles from an astounding range of cultures and regions.

Each textile or costume piece in this room may be appreciated simply for its beauty. Each one also displays the highest possible level of achievement within a particular craft. Miss Lucy sought the best advice in making purchases for her collection, but she also had an educated eye, for she rarely made a mistake.

Objects from Miss Lucy's gifts and bequest appear in almost every exhibition installed within this gallery. Due to their fragility and susceptibility to damage from exposure to light, the pieces are changed every four months, and those that have been shown are "rested" for three or four years between periods on display. Miss Lucy's important Islamic textiles, Javanese batiks, and Central Asian embroideries have been on view too recently to include them in this current show. If you have a favorite, however, rest easy. This gallery is devoted to exploring the textile arts of Asia, and the extraordinary works of art collected by Miss Lucy are the foundation and the touchstone for the Museum's continuing acquisitions in this field.

### CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Thai; Siamese?

*Hip wrapper*, late 1700s-1800s

Cotton plain weave with hand-drawn resist patterning, mordant dyeing, and applied gold leaf

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.537

India's supremacy as a producer of colorful cotton fabrics was unchallenged for centuries. Many grades of Indian textiles were imported by the Thai, with the finest and most elaborate used only at the King's court.

This man's hip wrapper was made specifically to the Thai taste, and the designs can be found in other Siamese decorative arts. The gold leaf was applied to the textile by Thai artisans to further embellish the textile for service at court. Miss Lucy received this as a gift from a Thai prince, probably during her trip to Thailand in the fall of 1924.



# RISD MUSEUM

Indonesian; Minangkabau

*Woman's ceremonial cloth (kain songket balapak), 1800s*

Silk, gold-wrapped yarn; plain weave, continuous supplementary gold weft patterning

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.546

The Minangkabau people in the western uplands of Sumatra are famed for the use of gold-wrapped yarns in their weaving. Isolated from the centers of trade, the Minangkabau were less influenced by textiles from India than others in Indonesia. The lizard-like figures separating the two sections of lattice-work are a particularly Indonesian form.

This type of cloth, finely worked with supplementary gold-wrapped threads that cover the entire width and length of the piece, would be used in wedding ceremonies.



Chinese

*Jiangyi (robe of descent), 1800s*

Silk, gilt paper, metallic-wrapped yarn; compound weave, embroidered

Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.416

Of the several kinds of Daoist priest's vestments, this poncho-like robe is considered the most formal, worn by the highest-ranking priest during one particular category of ritual: those of "going out." Only in these observances are the priests seen by the public, and this voluminous robe conceals secret ritual movements while simultaneously revealing the priest's power and status.

The complex iconography includes the Daoist cosmos in and above the large center medallion, and other motifs meaningful in the Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian belief systems.



# RISD MUSEUM

Chinese; Manchu

*Man's Court Robe, 1736-1795*

Silk and gold-wrapped thread slit-tapestry weave (kesi) with fur trim  
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.390

Rules of dress at the Chinese court reserved yellow for the use of the Emperor and his consort. Stylistic elements such as the width of the bottom border help date this robe to the 18th century, while the design features not only the imperial five-clawed dragon, but other symbols of imperial power that in the 18th century were restricted to the Emperor alone.

Tapestry weaving requires great skill and patience, especially in working fine silk threads into such a complex design. The technical excellence and sheer beauty of this robe made it worthy of an Emperor, and a masterpiece of this collection.



Tibetan

*Buddhist Devotional Hanging, late 1700s-early 1800s*

Appliquéd silk satin weave, with silk compound weave borders  
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.433

In the Himalayan Buddhist tradition, *thangkas* (painted or appliquéd devotional hangings) are displayed in temples on special occasions or are used in personal prayer and meditation.

This small appliquéd *thangka* depicts one of the most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism: Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, the teacher who brought Buddhism to Tibet. The workmanship is extraordinarily fine – even the tiny fingernails are small pieces of silk stitched invisibly to the fabric layers beneath. According to an invoice in Miss Lucy's papers, she purchased this important piece from Yamanaka & Co. in Boston on December 23, 1930.



