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## Women's Work: Sumbanese Textiles from the May Weber Collection

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# **Women's Work:** Sumbanese Textiles from the May Weber Collection





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Cover images: **ikat cloth (hinggi)**, Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0719; **ikat cloth (patola ratu)**, Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0889

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This catalogue was produced to accompany *Women's Work*, an exhibition of textiles from the May Weber Ethnographic collection held from March 16 — June 2017 in the Damen Student Center. The exhibition was curated by Anthropology student Grace Iverson (B.A. Loyola University Chicago 2017).



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# Forward

*by Dr. Catherine Nichols*

**D**uring the fall of 2014 Loyola University Chicago welcomed ten undergraduate interns to the exciting and challenging work of processing a gift to the university: over twenty-five hundred aesthetic objects sourced from cultures worldwide. The gift resulted from the passionate collecting of Dr. May Weber, who held an enduring interest in fostering an appreciation of beautiful objects of everyday life. The collection had previously been shared with Chicagoans through the May Weber Museum of Cultural Arts, near the city's Magnificent Mile. Its move north to Loyola's Lakeshore campus is the subsequent iteration of the collection's life, curated by the Department of Anthropology. Housed in Mundelein Center, the collection has become an integral piece of the research and teaching mission of the university.

Of the ten interns that began the arduous process of unpacking boxes, descriptive cataloging, and building permanent storage mounts, one would find inspiration amongst the many folds of colorful fabrics. Grace Iverson was beginning her sophomore year as an anthropology and art history major, with an interest in the creation of objects and their display in museums. After taking a course on Southeast Asia with Dr. Kathleen Adams, she proposed and was awarded a Johnson Scholarship through the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership to examine gendered aspects of textile production and collecting. As with most research projects, over the course of two years, Grace narrowed her topic while sorting through mountains of textiles from Southeast Asia, settling on the beautiful collection of forty-five textiles from the Indonesian island of Sumba. She pieced together aspects of provenance, as Dr. Weber had purchased several from well-known dealers. But Grace's true interest was in the beautiful iconography dyed and woven into the threads.

May Weber sought to foster an appreciation for the work of folk artisans and artists by bringing their objects into an experiential proximity that exceeds the typical museum display. She wanted people to look closely, to touch, to experience unusual beauty in their everyday surroundings. Inspired by her approach, Grace arranged an exhibition of a selection of the Sumbanese textiles on the second floor of Loyola's Damen Student Center in the spring of 2017. Twenty-six textiles were hung along the walls, flanked by

chairs and tables where students were often found working, resting, and socializing. The exhibition reflected both Grace's interpretive interest in textile iconography and Weber's passion for aesthetic objects.

The curation and interpretation of May Weber's outstanding collection since arriving at Loyola has been made possible by the generous support and efforts of many individuals. It has been my pleasure to work with dynamic student interns, our talented photographer Julie Calcagno, a supportive faculty, the exceptional staff of the Gannon Center, and two wonderful individuals that have made special contributions to this project: Jill Forshee and Gerry Hoffman.

Catherine Nichols, Ph.D.  
Director, May Weber Ethnographic Study Collection



# East Sumba through the Decades: Near and Far, Then and Now

*by Jill Forshee*

I first developed an interest in Sumba after seeing uniquely dramatic, pictorial fabrics hanging in the tourist shops of Bali. Filled with complex patterns, sea creatures, human figures, horses, lions, birds, and other lively motifs, the textiles resembled nothing I had ever seen. I was intrigued by these cloths and wondered about the people who made them. I had to find out more.

Looking back 25 years, I recall when I first ventured to Sumba. I was a graduate student at U. C. Berkeley at the time and planned to stay at least one year. My research interest was not only looking at traditional textile arts in the contemporary world, but to gather stories and histories of the women who created them. A journey thus unfolded that would fill me with many tales, teach me the rudiments of local weaving, and directly involve me in communities and lives—through decades of adventures and changes for Sumbanese people. This exhibition and catalogue bring back to me the highly animated nature of the fabrics and people I came to know in Sumba. This includes an ongoing conversation with visitors from around the world. Such dynamism characterized the creation, formats, imagery, and meanings in local cloth. The dualisms in designs incorporate the tensions within the mirror-image motifs, while creating an all-over balance in design. They also suggest that everything has two sides. This symmetrical approach reflects dualisms in Sumbanese cognition, aesthetics, speech, and behavior.

