



Pua Kumbu Textile

This is a spectacular piece of *Pua Kumbu* textile woven with the traditional Curve Dyaks Motif. *Pua Kumbu* is a well known tribal textile from Borneo in Southeast Asia - a fabric that is also known as *ritual cloth*. It is mainly and traditionally hand-woven by the Iban women of Sarawak who are part of the Dayak tribe and acclaimed as the finest weavers in all of Borneo.

Pua Kumbu weavings are used mainly in ritual during ceremonies & festivals associated with the Iban's religion cultural beliefs. They serve as a means of communication between this world & the world of their ancestors, spirits & gods.

In the early centuries of maritime trading, Indian traders brought the back-strap loom to Southeast Asia and introduced cotton as an alternative to bark-cloth textile. These new textiles and materials provided a new dimension to weaving in Borneo.

The cotton *Pua Kumbu* are among the most renowned and sought after textile in Borneo. As in many cultures, weaving is traditionally the work of women and her status in the community can be revealed from the type of motifs woven in her cloth. In the olden days, motifs with human-like figures or anthropomorphs (*engkaramba*) could only be woven by wives and daughters of chiefs. These figures with raised arms and out-turned legs are representations of deities of the Iban's animistic religion and serve as a talisman to protect the wearer from danger as well as to ensure a bountiful harvest for the season. Although sometimes difficult to interpret, the motifs and colouring are usually inspired by the environment and reveal a lot about the Iban's rituals and beliefs.

While most motifs are visual representations of animals, plants and even daily activities, others are more complex and abstract like this particular piece.

Kept as family heirlooms, these patterns are passed from mother to daughter. Like a personal stamp, the Iban women infuse much of their creativity in their weaving and decorative style. The most popular is the ikat or tie-and-die method. The warp patterns are created by selectively dyeing the longitudinal threads prior to weaving. This is also known as resist dyeing. When the dyed yarns are woven with a plain weft, the warped patterns emerge fuzzy and indistinct. Old beliefs of misfortunes and death befalling them kept weavers from straying from traditional motifs and methods of weaving.

Weavers use dyes made from roots, bark leaves and other vegetation. These natural dyes are closely guarded secrets and getting the right tones is a difficult skill that requires much experience. Dying often takes months and

