

Shawl (Rebozo)

Date

c. 1812

Primary Maker

Mission San Juan Capistrano

Medium

Silk



Description

This shawl, or rebozo, made quite an international journey before arriving in the Bowers' collections. The story begins in 1812 when this rebozo and one other were offered for sale in Alta California while a galleon was stopped on its way back to Mexico from Manila. This rebozo was purchased by Patricio Ontivero, Majordomo of Mission San Juan Capistrano and great-grandfather of the donor, for a price of 500 choice heifers. It was then given to his daughter Gregoria when she was born. It was passed along in the family before being donated to the Bowers by Doña Magdalena Murillo within a decade of the Museum's founding in 1936. Because of the size of the shawl, 82 by 30 inches, it has been surmised by past Bowers curators that the textile was created in the Philippines, that the fabric may have been intended as silk yardage for a dress, and that the embroidery may have become an ongoing project for Gregoria or someone else in the family. This might explain why some elements of the textile appear to be unfinished, but leaves many questions unresolved. The construction of this rebozo is relatively unique compared to other examples despite commonalities in the overall composition of the textile. Its fringed edges might simply be indicative of more wear than the ornate lacework seen in other museum examples—damage to the embroidery floss might be another explanation as to why portions of the piece appear to be unfinished. The rebozo has eight alternating bands containing embroidered figures and designs that represent a wide variety of scenes taken from life. A generally similar rebozo from the Philadelphia Museum of Art corroborates that these thicker, embroidered bands were often separated by thin, multicolored bands, but rather than ikat dyed sections, the separating bands of this textile are sequined. The real likeness between the Bowers rebozo and those in other museum collections lies in its embroidered vignettes. Boats lazily floating along canals, splendid arbors, elaborately dressed men and women toting parasols, elegant horse-drawn carriages, a wide range of floral motifs, and much, much more are similar in content to other Spanish-American-made rebozos which, like European textiles made around the same time as or later than French impressionist paintings, illustrate the practice of *días de campo*, days spent luxuriating in the tamed natural splendor of city parks. The similarities here indicate that its embroidery was either done in or around Mexico City or that an example from that area was used as a reference. If this is the case, then then some elements of its anecdotal provenance might be incorrect. The most telling evidence here would be the signature, which is present in one corner of the textile, but we have not as of yet been able to discern the name.

Dimensions

flat: 30 × 82 in. (76.2 × 208.3 cm)