Much has been written of the symbolic meanings of a range of Sumba's motifs. These basically regard clan, caste, status display, and the centrality of "social place" in life. In these caste-based communities, cloth is one element of an ancient system of conspicuous consumption that visibly communicates authority and place—through high-peaked clan homes, funerary megaliths, and elaborate fabrics. The quantity and quality of local textiles enfolding the dead at burial or following a bride to her husband's village maintain a strikingly visual aesthetics of power and identity through generations.

Yet, this aesthetic system was also fluid and permitted new people and influences to enter into local life. I came to profoundly experience the socially binding nature of dualisms in Sumba. This went beyond political strategies or status contests to facilitate deep and lasting relationships with others. I was fortunate to experience close friendships, which I enjoy to this day. Sumba's textiles and people are all about social life, including the local and beyond. Imagery in cloth often bridges the near and far, the then and now. These factors also create memories; moments of shared experiences over time. For me, there are many.

In the textile designs in this wonderful exhibit, I recognize ancient, indigenous forms; designs from 15th century Indian and Arabian trade goods; images from the Dutch colonial era; and progressively more representational motifs that reflect shifting aesthetics as Sumba engaged with the 20th century world. What I refer to as "narrative cloths" (which proceed through a series of images and "events" from one end of a cloth to the other) reflect a changing sense of time and history in Sumba. This was largely affected by the spread of literacy via Dutch mission schools and eventually Indonesian public schools across the island. Stories depicted in cloth took on more realistic forms and revealed distinct events in time—including beginnings and endings.

Importantly, these vibrant fabrics interpret various times in Sumba and how people experienced and made sense of them. In this way, they offer a uniquely rich and detailed history of eastern Sumba, drawing upon everything involved.



*Two girls from the village of Prailiu, Sumba.* Photo copyright Jill Forshee, 1995

# Women's Work and Creative Innovation in Textiles from Sumba, Indonesia

*by Grace Iverson*

**A** 2013 online edition of the *Lonely Planet* tourist guide sings the praises of Sumba's colorful timelessness for potential visitors. The island is described as having "one of Indonesia's richest tribal traditions, from its wonderful ikat to timeless traditional villages only now opening up to tourism..." While the language of the travel guide suggests that Sumba is an isolated region, frozen in time, the small island's innovative weavers tell a much more nuanced story through cloth.

As the world's largest island state, and its fourth most populated nation, Indonesia boasts a vast array of diverse cultures. The island nation has been an important center of global trade since the 7th century. Decades of colonial and military occupation, and more recently, a growing tourist industry, have fueled encounters with foreign cultures. Sumba is located in eastern Indonesia, in the province of East Nusa Tenggara. Little written history of Sumba is known to exist, but it is clear that a strong Javanese cultural influence, Dutch missionaries and national political events have all had lingering impacts on the island. The considerable distance of the island from national centers of power in Java allowed for less intensive state-level integration during shifts in national power, so industrialization and modernization projects began later than in more populated regions of Indonesia. The province in which Sumba is located is considered among Indonesians to be poor, backward, and isolated (Vel 2001:144).

Eastern Indonesia is well known for a chain of islands that employ a megalithic funerary practice, in which large stones, sometimes weighing several tons, are dragged to burial sites and used as grave markers. Funerary rituals have immense meaning in Sumba — similar to the Toraja people of Sulawesi, the Sumbanese have traditionally practiced an animist religion that heavily emphasizes the influence of ancestral spirits. The indigenous religion, called Marapu, remains an inextricable part of the Sumbanese culture, as it defines the customs that govern weddings, funerals, inheritance, and settling

disputes (Vel 2001:148). People still hold Marapu beliefs in serious regard, and around half of the population of Sumba practices Marapu or blends it with other belief systems (Forshee 2006:41).

