
Weavers and Makers

This exhibition featured woven materials from 13 different indigenous groups in the Philippine archipelago. The traditional handweaving of textiles has been largely replaced by industrial textile production but the craft persists in select cultural communities. Some of the well-known Philippine textile traditions include those of the:

Gaddang
From Cagayan Valley in the Cordilleras of North Luzon.
Like many indigenous groups of North Luzon, they traditionally weave textiles from cotton, dyed with natural materials. The Gaddang however are renowned for their abundant use of beads in clothes for both men and women.

Tboli
From the highland lakes of South Cotabato.
They harvest sweet potatoes, taro, sugarcane, corn, and coffee. Their special abaca textiles are called t’nalak. Popularly called dreamweavers, the Tboli weavers receive different patterns from the deity Fu Dalu in their dreams which they execute into woven cloth. Natural dyes in red and black, and cast brass bells decorate their attire.

Yakan
Originally from Basilan island.
Several communities however, have migrated to the Zamboanga peninsula due to armed conflict in the last few decades. They practice Islam but integrate their traditional indigenous beliefs – shown in the abundant geometric patterns in their colorful attire.
Attire is associated not only with taste and style but also with social status, as well as occupation or social role. Clothes can affiliate us with a school, company, or even nation. The same is true with traditional textiles. The choice of color, design, and materials used can distinguish between the garments of a warrior from the Mountain Province of Luzon, and the highland groups of Mindanao. Regardless of distinct styles however, there are generally four categories of garments used in traditional Philippine textiles.

**HEADCLOTHS**

In many cultures, headcloths play an important and symbolic role. The head is often regarded as the most powerful part of the body and the adornment of headcloths serve as protection, as well as signifier of a person’s status, wealth, and power.

Many traditional headcloths are based on a fourfold geometric pattern.

Yakan headcloth or seputangan

**LOWER GARMENTS**

In the Philippines, lower garments may vary from loincloths to trousers for men, and wraparound and tubular skirts for women. Unique are Yakan women and their tight-fitted trousers, worn with an overskirt wrapped around the pelvis.

**UPPER GARMENTS**

Besides body protection, some textiles like vests, shirts, blouses, and jackets are heavily embellished to establish identity or grant special powers to the wearer.

**ACCESSORIES**

Shawls, belts, sashes, and capes are some examples of textile accessories that enhance the basic ensemble. Among some groups, like the Gaddang, pouches for betel nut chew are also heavily decorated with elaborate beadwork.
TECHNIQUES, TEXTURES, AND COLORS

There are many techniques used in the making of Philippine textiles. The different designs are produced by the order in which threads are interlaced—in varying rhythms of 1:1, 1:2, 1:3 patterns and so on. These different methods also create various textures. While a plain weave, which interlaces one warp for every weft thread, produces a smooth surface, weaving two for every weft [like in a twill weave] produces a slightly undulating texture.

Textiles are traditionally colored using natural dyes—pigments sourced from plants and other organic materials. There are three colors that are commonly found in Philippine traditional textiles:

RED

Among the Kalinga and Gaddang, the bark of the narra tree was used to produce an orange to brownish red. Using the annatto or atsuete results in a lighter red. Highland groups from Mindanao often use roots of noni fruit to get an orange-red to black-red color.

BLUE

In the Mountain Province in Luzon, the indigo plant is used to produce different shades of blue. It can range from light sky blue to a dark, almost blackish blue.

BLACK

There are many different sources for black dye. The T’boli use the leaves and fruits of k’nalum tree, which belongs to the ebony family. In coastal areas, the bark and leaves of the bacauan babae or the female mangrove are used. The Mandaya also use mud to intensify their black dyes.

Below are some examples of weaving patterns. The boxes are yellow when the warp or vertical threads are on top, and they are blue when the weft threads are on the surface. Can you imagine the kind of textures the alternating raised threads would create?

A very old and popular dyeing technique is called ikat. It is a resist-dye procedure where parts of the warp threads are tied together before dyeing. The parts that were bound together do not absorb the dye while the rest of the thread absorbs the new color. The process of resist-dyeing can be applied to thread before weaving as seen in ikat, or to a finished fabric, as seen in the Bagobo warrior’s attire.
COLOR IT!