

Artes de las Filipinas

The Long Tradition of Hand Embroidery in Taal, Batangas



A nineteenth century pi cloth with embroidered edges, believed to be the property of the Yriarte family of <?xml:namespace prefix = st1 ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:smarttags" />Manila.

Photo Courtesy of Teresa de Vera from Casa Manila

THE LONG TRADITION OF HAND EMBROIDERY IN TAAL, BATANGAS

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The town of Taal, Batangas had a long tradition of hand embroidery since the turn of the century. Its intricate, well-embossed hand embroidery made it increasingly a refined art of society. It boasts of its highly *callado* (a kind of filigree work wherein yarn in painstakingly pulled off from the cloth) as one of the finest in the world.

Pina and jusi are the traditional fabrics used by the bordadoras. Pina is a soft, fine, flexible, and durable off-white fabric about two to four inches in length. It is derived from the finest mature leaves of the red Spanish variety of pineapple. During the Spanish period, pina was the most expensive and highly sought fabric worn for barong Tagalog by the ilustrados on very rare special occasions. It is a very delicate material, too difficult and expensive to embroider. Jusi (the Chinese term for raw silk), on the other hand, is a lightweight, flimsy, and ecru colored fabric regarded by the bordadoras as the best material for embroidery.



The vanishing thread (eskaladao) as shown in the flower motif.

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In Taal, hand embroideries are characterized by the following: *makinis* (smooth and even quality of the embroidery stitches), *sunod ang korte, pino* (fine) at *masinsin, hindi makarat ang dibuho* (design should be composed of fine, delicate shapes that are not scattered all over the cloth), *mabintog* (embossed quality of the embroidery which gives depth and volume to the design), *matibay* (durable), *hindi hiris ang panahi*, and *magkakahawig na kulay*. The *makinis* is the most important criterion of beauty in embroidery.

Hand embroidery starts with a *magdidibuho* (designer) who is in charge of stamping designs on the cloth. The cloth is then passed on to the *magbuburda* (embroiderer) who embroiders the cloth which the designer has stamped. The *magkabalado* works on the cut-openwork portion of the embroidery. There are three persons assisting the *magkabalado*: the *magbabakbak*, *maglalala*, and the *magmumunggo*. The *magbabakbak* draws the thread out from the cloth. The *maglalala* draws together the thread left in the process of *pagbabakbak* by applying various embroidery stitches on the cloth. The *magmumunggo* embroiders the part where thread was drawn together. These three functions can sometimes be done by a single person.



From the *calado* (open-work design), the cloth is brought to the *magaagohero*, in charge of embroidering the hem or edges of the embroidered cloth after which the *maglalaba* washes the embroidered cloth. The cloth then is mounted on a wooden frame to dry under the sun. Once dried, the cloth is folded and delivered to the *cabecilla* to sell.

During the early 1900s, *naguas* or *lagwas* (undergarments) and *kamison* (chemise) were the very first items to be embroidered. The intricate embroidery and *callado* are found in the bodice and hemline. *Panuelo* made of pina cloth have cut-open work and floral design on its edges. The leaves and flowers motif was the dominant design imprinted on cloth.

References:

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