

Basic Detail Report



Baby Carrier

Date

mid to late 20th Century

Primary Maker

Miao

Medium

Cotton, silk and metal coins

Description

This is a cotton and silk baby carrier from the Miao culture of China's Guizhou Province. Here, from birth until children are old enough to walk, new mothers carry infants in wrapped textile baby carriers. While relatively plain carriers might be used while mothers engage in manual labor, highly ornate carriers for festive and ceremonial occasions—such as this object—are decorated with a wide selection of motifs and sometimes with inclusions of silver or coins. This eye-catching example's geometric embroidery symbolizes the ancestral homelands of the Miao. The coins attached at the center are tokens to ward off evil and ensure the good health of the baby it holds. The design of this baby carrier is quite typical of the textiles of the Nankai area. Similar designs, symbolism and color are included on other garments from this area. Carriers are mostly created and embroidered by young, unmarried women, but among some Miao groups baby carriers are instead made by a new mother's family and presented to a her and her husband after a baby is one month old. A woman's ability to create fine embroidery and textile work is seen as valuable to the community and especially to potential husbands and in-laws. Baby carriers and other embroidered work becomes part of a woman's dowry. The reason why many carriers in museum collections are missing their straps is that the straps are believed to be repositories for the soul of the child the carrier held. They are generally kept and reused if a carried is retired.

Dimensions

36 × 56 in. (91.4 × 142.2 cm)