

NOMADIC EMBROIDERIES



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TINA SKINNER
WITH THE SAM HILU COLLECTION



nomadic embroideries

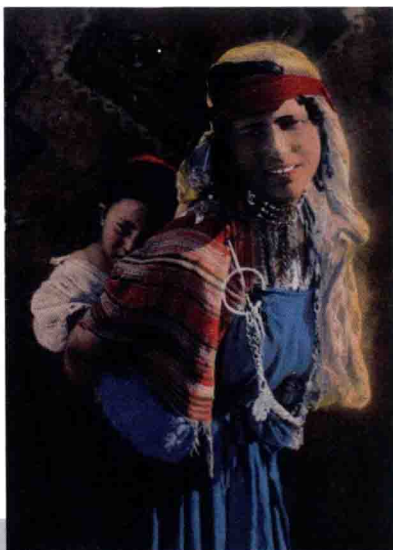
India's Tribal Textile Art

Tina Skinner with the Sam Hilu Collection



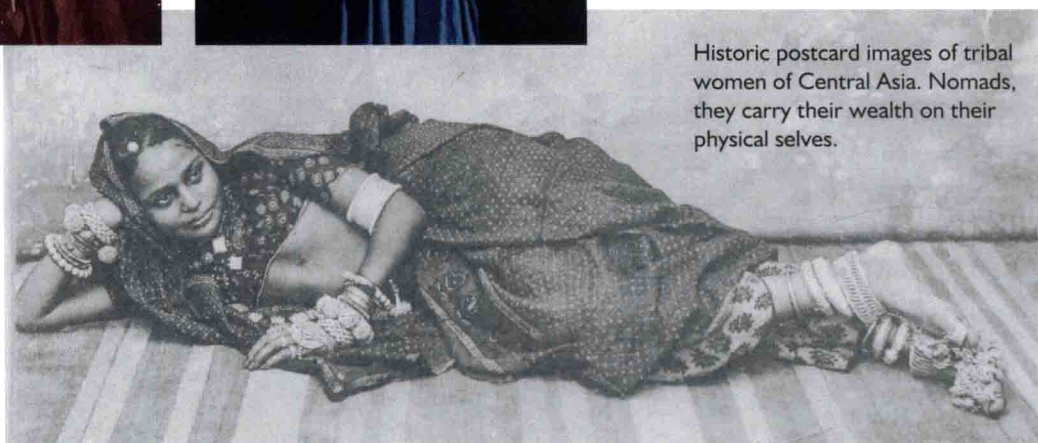
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acknowledgments

Dedicated to the anonymous women who labored in poverty and love to brighten their world, and ours. To Ginger Doyle, who tirelessly toiled behind the camera lens. Also, endless thanks for the contribution of textiles from the Sam Hilu collection. Sam Hilu is a designer who has labored many years to preserve traditional art and craft through sensitive import. His work can be seen at www.samhilu.com.



Historic postcard images of tribal women of Central Asia. Nomads, they carry their wealth on their physical selves.

