

Basic Detail Report



Door Curtain (Paa Kang)

Date

early to mid 20th Century

Primary Maker

Lao

Medium

Cotton and silk

Description

This is a paa kang, or door curtain, from Houaphanh Province in Laos. Houaphanh is well-known for its textiles, and all women in the province have at least some knowledge of weaving. Paa kang are popular as dowry items and are made by the bride for the groom's family. In Houaphanh, paa kang and other dowry textiles would be created during the year that typically elapses between a wedding engagement and a marriage ceremony. These paa kang (2016.15.62, 2016.15.63, and 2016.15.68, as well as the shamanic cloth in 2016.15.64) are notable as examples of the pii nyak design, a common motif in Lao-Tai textiles. Weavers of Houaphanh describe the pii nyak as an evil spirit who lives in the mountain forest and eats the bodies or souls of all who pass by at night. Although the pii nyak is widely feared, the depiction of a pii nyak in textiles acts as a symbol of protection to ward off other evil spirits. Weavers interviewed by Ellison Banks Findly were quoted as saying that nothing evil can be depicted in a textile, explaining the transformation of the pii nyak from a real and evil creature to a signifier of protection through the process of weaving. The pii nyak appears in textiles as a semi-abstract design of a serpent with a diamond-shaped head and two coiled tails. The appearance of the pii nyak on door curtains represents both a spiritual threshold for the viewer and a way of blocking evil spirits from entering a room.

Dimensions

27 1/2 × 118 in. (69.9 × 299.7 cm)