

Basic Detail Report



Quilt (Nakshi Kantha)

Date

early to mid 20th Century

Primary Maker

Bengali

Medium

Cotton

Description

Nakshi kantha are traditional Bengali embroidered quilts mostly found in Bangladesh. They are made from layers of discarded clothing and can be used for anything from swaddling clothes to prayer mats to wraps for toiletries or valuable objects. While they are chiefly embroidered with the very simple running stitch, the patterns are often complicated, and nakshi kantha are very labor-intensive textile pieces. The center motif, usually a lotus, is completed first; then come the corners and the areas surrounding the center, which are decorated with trees-of-life and other images, respectively. Finally, the area between motifs is filled in with a ripple-like design. Often, scarcely an inch of cloth will be left unembroidered. Kantha motifs are considered magical. They include depictions of everyday life; images of animals; scenes from Hindu mythology; and, in some cases, Bengali proverbs, captions, or blessings, as well as the name of the woman who made the kantha. The fact that nakshi kantha are made from old cloth is also considered to lend the object's user protection from the evil eye. Production of this traditional craft saw a decline in Bangladesh around the 1970s, which scholar Martha Alter Chen attributes to a decline in the country's economy, the migration of Hindus out of Bangladesh and into India, and processes of modernization. In recent years, the development organization BRAC (Building Resources Across Communities) has made efforts to bring back kantha production as a mode of economic stimulus.

Dimensions

27 1/2 × 34 1/2 in. (69.9 × 87.6 cm)