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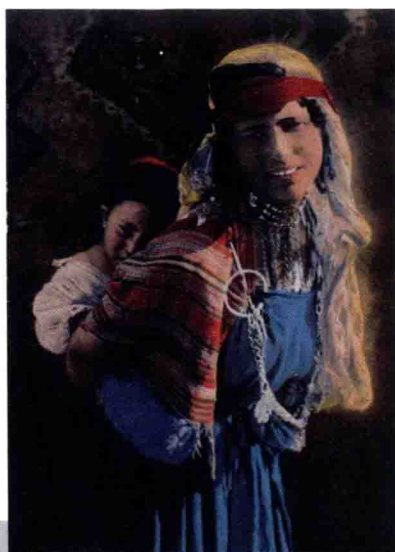
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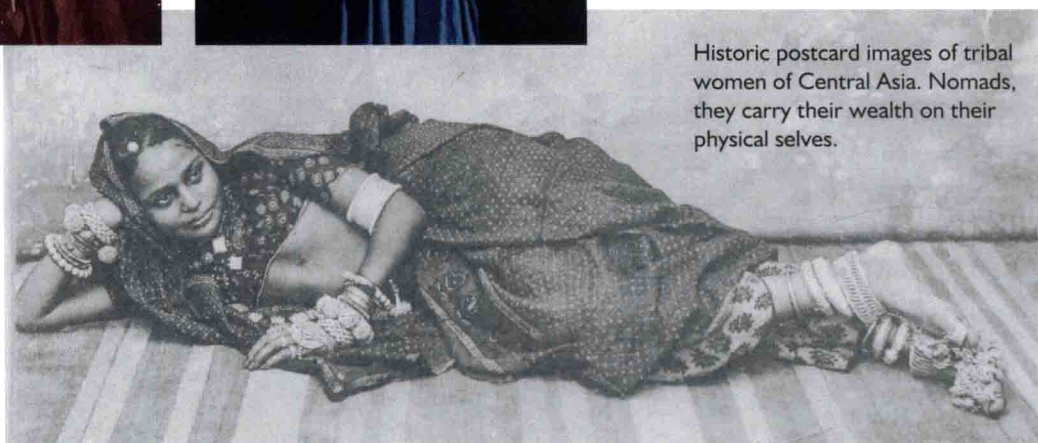
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introduction

Over the last decade, I have found myself drawn to these embroidered remnants, my collection growing with my sense that I was rescuing something tenuous and precious. This collection is sometimes displayed, but mostly just carefully packed away, like treasure too precious for the light.

In fact, as my Indian textiles guru Sam Hilu tells me, these are precious beyond comprehension. These are lovingly created textiles that were probably parted with only on pain of death, literally, as some family hocked their most precious wares in order to pay for some dire necessity, such as a life-saving operation. Mr. Hilu, who has made his career from the pursuit of original folk arts, is not comfortable dealing in works of art that have a religious or a family ritual use. Commercializing such works, he says, trivializes a labor of love.

By no means an academic study, this book was compiled to celebrate the colorful, richly embellished costumes and textiles of shepherd, gypsy, and farm communities of India's arid northwestern provinces, particularly Rajashtan and Gujarat, and adjoining regions in Pakistan.

"Truly, India remains the most original, creative, and prolific source of textile production in the world," proclaim John Gillow and Nicholas Barnard in *Traditional Indian Textiles* (Thames & Hudson, 1993), adding that the Gujarat region is "the most important center in the world for fine commercial embroidery" and the "world's richest source of folk embroidery."

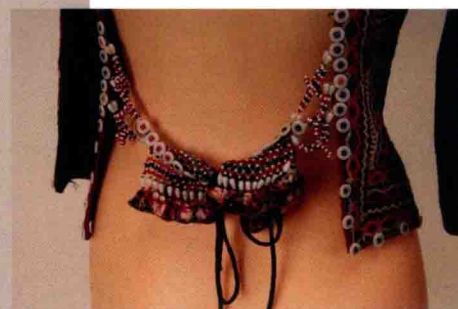
The prosperous state of Gujarat is part of an arid region long famous for cultivation of cotton and indigo and a long tradition of dye expertise. Trade from the region dates to early history, with printed textiles from the region discovered by archeologists in excavations of ancient Egyptian cultural sites dating back to the 15th Century B.C. During the era of India's Mughal Empire, from the 16th Centuries onward through the British rule, members of the royal court commissioned elaborate embroidered pieces from the Gujarat region. Thereafter, Gujarat became a source of embroideries, printed cloth, and indigo tapped by England's East India Company for export. In particular, Gujarat State has served as the world center for fine commercial embroidery during the rise of the East India Company throughout the 17th Century, and many of today's embroidered pieces being produced for export to the West originate here.

Locally, the Gujarat people embellish their clothing, household textiles, and animal trappings with appliqué, beads, mirrors, buttons, and shells in addition to the needlework. Traditional designs and colors are worn proudly, as an individual's tribal identity in an area where many different cultures, castes, and social ranks intermix, including the Kutch, Saurashtra, Mutvas, Lohanas, Garasias, Dhanetahs, Sindhis, Harijans, Rabari, Kathi, Mahajan, Kanbi, Barwads Ahir.