# RISD MUSEUM

Indian; Gujarati

*Sari/Odhani*, late 1800s-early 1900s

Silk, metallic-wrapped thread; satin weave, tie-dyed (*bandhani*)

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.308

In Gujarat the *bandhani* (tie-dyeing) technique has long represented a pinnacle of achievement for both the artisans who make the fabric and the wearers of the finished garment. In this piece, small knots were worked precisely to produce a spotted background with central medallions and borders of meandering floral motifs, while successive stages of dyeing resulted in contrasting colors.

The woman who wore this elegant sari, perhaps part of her bridal attire, would have been well versed in the symbolism of the auspicious hues of yellow (auguring spring) and red (often referred to in Indian love poetry).



Indian; Gujarati

*Sari*, late 1800s-early 1900s

Silk; metallic yarn

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.292

*Patolu* cloth is made by tie-dyeing patterns into both the warp and weft yarns before weaving. Colors in the yarns are carefully aligned during weaving to make a clear design.

Only the wealthiest in India could afford to buy a *patolu* sari. Traditionally it was used as the bride's garment during her wedding, although the groom might also have worn one folded as a shoulder cloth. This type of cloth was held in great respect and believed by some to have protective powers.



Indian

*Chakla*, late 1800s-early 1900s

Silk; mirror

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.357

This square panel (*chakla*) would have first served to hold a bride's dowry during her marriage ceremony and later would have hung in the bedroom of her new abode. The carefully embroidered, celebratory dancing women, peacocks, elephants, processional scenes, and mirrors attest to the textile's role as a festive banner and as a charm against malice.



# RISD MUSEUM

The interlacing stitch, which creates the feathery white outlines here, represents a point of pride for Gujarati embroiderers. It also may reveal the influence of trade between the Near East and India, as it resembles a stitch common in Armenian embroidery.

Indian; Kashmiri  
*Jamawar length*, late 1800s  
Wool double-interlocking twill tapestry weave  
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.329

The captivating graceful movement and exquisite colors of the *millefleurs* ("thousand flowers") design veil the painstaking work behind the creation of this Kashmiri shawl fabric. Upon close inspection, best with a magnifying lens, it is possible to count eighty delicate weft threads per inch woven in by hand after a lengthy preparation involving as many as six specialists.

Originally, this uncut length may have been intended for a man's coat, with the thin borders delineating either the center opening or the lower edge of the garment. The uninterrupted design, however, makes its potential uses boundless.



Indian  
*Mat*, late 1700s  
Cotton plain weave, block printed and hand painted  
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 37.006

Reminiscent of a carpet design, the formal arrangement of central medallion, corner segments, and framing borders is offset by playful creatures – monkeys and birds – inhabiting gargantuan, swirling foliage. With a brush (*kalam*), pattern stamps, and colorfast mordant dyes, the artists produced a composition appealing in its singular colors and energetic figuration.



Always with an eye for distinction, Lucy Aldrich joined a long line of admirers of similar textiles. Since the 17th century, merchants flocked to the Coromandel Coast for quality *kalamkari* (Persian for "pen work") produced according to the tastes of the clientele, whether Indian, Southeast Asian, or European.

# RISD MUSEUM

Pohoomull Bros.

*Coat*, ca. 1875-ca. 1925

Silk; metallic-wrapped yarn

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.267

Weavers in the town of Varanasi have long provided wealthy patrons, including Mughal royalty, with sumptuous fabrics made on special drawlooms. In some cases, the complex golden patterns – here, squared borders, elaborate tear-shaped botehs, and prancing animals – were designed and woven specifically for a garment fit to the client's exact dimensions. Such pieces could take a year to complete.

A label within this coat reveals that Aldrich bought it in Egypt, adding to questions regarding its shape. Although the fabric shows a markedly Indian style, the curved, inset sleeves differ from most Indian garments. Perhaps the coat was altered to suit the clothing tastes of a traveling connoisseur.

