



2

1 Figural *phulkari*, Punjab, India, 19th/early 20th century. Cotton and silk; embroidery, 1.30 x 2.39 m (4' 3" x 7' 10"). This cloth would have been used by a bride on her wedding day. The drawings of human figures and animals are taken from village life, and presented in a 'flattened' style akin to cave paintings. I traded one of the first digital cameras to arrive in India for this in Ahmedabad, where I had gone to see the worthy Calico Museum of Textiles.

2 *Palla* shawl end panel with cypress tree motif (detail), Kashmir, India, 1830. Pashmina, interlocking tapestry, 0.53 x 1.19 m (1' 9" x 3' 11"). Collecting Kashmir textiles is compelling for many reasons. And the feeling in the hand is so sensuous!

# In his own words

Peripatetic tribal and ethnographic art dealer **Thomas Murray** has donated almost 100 textiles to the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, his hometown. A longtime friend of the FAMSF, he spoke to curator of costume and textile arts **Jill D'Alessandro** about the gift

**Jill D'Alessandro:** You are well known as a Bay Area dealer, collector and independent scholar of tribal and textile art, specialising in South and Southeast Asian art with a focus on the arts of Indonesia. Do you think being a Bay Area native guided your interest?

**Tom Murray:** Growing up in Marin County, when there were still open hills, old barns and Miwok shell mounds on the Tiburon Peninsula, gave me a fascination for 'the old days'. We played Tarzan in an area we called prehistoric land. When the most important American Indian burial ground in Marin was found at the end of the street we grew up on, my sister Elizabeth and I started the archaeology club at Redwood High School. We helped dig under the supervision of a PhD candidate from San Francisco State. That made a formative impression and triggered an interest that stayed with me for a lifetime.

The Fine Arts Museums also enter into the discussion of early influences and inspirations. I remember my mother taking me to see a Navajo sand painter at the de Young; he worked all day and then destroyed his creation at sunset. Already at seven years old I liked the shamanic art I was seeing. And coming of age in Marin in the 1960s and 70s heavily influenced me. There was a lot of interest in Eastern religions, mystical philosophies, and non-Western art. The Marin Flea Market was a crossroads of world travellers who supported their adventures by selling artefacts. I was always looking for old rugs and Indian baskets encoded with symbolic motifs that we tried to decipher, sometimes with the help of shamanic plant 'helpers'. The Flea Market was a place where we exchanged not only works of art but also travel tips, insights and ideas.

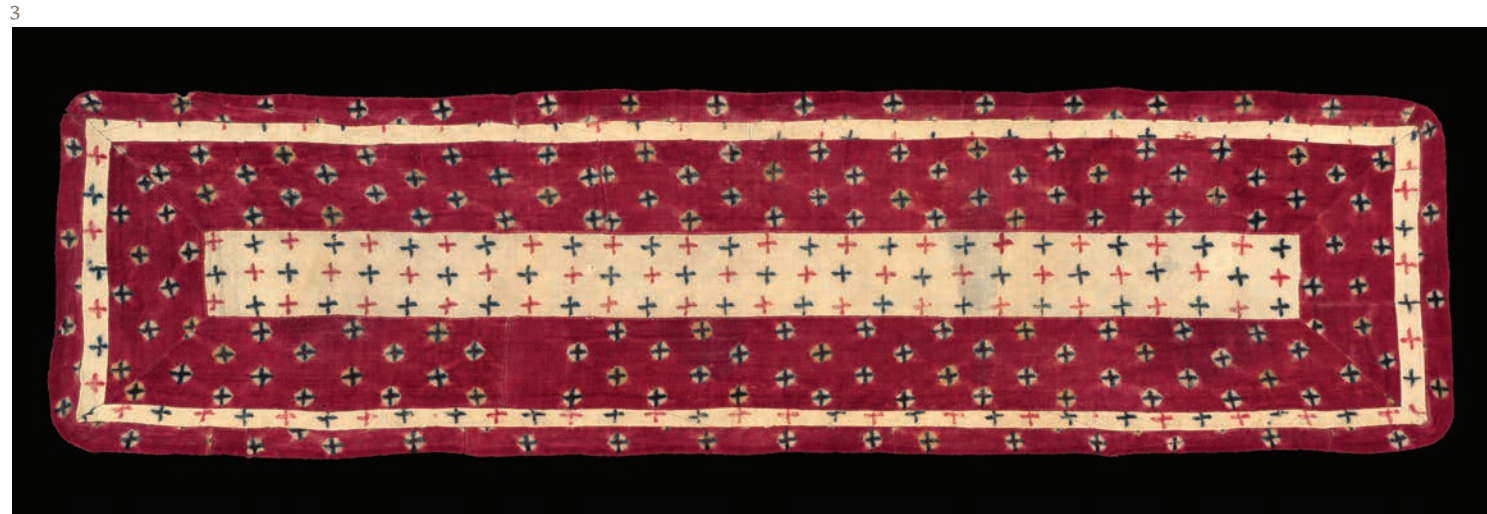
**JDA:** You have spent four decades travelling the world and collecting art. How did it all begin?

**TM:** I come from a long line of explorers. My mother's brother, Fenton Kilkenny, was a great sea captain who came home from Asia every year or two. In Hong Kong, before World War II, he helped my great uncle Ted build what was at the time the world's most luxurious Chinese junk for a Harvard botanical research expedition led by Dr David Fairchild, sponsored by a Standard Oil heiress. Named *Cheng Ho* after the great Ming admiral, they sailed through the Philippines, Borneo, Sulawesi and the Moluccas, and had to end their trip in Bali when war broke out.

