



Contact: Katrina Carl
805.884.6430
kcarl@sbma.net



Gold Dragon Robe (Chinese, Qing dynasty, late 18th - early 19th century). Silk slit-tapestry weave with gold-wrapped threads. SBMA, Anonymous gift.



Theatrical Robe for a Bride (Chinese, Qing dynasty, 1840-1860). Silk satin weave; embroidery with silk floss and couched gold-wrapped threads, applied silver discs and silk tassels. SBMA, Promised gift by Helen Jahnke from the Collection of Fyle Edberg and Paul Foote.

Golden Threads of Time **SBMA Displays Rare Attire and Furnishings in** ***Everyday Luxury: Chinese Silks of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)***

On View November 10, 2007 – February 17, 2008

July 25, 2007 – As time continues to pass and globalization continues to homogenize the world, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art illustrates the influential role the distinct characteristics of Chinese fashion and culture played during a frenzy of foreign trade over 100 years ago - just as it does today. Showcasing more than 90 selections from the Museum's collection of Chinese costumes and textiles covering a span of nearly 300 years, *Everyday Luxury: Chinese Silks of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)* is comprised of official "dragon robes," women's dress, theatrical garments, interior furnishings, and related accessories. The exhibition also explores the imagery, forms, techniques, and functions of these wide-ranging textiles in the context of their cultural background. This is the first of two phases of exhibitions that celebrates the strength of the Museum's Asian Collection as the Asian Art galleries undergo renovation beginning September 2007 and are due to re-open in Spring 2008.

Reflected in the quality and diversity of techniques, functions, styles, and decorative motifs, the Museum's collection of Chinese textiles is considered one of the finest on the West Coast. *Everyday Luxury: Chinese Silks of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)* provides an unprecedented viewing of

approximately half of the objects in this collection, many of which have never been exhibited together.

The Qing dynasty, China's last period of imperial rule, was a time when the country was not governed by native Chinese, but by the Manchu, a nomadic group originating from the northeastern part of the country. This melding of native and foreign cultures is evident in the dynamic transformation and experimentation of textile arts. During the 19th century, increasing demands from the West for luxury goods, including tea and ceramics, also spurred an expansion of textile production. The majority of the works in this exhibition, and SBMA's collection in general, were created in the late 18th and 19th century. Most were collected throughout America and Europe, with some heirlooms passed down directly from family members who traveled to China in the end of 19th and early 20th centuries. With many items in the collection fashioned from sumptuous fabrics and embellished with extraordinary designs –woven entirely with gold-wrapped thread in some cases – it is not difficult to imagine that these were the garments of China's most elite population.

The exhibition highlights the height of fashion and opulence more than 200 years ago, including many rich and colorful examples of the official dress, commonly known as “dragon robes,” and more informal garments such as women's robes, jackets, vests and skirts, and fine examples of accessories, including shoes, hair ornaments, purses, and hats, along with dramatic theatrical garments. Many of these garments are exquisitely woven with tapestry, satin, brocade, gauze, damask, and velvet techniques, many with fine embroidered embellishments.



The apparel is accented by some especially rare items including a spectacular dragon robe of woven peacock feathers– the only other known example resides in the Palace Museum in Beijing. Also on view are a number of yellow dragon robes accented with the twelve-symbols of authority, indicating that they were only worn by members of the imperial family, if not by the emperor and empress themselves.

Image: *Chinese Woman's Jacket*, Chinese, Qing dynasty, second half of 19th century, blue silk damask with Buddhist symbols; embroidered borders on white satin; two ribbon trimmings. SBMA, Gift of the Hone Family.



Image: *Bed Valance with One-Hundred-Boy Design* (detail) (Chinese, Qing dynasty, 1820-1840). Blue-green silk satin with silk embroidery including couched gold-wrapped threads. SBMA, Gift of Mary V. and Ralph E. Hays.

In addition to the items that dressed the elite, the exhibition also includes fabrics that donned the upscale household, including chair and cushion covers, table and wall hangings, bed valences, and temple banners.

One golden thread that is profoundly woven throughout the variety of these items is the shared visual language of

decoration; this language, deeply rooted in China's long history of ornamentation, reflects both cosmology and cultural values. Decorative themes and auspicious symbols drawn from nature, folk beliefs, Buddhism, and Daoism convey good wishes, longevity, great wealth, abundant food, and fertility. As a system of visual communication, it was understood by all classes.

These reminders of such an ancient and engrained symbolism, the exquisite workmanship, and sumptuous quality of silk are major reasons these items remain, even today, such an attraction to a relatively young, Western audience. SBMA's collection of Chinese textiles is a direct result of the generosity of collectors with such fascination and discriminating taste spanning the Museum's 65 year history. Eighteen robes and textiles from Mrs. Stewart were among the first gifts at the Museum's inception in 1941. Consequent gifts from Mrs. Lockwood de Forest, F. Bailey Vanderhoef, Jr., the Hone family, and Beverley Jackson have contributed to the exceptional quality, richness, and diversity of the collection today. Most significant was the gift of over 120 Chinese costumes and textiles by Ralph and Mary Hays in 1989.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that provides internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

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