After depleting the island's sandalwood forests, colonial powers were not necessarily interested in Sumba beyond pacification. Upon Indonesian independence in 1949, colonial positions of authority were transferred to the educated children of noble families. Other government jobs were highly sought after among the Sumbanese because they presented an opportunity for financial gain. For some Sumbanese, a successful career could be established through government positions. This necessitated some level of formal education and a move to urban centers of Sumba, which meant that this opportunity was essentially only available to the noble class. These jobs were also only open to registered members of five nationally recognized religions, of which the indigenous Marapu religion of Sumba was not included (Vel 2001:148). With an increased tourist interest in Sumba, the textile industry has presented a new opportunity for financial gain.

While the presence of Protestant European missionaries certainly impacted life on Sumba, it was the secular European presence that affected the traditions of the royal court and systems of textile production. Unique among Indonesian textile traditions for its highly figurative cloth, Sumba has been globally recognized for its textiles since Dutch colonists began collecting them in the early 20th century. In Southeast Asia, handwoven textiles are significantly used as articles of clothing, but they are also utilized in systems of religion, political organization, and exchange as ceremonial religious hangings, royal symbols, and currency. The design of a cloth is affected by its function, and many textiles can signify important messages about the wearer, acting as what anthropologists have termed "social skin." In a more abstract sense, these textiles embody the social history of Sumba and visually display meaningful shifts in Sumbanese culture.

The flourishing tourist industry in Indonesia has created an international demand and a local market for ethnic arts, including the uniquely figural ikat textiles produced in Sumba. In the wake of monumental social and economic changes in the nation during the 20th century, the textile economy has become a viable avenue for Sumbanese women to assert agency in the economic realm and to gain social mobility as well as for the Sumbanese to actively construct identity in encounters with the Western world.

## Process

A Sumba ikat textile can take anywhere from seven months to eight years to complete, depending on the dyes used and the complexity of the design. Ikat refers to the production technique, which involves binding the warp (vertical) yarn with palm leaves, which resist dye and create patterns. Sumbanese women use two main sources for plant-based dye: the indigo plant for deep blues, and the morinda or mengkudu tree bark is the primary source of red pigments, varying from purples to rusty oranges. Artificial commercial dyes and plastic ties, which have significantly sped up production, are also frequently used today. However, even with the use of chemical dyes, large textiles can still take up to 6 months to complete.

*Hinggi*, large rectangular ikat garments worn by men over the shoulder and hips, are some of the most recognizable textiles from Sumba. When worn, two *hinggi* are needed to complete an outfit—one is wrapped around the hips and another is draped over the shoulders. The ikat technique also appears on long tubular skirts for women, called *lau*. The lower portion of these skirts are usually decorated with simple *pahikung*, supplementary warp thread designs, or beading and embroidery.

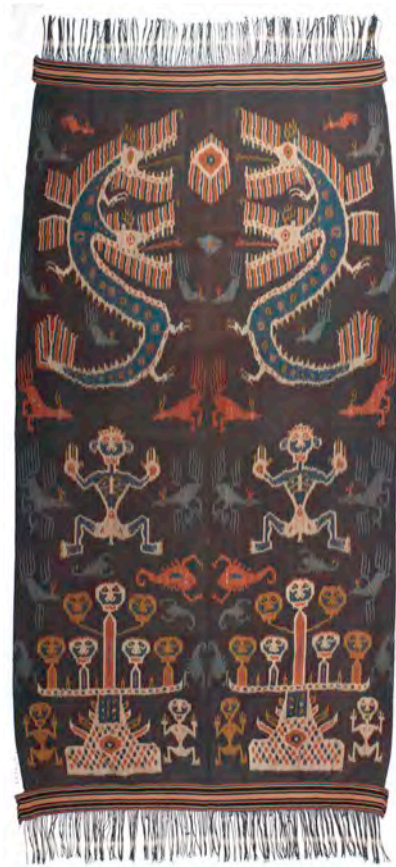
While the design of *hinggi* cloth has changed drastically over the past century, weavers tend to favor designs that emphasize patterns of horizontal bands. Mirrored motifs of facing animal figures are commonly used, emphasizing the horizontal orientation and adding a sense of duality to the design. These figures were adapted from European coins and medallions, most notably, the facing lions of the Dutch royal seal (Maxwell 2012: 390). This symmetry is achieved by folding the unbound warp threads and tying an ikat design on both sides simultaneously.