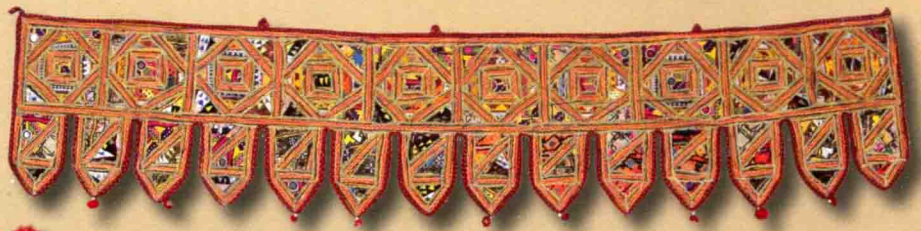
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Beautiful examples of wedding choli, created by girls as part of their dowry.



12" x 80"

A Toran is hung above the doorway to the main house in welcome to both people and gods. The hanging penants represent mango leaves, which are symbols of good luck. A common element in Asian and Middle Eastern homes, this welcoming banner would grace the opening to a home, or tent. Sections of embroidery are defined by strands of thread, whip stitched in place.

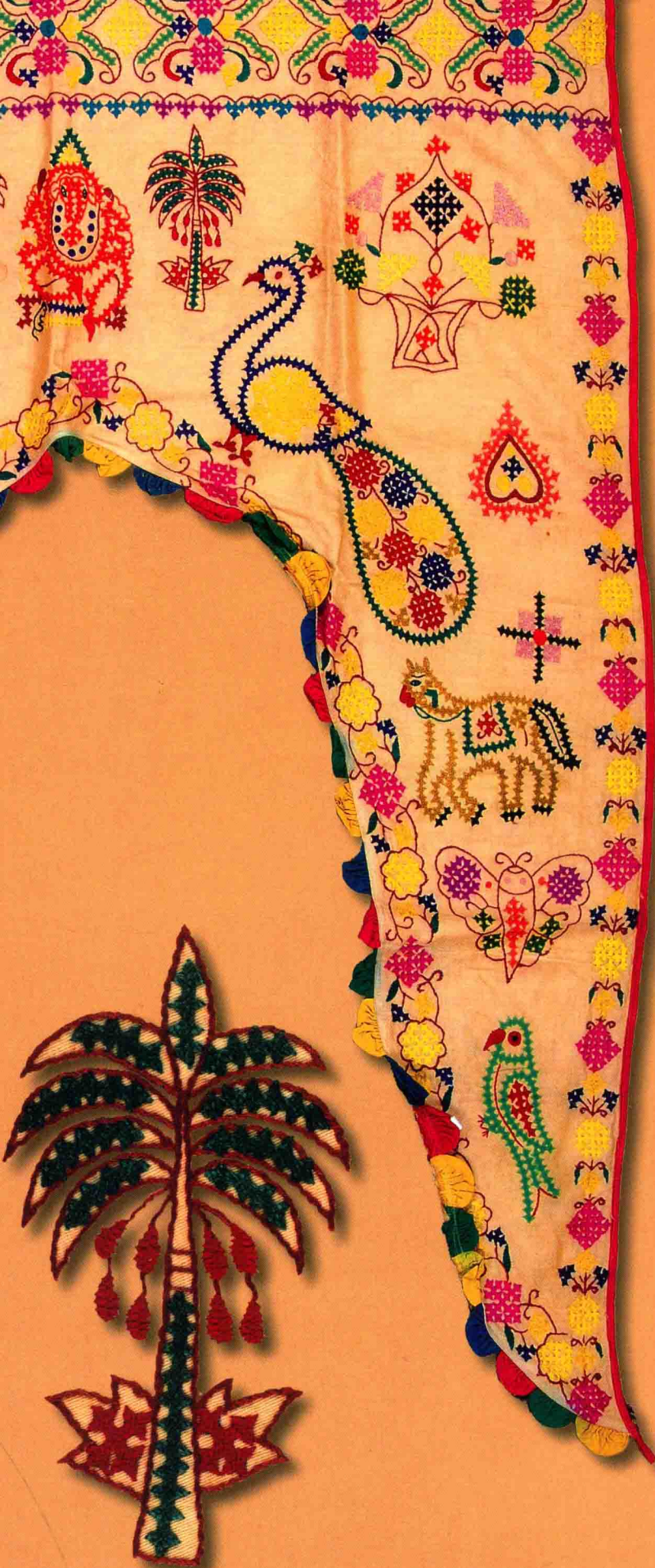




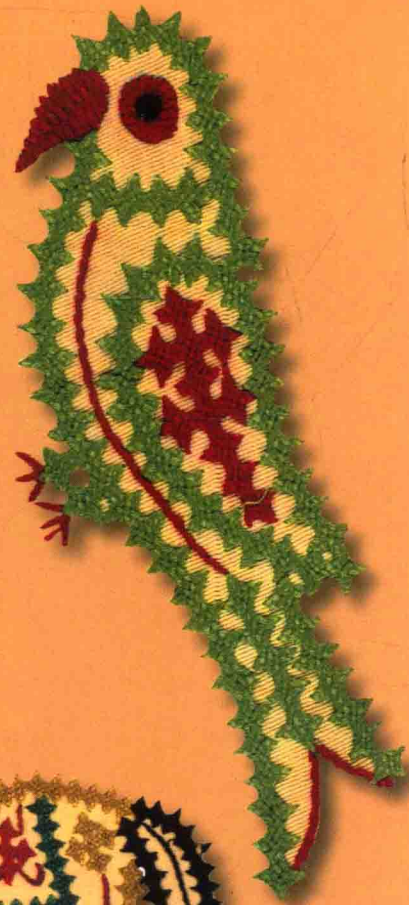
42" x 46"

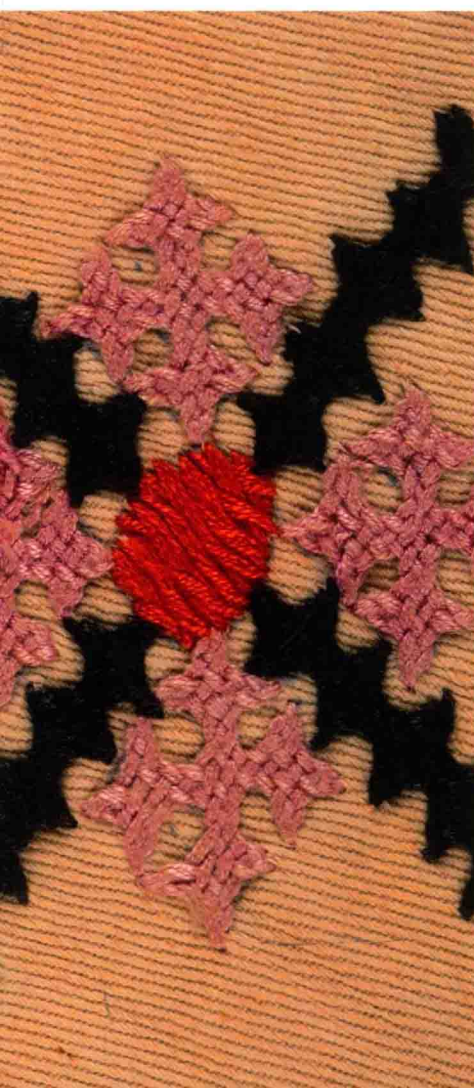
Another fanciful doorway adornment, this one features Lord Ganesh in the center bestowing his blessings to all who pass beneath. Also of interest, a man and woman are portrayed churning butter, Lord Krishna playing the flute, and there's a gramophone!





