

Basic Detail Report



Skirt (Gerévut)

Date

mid 20th Century

Medium

Raffia and hibiscus fiber

Description

A Palauan grass skirts piece, gerévut in the Palauan vernacular. The gerévut consists of two aprons, one in the front (madál) and one in the back (dél) held in place with a hip cord (tägúl). The women of Palau handcraft their grass skirts using various plants materials sourced from the island; such as taro grass, hibiscus fiber, or raffia palm. The plants are softened in water, usually sea water,

and then scraped using mother-of-pearl shells to remove the epidermis and slimy residue. Once sun dried the plant materials are then split into wide stripes by hand and dyed with natural pigments; such as red clay, turmeric powder, soot, or mud from the taro swamps. According to the donor, the purple pigment shown here originated from a piece of carbon paper from Dr. Douglas Osborne--such a product was held in high demand for its use in dye. Additionally, the yellow pigment on this skirt came from turmeric powder. The madál and dél are assembled by weaving together the plant strands and securing them with a braided band. Palauan women often make multiple gerévut as each are intended for different purposes. Gerévut are not worn over the waist but below it, in the hip area and directly over the perineum, leaving the waist exposed. Weaving was primarily a women's skill passed down from mother to daughter; therefore it would be assumed that local Palauan women shared the skill with the donor. This particular grass skirt--along with three other gerévut in the collection--were all made local Palauan women. Frieda Wray and her sister, Ellen Osborne, were asked to participate in a ceremonial dance on the opening day of the Palau Museum Men's Meeting House in 1969. These four gerévut were worn by Frieda and Ellen during the ceremony were they performed three or so stories through the dances. One dance incorporated the use of dance paddles (Besós ra nglóik) that told a story about migration and wave conquering. Another dance was based on a traditional Japanese story.

Dimensions

25 × 14 × 3 in. (63.5 × 35.6 × 7.6 cm)