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SUZANI

Emirate of Bukhara

Second half of the 19th century

*Cotton craft fabric, silk threads,
hand embroidery*

About the project

[https://tsaritsyno-museum.ru/
events/special/p/lyudi-i-fondy-eng/](https://tsaritsyno-museum.ru/events/special/p/lyudi-i-fondy-eng/)





SELECTED BY
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I am a supervisor of the exhibition projects, and one of my tasks, I would say, my favorite one, is to look through our holdings in search of exhibits for future exhibitions. When one day the fabric curator unrolled suzani in front of me, I 'drowned' in this riot of embroidery and luxury of flowers.

The cloth was and remains not only a ritual item: it is also used in everyday life, and therefore it wears out quickly. But our items were lucky enough to keep the colours and the density of the fabric. It was obvious that these embroideries were rarely exhibited as they remained in excellent condition. It seems like just yesterday the women of a large Uzbek family completed their embroidery and put the work away in the chest where the bride's dowry is collected.

The suzani would not get out of my head. When the museum came up with this project, I realized that this was a great opportunity to show its magnificence.

Our suzani comes from Bukhara, the centre of trade and crafts, education and Muslim learning, one of the five major centres of embroidery in Uzbekistan. The Bukhara suzani ornamentally refers to the luxury of Persian carpets and the decor of luxurious city houses.

Several craftswomen work on a suzani of this size at the same time, and almost every flower rosette is embroidered in its own way: the set of threads for all craftswomen is the same, but the sense of composition is different. Collective art is also necessary to speed up the work: even when embroidering together, women spend from 1.5 to 3 years on one suzani! Each bride needs her own suzani, and more than one, so the family begins preparing embroidery for a girl's dowry since her birth. The suzani decorates the walls, beds and pillows in the newlyweds' room; sometimes the bride is wrapped in the suzani or has embroidery over it during the

wedding ceremony. The embroidered floral abundance is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden; it is a wish for prosperity, fertility and family happiness.

For wide embroidery, several narrow stripes (tachi) were used. Before starting the work, they were basted together and carried to the draftsman (kalamkash). She applied the pattern, after which the cover was again ripped into strips, and each craftswoman embroidered her own part, that is why the design in the suzani at the junctions of the strips often does not match.

The draftsman applied the pattern to the base without tracing paper or sketches, by hand, with soot and a sharpened reed pen, and later with a pencil. The skill of draftsmen was hereditary, and the attitude towards them was contradictory. People needed the service of draftswomen, but they believed that the kalamkash themselves were susceptible to illness or were more likely to encounter life's difficulties, since drawing for Islamic society was akin to magic. The suzani kalamkash received the right to apply a pattern after a special initiation ceremony, and then the job became destiny, there was no right to refuse it.

The suzani hides its secrets, characteristic of many folk crafts. Taking a closer look, one can notice that the fabric has sketch lines. It is not an oversight of the craftswoman, but a tradition. From the Muslim point of view, perfection is inherent only in God, and therefore even the most amazing work must be slightly imperfect. Older women left a small section of fabric unembroidered for future craftswomen, almost literally stretching the thread of tradition between generations.