

Peter Ten Hoopen, *Ikat Textiles of the Indonesian Archipelago*. Hong Kong: Museum and Art Gallery, University of Hong Kong., 2018, 604 pp. ISBN: 9789881902474. Price: USD 125 (hardcover).

This work is a textual and visual journey through the ikat-producing cultures of the Indonesian archipelago, guided by a devoted collector. It appears when the very survival of this resist-dyeing technique as an art form is threatened, which the author reiterates. The work is thus a sign of the disappearance of the art it documents. When 'tradition fades into faceless modernity,' laments Peter ten Hoopen, 'important aspects of material culture do not just disappear, they disappear undocumented, as if they had never existed' (p. 449). Here lies the importance of Hoopen's penchant for collecting and documentation. The author's Pusaka Collection (PC) website, the evolving source of this book, was already called 'a remarkable body of reference' by textile-researcher Brigitte K. Majilis when 'still in its infancy,' which led to the realization that there did not exist a reference work in print, and 'triggered the ambition to create one' (p. 15). The book references almost all the existing scholarly literature about or related to ikat, foremost ethnographic works, but also missionary documents, while colonial era photography, among 400+ color illustrations, gives life to the histories told. The scope and arrangement is next to the geographical, the different styles of the archipelago, which provides the width and sufficient depth for an archive 'of a rapidly declining, disappearing culture' (p. 13), including cloths without ceremonial significance often overlooked by collectors. In collecting, the author shifted from a focus on heirlooms toward the social role of textiles to attain a full overview of the different traditions.

The author's travel anecdotes are embedded as personal marginalia, a subjectivity which adds value and texture to the reading. Hoopen bought cloths off of women's backs on Flores, was pelted with stones on Solor, and frustrated in his failed search for a customary cloth on an otherwise fascinating Alor, where he observed a 'spiritual void' in a people made fearful of their old beliefs by the missionaries (p. 360). A few localities receive less flattering, rather blunt, descriptions, such as: Bali's neighbor Nusa Penida, where '[p]hysical beauty and grace are hard to find,' (p. 183) except in their textiles; or the poor Ngada, which 'offered a singularly depressing aspect,' 'saw no beautiful textiles anywhere,' and whose language characteristics (extremely isolating, no prefixes/suffixes), 'reinforce the image of a people with limited development' (p. 211).

The author oscillates between different viewpoints when speaking of localities several researchers have published about, not least in the war of words about the assumed (non-)meaning of Iban patterns (pp. 92–94); which mediates between the different 'headhunting' parties. After 76 pages of introductory

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themes the textiles of the Borneo Dayak Ibanic peoples are presented, which 'represent the pinnacle of ikat weaving across the Indonesian archipelago' (p. 89), and whose iconography is located between forgetting, secrecy, compositional canons, and the enchanting decoration of the complex patterns.

At the heart of the book are the illustrations of PC, from Borneo to Sulawesi (pp. 88–546), photographed by the author and beautifully reproduced against a black background, with detailed information about provenance, design, literature, and a comment. In addition to the pleasure of contemplation, the pictures from this collection are a primary research resource, and their dimensions and clarity allow for detailed observation. Each ikat-producing region is presented in a few pages of text with information about its cultures and textiles, including which collections keep holdings, and 'core literature.'

The style of writing has a personal flavor, certainly freer than in purely academic works. It is a vast survey, and sometimes we wish there were more in-text references, making it easier to consult the source. For Palu's mythology, the author should have relied more on the core literature, landing central instead of fringe. On Lombok, after the sad history about their textiles, an example is given of how low-quality imitations of ceremonially important Balinese textiles provide ethnographic insights about the users: 'such cloths are already worth collecting, as they tell a unique story about a clearly defined ethnic group and its needs within the diaspora' (p. 197).

The closing chapters are the 'Future of Ikat' and 'Collecting and Curating.' Ikat is 'a fading art, as the process is so laborious that it can hardly be carried out under current economic circumstances,' and 'the spiritual, cultural, and societal relevance has vanished or is quickly disappearing' (p. 548). It is 'gradually descending to the level of handicraft' (p. 223), although works of high quality are still produced, but with new motives, not least money for the children's education. and higher education will impact the matrilineal knowledge transmission. Attempts at preservation, such as the efforts of both local and foreign NGOs and social entrepreneurs to revitalize the art, are discussed critically. The author's principal grievance is toward the institutions which, at worst, serve to extinguish the art, and the market forces and enterprises which lead to 'a loss of information and inspiration [...] reducing the capacities of weavers,' or even, when designers appropriate traditional patterns with digital printing, bypass them completely (pp. 549–551).

Museums, Hoopen suggests, should collect revival textiles instead of the increasingly rare antiques. Even if revivalists cannot prolong the culture of ikat, these will leave 'us with an immensely rich heritage to study and to admire,' because '[w]hen promoting cultural values requires a business plan and professional marketing, the culture is in trouble' (p. 554). And for all the collateral

damage inflicted, 'collectors and curators are also the most effective agents in the preservation of the Indonesian islands' cultural heritage and [...] its documentation' (p. 562). Exhibiting for the concerned nations and peoples 'the fine artistry of their ancestors' is a way to regain pride in their heritage, which, hopefully, to some extent can be recovered with institutional support (p. 563). Hoopen states humbly that he, with collectors generally, are not the true owners of their antique works, but 'temporary guardians whose job it is to pass them on to the next generation, ideally well documented' (p. 563). We wonder how this museum without walls would be received among the archipelago's weavers, not the target group of the publication, but who, one imagines, would be inspired by the art displayed. Low-resolution images of the collection are available on the PC website, an adjunct continuously updated with the aid of the world's ikat devotees.

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