**Ikat cloth**, Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0835



While this expedient process was once used to duplicate one half of a banded design, it is now used to design and dye all four quadrants in one binding process. Usually nearing five by eight feet, binding and dyeing multiple designs is an incredibly labor intensive process. An identical design can be symmetrically repeated in all four axes of a hinggi cloth by folding the threads and binding them in a single action. Simplified designs also expedite the production process—many market quality textiles contain a large central motif surrounded by negative space or small symbols.



**Ikat cloth**, Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0873

### **Regional Variation**

Anthropologist Janet Hoskins reports that contemporary textile production on the island has never been stronger, and that almost all Sumbanese girls and women learn to weave. Handwoven garments are still very much a part of ceremonial dress and traditional exchange practices. Ikat textiles, particularly handwoven and hand-dyed, have deep cultural significance that persists despite the increased production of hinggi for tourist markets (Hoskins 2008:106).

Textile production was once limited to the coastal regions of Sumba, where the necessary crops to spin thread and dye cloth were grown. Now that commercial thread and dye have become available, inhabitants of the inner regions of Sumba have begun to weave as well. Janet Hoskins' work on indigo and its connections to womanhood is based in West Sumba, among the Kodi. Their most heavily produced cloth is dyed solely in a deep blue indigo and remains more horizontally oriented than Eastern Sumba cloth.

The majority of May Weber's Sumba collection is comprised of textiles produced in the eastern villages, which is reflected in the textile selection presented in *Women's Work*. Jill Forshee and Monni Adams have both worked in the weaving villages and urban spaces of East Sumba and have written extensively about the traditional motifs and changing practices of textile production. Waingapu, the booming capital of East Sumba, is the central hub for fabric trade on the island. A marked contrast between urban and rural is visible when villagers enter the city to trade and sell goods, including textiles, near city hotels. This market is financially lucrative because there is no middleman present to cut into profits.

Weavers also sell textiles directly to tourists in the several small villages that have been made accessible to visitors. Prailiu, relatively close to Waingapu, is one such weaving village. Here, textiles hang throughout the village, ready to be marketed to busloads of tourists. Complicated narratives, such as scenes from the Indian epics, are captured in the detailed hinggi of Prailiu. Some of the highest quality and most expensive fabrics of the island are produced in the village of Rindi. In these textiles, central figures float in the middle/central band, usually set against deep indigo. These shadowy, ethereal figures are related to the otherworldly sphere of Marapu. Textiles from the village of Pau are unique because they most heavily employ supplementary warp (pahikung) techniques. Pau also contains the majority of the textile workshops in the region, some of which are owned by Chinese Indonesians.

### **Textile Economy & Labor**

Village subsistence patterns in East Sumba historically included agricultural and livestock rearing activities. Villages closer to urban spaces, near Waingapu, are heavily settled and land is no longer able to support extensive maize and rice farming nor to maintain suitable lands for livestock grazing. After a national economic crisis in 1997, the number of government jobs available in Sumba dwindled. Instead, many village people are self-employed or involved in some capacity with the

production or sale of textiles. The textile industry operates at many levels: individual designers and weavers, shop owners, and through several workshops.

Textiles, despite having become ethnic art market commodities, have also endured as prominent elements of gift exchange ceremonies and funerary rituals. Being *moderen* or “with the times” is a source of pride for villagers. A variety of habits and livelihoods can make one *moderen*—in Sumba, embodying this concept can be as simple as wearing a T-shirt and jeans, markers of one’s status as a consumer in the global economy. Being *moderen* is integral to national industrialization and modernization movements. Interest in wealth and the commercial world outside Sumba mark one as *moderen*, which means that the marketing of textiles is linked to this idea as well. In addition to selling textiles, Sumba residents have become involved in trade to procure materials to produce cloth, such as chemical dyes and cotton yarn that are imported from Java. Rarely is the cotton used in Sumba ikat handspun anymore.

