



Baby Carrier

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Miao

Medium

Cotton and silk

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. The Miao's heritage is that of migration from east to west. Most often depicted as this series of concentric rectangles just below two- or three-square designs, these are the ancestral cities of the Miao. 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

23 × 19 in. (58.4 × 48.3 cm)