Uncle Fenton was also a great storyteller, and most of it was true. He would tell us kids about the South Sea Islands he had visited, the cannibals, headhunters and beautiful maidens guarded by a mythical beast that was part-tiger, part-lion and part-leopard. He told us about his discoveries, saying Bora Bora was the most beautiful island, but Bali the most fascinating. He was the first to inspire me to explore the Philippines, Borneo and the other outer islands.

More recently I honour Bruce Gordon, who I met at the Marin Flea Market, and his partner, Vicki Shiba, for encouraging me to get moving. I vividly recall seeing my first Indonesian ikat at their home on New Year's Eve in 1976. It was a ceremonial cloth (*pua kumbu*) from Borneo and I was captivated. I asked Bruce how it was made and he explained the counterintuitive process of ikat, where the pattern is tie-dyed onto the warps before the cloth is woven, and that it was used 'to attract the gods during headhunting ceremonies'. I was hooked. When Bruce told me 'Asia is changing. You should go now', I listened and acted quickly.





**JD'A: You are best known for Indonesian textiles and sculpture but your gift includes a large number of textiles from mainland India. Is there a reason you specifically chose to give your Indian textiles to FAMSF?**

**TM:** I wanted to give something that dovetailed with and augmented the pre-existing collection, which I know well—its strengths in Central Asian carpets and Anatolian kilims; the growing Indonesian holdings; and the world-class Indian trade cloths and early silks given by George Hecksher. India may be argued to have been at the centre of the textile world in centuries past, and we find fascinating connections from Europe and the New World to Indonesia, Thailand and Japan. My gift also includes all my Thai, Lao, Burmese, Tibetan, Central Asian and Andean textiles. I built these collections with the same attention to themes of cross-cultural pollination and independent invention; aesthetics and woven structure; and a focus on what may be termed a universal truth about the spiritual nature of weaving, with textiles serving as a primary means of transmission of culture from the ancestors.

3 Talismanic door hanging, Altai Kazakh, Kanas Lake, Xinjiang, China, 20th century. Wool; felt, reciprocal mosaic-pieced construction and embroidery, 0.91 x 1.80 m (3' 0" x 5' 11"). This piece I collected right from a yurt doorway on one of my most memorable and remote trips to the scenic glacier lake juncture of Siberia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan and West China. My friend Wenhua Liu got me invited on an expedition the very first time the area was opened up to tourism by pretending that I was a VIP travel agent from America.

4 *Tigma* pattern prayer mat, Tibet, 19th/early 20th century. Wool; felt, clamp-resist dye, 0.86 x 3.28 m (2' 10" x 10' 9"). Meditation mats of this length were used in monasteries for monks to sit on, serving as insulation. The cross pattern is probably apotropaic.

5 *Lawon Perada* noblewoman's shoulder cloth, Palambang, Sumatra, 18th/19th century. Silk, gilding; *tritik* zone-dyed stitched resist, 0.77 x 2.31 m (2' 6" x 7' 7"). This remarkable cloth came out of the trunk of a Dutch colonial officer.



**JD'A: You have assembled groups that fit together thematically. Can you touch upon one of these collections?**

**TM:** I like collecting in series as it provides opportunities to note stylistic variations such as the *boteh* forms found in Kashmir shawl end panels. I am very interested in tie-dye as a cross-cultural theme. Like the shawl end panels, this is a sub-set of my gift. I am especially pleased to place a few such textiles from the Jack Lenor Larsen Collection in the museum, some of which were published in his 1977 book *The Dyer's Art*. I had admired Larsen's work long before I met him, as his study of resist-dye techniques served as a bible to many of us when we were first getting started and remains a very important reference to the present. Larsen is a 'tastemaker' with his many contributions to the field. When the time came to disperse the collection that he had so long loved, he approached me because of our affinity of taste, in part because his book had such an impact on my own cross-cultural interests.

**JD'A: You are an indefatigable traveller. Do you still collect in the field?**

**TM:** When I started collecting in the 1970s, it was as part of a culture of travellers (vs. tourists) who were willing to spend months, even years, on the road exploring remote countries, observing rituals, and paying deep respect to the peoples and cultures we visited. We had to pay for these explorations with what HALI magazine called 'high adventure sourcing' and developed some real expertise en route, thus becoming 'scholar-dealers'. Fine textiles can always be found in the hands of top urban dealers but they were too costly for us; discovering a masterpiece in a distant market at a bargain price was very much more the fun. Buying and selling creates an opportunity to engage with locals, which just wandering around as a tourist does not. Having said that, for quite some time now I have acquired most of the tribal objects and textiles I sell or collect from early Western collections, not from their country of origin. The reasons for this are many, not least that many of the best pieces came out during the colonial era. And provenance is a good thing to have to build up confidence in the value of a work of art. As a wise observer recently commented, it serves 'as the equivalent of an artist's signature on a painting'. Plus history is interesting and enriching for its own sake.

**JD'A: What does making this gift to the FAMSF mean to you?**

**TM:** I am a hometown boy supporting my hometown team. Setting aside my long personal association with the museum, I was very much inspired by the recent gift of Native American art from Thomas Wiesel and his family. From the moment I entered the exhibition 'Lines on the Horizon', I was struck not only by how great an aesthetic connoisseurship ran through the collection, but also by its intellectual depth in an art historical/cultural sense. I could see how that gift served as a very real and immediate advocacy for an art form not known to many but deserving of scholarship and appreciation. I should not really mention my gift in the same breath as theirs, but I do feel an underlying dynamic exists. I too want to raise the consciousness of others and further my belief that the spiritual nature of an indigenous people may be accessed through their textiles as art, and that in turn we may gain a greater understanding, respect and desire to preserve from them these expressions of our collective humanity. I believe that the de Young is the primary vehicle to disseminate knowledge about these cultures to the greater Bay Area, and it is my wish to be part of that process, hoping also that my gift will inspire others to help build the museum's magnificent collection.