## **Class**

Textiles are a visible marker of class, but today, strict hierarchies in caste stratification are lessening. Historically, there were three castes: the maramba or nobles, the commoners, and the ata or slaves/descendants of slaves. These class distinctions are still resonant in terms of appropriate behavior in social relationships and marriage matches. Class is still embodied and displayed, as contrasts in dress and demeanor are evident (Forshee 2001:87). However, perhaps revealing current attitudes toward class, motifs and dye colors once “owned” by maramba, such as the patola-like florals of the kain radja or patola ratu, are now woven into tourist market pieces. Additionally, weaving is not limited to a single class of women -- noble women and descendants of slaves are both able to weave, and even ata women or descendants can gain local recognition for their finely made textiles.

Class does have an impact on the ability of women to sell their textiles. Descendants of slaves are believed to be less restricted by a “sense of honor,” whereas members of the noble class are expected to be detached from material wants and are less likely to be able to travel and market textiles without social repercussions.

## **Tourism**

Tourism is a recent development in Sumba, gaining traction in the early 1990s upon the island’s inclusion in popular travel guides such as Lonely Planet, as well as domestic

travel guides (Hoskins 2002:802). The *pasola* festival was a major initial draw for tourists, who are attracted to the staged violence. The event is a ritual of warfare in which men, wrapped in their finest hinggi, ride horses and throw wooden poles at one another. The *pasola* garners thousands of spectators, both local and foreign (Vel 2001:150). This popular event appears on many small textiles, likely made for the tourist market.

Weaving villages hold *pemarons*, or “exhibitions”, which consist of staged weddings, dances, music, and other mock rituals. Tourists are then invited to wander the village plaza where they are able to buy hinggi. These are usually gendered spaces. Female weavers watch as male vendors try to sell their textiles. Older generations of women, the same who might complain about the decline of Sumba cloth, remark upon the “stupid tourists” shuffling through the village and purchasing low-quality but brightly coloured (chemically dyed) ikat fabrics. Most tourist dollars are spent on the representational cloth of the eastern weaving villages.

In Bali and Java, physical and cultural distance is one explanation for the popularity of Sumba cloth among tourists domestic and international alike. The island is far from the main tourist hubs of Indonesia and visitors to tribal arts shops in Bali are able to project fantasy notions of the exotic—imagining the tribal people who might have worn or made the textiles. In Bali, Sumba ikats and *pahikung* cloths are transformed into ready-to-wear fashions, backpacks, and scarves.

Somewhat distant from the most popular tourist locations, Sumba is a hot spot for “adventure tourism” and “cultural tourism”. Stereotypes inevitably surface in encounters between the tourist and the host community. Judith Mayer includes an anecdote in her discussion of tourism and tribal violence in Southeast Asia that details an American tourist asking a Dayak host where his village kept the “old heads”—certainly, this illustrates just how fundamental this exoticized trope is to foreign understandings of “tribal culture” (Mayer 1999). Similar to the Dayak in Borneo, the Sumbanese also have a history of headhunting that fascinates tourists. In Sumba ikat, the skull tree motif, which refers to a common practice during headhunting times, is often creatively reimagined in contemporary fabrics. These cloths are an example of the re-fashioned imagery of headhunting and how it has become a trope in the tourist art market.

## **Persistent Traditions**

One of the most delightful elements of Sumba ikats is the variation in motifs and subjects depicted. Jill Forshee describes a weaver who at one point was including former U.S. president Bill Clinton, in his ikat designs. I have also seen the French comic book character Asterix appear in an ikat held in a private collection. Sumba weavers have a particular skill for balancing the old and new. Decades of interactions with Dutch colonists and missionaries, the influence Indian culture, Chinese traders, and the Japanese militia who occupied Indonesia have all shaped ikat designs and motifs. Capturing a colonial power dynamic, ikats sometimes include the facing lions of the Dutch royal seal. Prestige goods or symbols of status received through global trade were incorporated into hinggi as markers of class and power. Northern Indian Patola cloth was incorporated in local cloth as a symbol of nobility—the families that obtained these lush double ikat Indian silks began to include the floral motif into the central band of hinggi. Many weavers also incorporate stories from the Sanskrit epics *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*.

Contemporary weavers might also find inspiration in international museum catalogues and historical examples in museums. As weavers resituate historical motifs within a contemporary frame. It would seem that weavers are acutely aware of global tastes and the value of primitivism to their buyers. Textile producers are also aware of the value of perceived authenticity; Many contemporary textiles made with the bright colors of chemical dyes are washed several times to give them the appearance of having been used or worn.