42" x 54"



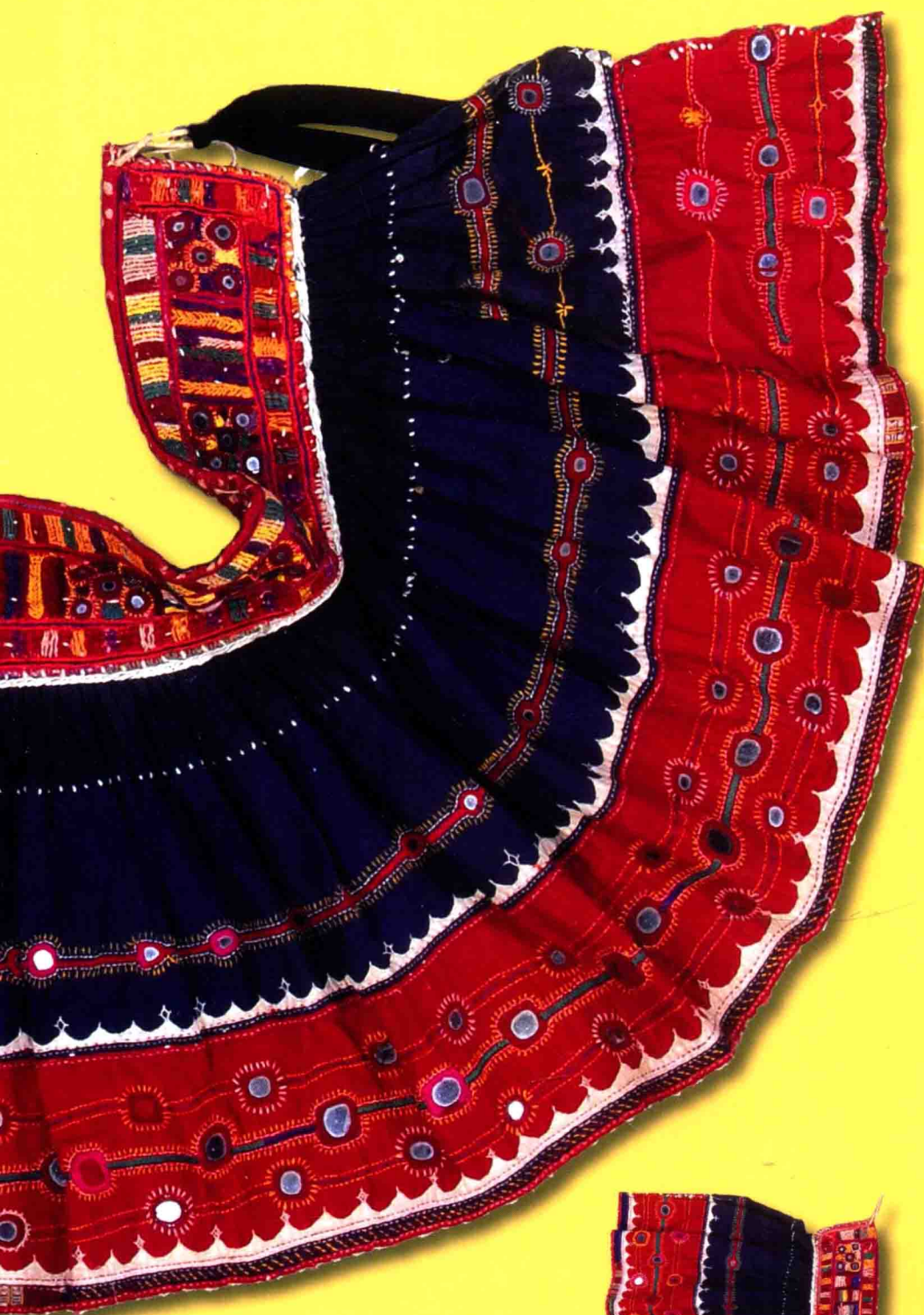




12" x 24"

Never worn, this is a hand-embroidered piece that would have been added to a garment such as a child's dress or a man's blouse.





A wrap skirt, probably intended for a man to wear over britches.



12" x 36"