## **Gender**

Within a Southeast Asian framework of gender complementarity, indigenous understandings of the cosmos contain both female and male aspects. Textiles are associated with the female elements of the universe. “Ephemeral” soft cloth is associated with the bride in dowry exchange (Hoskins 1989). These cloth goods reciprocate the “male” gift of metal goods. On Sumba, Women’s lives have traditionally been bounded within domestic spaces. Their role in producing textiles matched conventions of gender and the significance of cloth in Sumbanese society.

In the midst of an ongoing reconceptualization of gender in Sumba, women’s involvement in the textile economy has rapidly increased. Today, men and women are involved in both designing and marketing the textiles, but historically that was not



always the case. At one time, it was men who would leave to sell textiles in larger cities, sometimes even other islands. Women would stay behind and weave textiles at home, socializing with others on their verandas as they worked on their looms. Women's labor in producing textiles is valued and protected by local magical beliefs. Despite conversion to Dutch Calvinism, many Sumbanese still practice some types of ancestral worship. Regardless of religious affiliation, beliefs regarding witchcraft and the spirit world endure. Indigo dyeing is still a strictly female realm, as the pigment is seen as a supernatural danger to men, alongside menstrual blood and urine. These fluids are feared and believed to be associated with witchcraft. Additionally, male presence near an indigo pot is thought to spoil the dye.

Women have only recently become involved in the male domain of trade. The textile business allows women to legitimize their travels while still following gendered protocol, supplying them with the necessary justification to leave their home villages. In her 2001 ethnography *Between the Folds*, Jill Forshee includes accounts of several village women who travel throughout the island and the nation in order to trade materials and market cloth. These women venture beyond the spaces conventionally assigned to them—the women involved in the textile economy have “expanded local notions and controversies regarding what women might do in the world” (Forshee 2001:65). One marker of this expansion is the frequency with which women act as agents in the marketing and sale of textiles, a realm which was once limited to men. Additionally, interactions within tourist border zones (Bruner 2005) have widened social worlds for textile vendors, who frequently collect global ties as a form of personal prestige.

Although an increasing number of women are involved in travelling for the textile trade, their mobility is still limited by certain social regulation of behavior. For instance, noble women must always be accompanied during their travels. Additionally, markets in urban centers are seen as dangerous spaces, associated with loosening morals. As women participate in commerce, tension grows in weaving villages. Villagers hold resentment towards successful women—common gossip suggests the influence of witchcraft or immoral behavior (including trysts) whilst in Bali (Hoskins 2008).

For women, the textile economy presents an alternative to government jobs as a way of reaching worlds outside of Sumba. With a broadened social universe, women are able to construct a new sense of self, becoming agents in their own lives and gaining prestige and authority within local spaces.

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**Left: Ikat cloth (patola ratu),** Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0889

These floral motifs originated in Indian *patola* cloth, which is produced through a complex double-ikat dye process. Patola cloth was a valuable trade good throughout Indonesia dating back to the 17th century. In a *patola ratu*, the floral pattern covers the entire cloth. This pattern was once restricted to use in garments worn by members of the noble class. The aesthetic of highly desired silk patola cloth was incorporated into local weaving as a symbol of nobility. Noble families that owned patolas began to include the floral motif in newly made textiles during the 19th century. Patola-inspired designs commonly appear in the central band of a cloth, where is it most visible when worn over the shoulder.

**Ikat cloth,** Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0846







**Ikat cloth (patola ratu)**, 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0888

The weaver of this unusual cloth has transformed the traditional patola motif into a geometric pattern with a single flower appearing in each square of its grid.





**Ikat cloth with patola band**, 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0836





**Ikat cloth**, 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0865

This indigo ikat cloth features bands of facing shrimp, horses, and birds. Aquatic creatures such as shrimp and crayfish are particularly popular representations of the rich sea life surrounding the island. Cloth that is solely dyed with indigo is more commonly found in West Sumba.

**Right: Ikat cloth (hinggi) with shrimp**, 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0866











**Left: Ikat cloth (hinggi),** Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0719

This remarkable indigo hinggi reimagines two standard motifs in Sumba cloth: large human-like ancestor figures and the "skull tree." The head of the central figure has been replaced with a skull tree. These trees refer to the display of hunted skulls in a village, and although headhunting has not been practiced in Sumba for centuries, skull trees remain a popular motif in contemporary cloth. Hunters, deer, and birds in flight surround the large figures, while stars and moons adorn the central band.



**Shoulder cloth,** 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (supplementary warp), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0843

An ancestor figure appears in this shoulder cloth, with the head of a human and the body of a serpent. Yellow and blue dyes were applied to the surface of this supplementary warp design, adding detailed color and dimension to the design.





**Women's skirt (lau),** 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (supplementary warp), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0718

Large ancestor figures surrounded by snakes and lizards appear in a supplementary warp panel at the bottom of this lau. Women's cloth often depicts ancient symbols of Sumba and are worn for significant ceremonies. *Mamuli*, omega shaped pendants crafted in gold, often accompany lau in adorning Sumbanese women for special occasions.





**Ikat cloth (hinggi)**, Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0840

Although it was probably colored with commercial dyes, this hinggi represents a traditional banded design. The second band includes a symbol of Dutch colonial power — two heraldic lions facing a coat of arms. This motif was incorporated in the early 20th century during Dutch colonial occupation, was likely introduced by the circulation of Dutch currency, and remains a popular symbol of the wearer's status.





**Above: Women's skirt (lau) with skull trees**, 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (supplementary warp), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0718

**Ikat cloth (hinggi)**, Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0837

This late 20th century hinggi reflects a trend towards more centralized designs as well as a reinvention of popular motifs. A facing pair of humanoid lions, likely taken from the Dutch coat of arms, surround a skull tree. The lowest band echoes the central motif.





**Women's skirt (lau) with elephants**, 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia  
cotton, dyes (supplementary warp),  
May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0863







**Left: Ikat cloth (hinggi)**, Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia cotton, dyes (warp ikat, supp. warp) May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0885

Both ikat and supplementary warp techniques were used to create this hinggi. Crocodile-like ancestor figures appear along the border, while skull trees, monkeys, plants, birds, and chickens adorn the central band. An unusual pegasus-like creature appears near the top of the cloth, demonstrating the imagination of the weaver.



**Women's skirt (lau)**, 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (supplementary warp), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0864







**Left: Ikat cloth (hinggi),** Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0886

Produced with commercial dyes, this vibrant hinggi is designed in a single vertical band. Layers of large, skeletal humanoid figures are likely inspired by similar textiles from Borneo which are highly marketable to a Western audience.

**Shoulder cloth,** 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (supplementary warp), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0842







**Ikat cloth (hinggi)**, Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat) May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0874





**Ikat cloth (hinggi)**, Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat, supp. warp) May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0645









**Shoulder cloth**, 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia cotton, dyes  
(supplementary warp) May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0847

A large crocodile eats a humanoid figure in this shoulder cloth, likely illustrating a story from Sumbanese folklore. Additional dye was applied to the surface of this design, adding dimensionality to the scene.





**Above: Ikat cloth**, 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0835

This hinggi contains mirrored images of large roosters, deer, and snakes. The repetition of horizontal bands reflects a favored early 20th century design.

**Right: Ikat cloth**, Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia, cotton, dyes (warp ikat), May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0873

The centralized figures in this late 20th century cloth illustrate a harmonious incorporation of the global into the local. Although this cloth depicts several classic Sumba motifs including ancestor figures, local birds, aquatic creatures, and skull trees, the weaver also found inspiration in a popular trade good: Chinese porcelain decorated with winding dragons.







**Top to bottom: Shoulder cloth**, Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia  
cotton, dyes (supplementary warp)

May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0844

**Shoulder cloth**, Late 20th century, Sumba, Indonesia cotton, dyes  
(supplementary warp) May Weber Ethnographic Collection 2014.001.0850

These two small cloths feature intricate supplementary warp designs along with surface-applied pigment. The top example contains omega shaped *mamuli*, or highly treasured golden ear pendants that are worn by Sumbanese women on special occasions. Mamuli often have carefully crafted warrior figures on their looped ends.







