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**A Garden of Shawls: The Buta and Its Seeds**  
**October 1, 2004 – March 6, 2005**

**September 1, 2004, Washington, DC** — In Kashmir, an area at the foot of the Indian Himalayas, weavers produced a garment of supreme quality – the Kashmir shawl. This fall, The Textile Museum exhibition [A Garden of Shawls: The Buta and Its Seeds](#) will trace the development of the design vocabulary of Kashmir shawls through the *buta*, a shape known in the West as a paisley. The exhibition will be on view October 1, 2004 – March 6, 2005. Art historian Eunice Dauterman Maguire, Curator of the Johns Hopkins University Archaeological Collection, is guest curator for the exhibition. All of the objects in [A Garden of Shawls](#) come from The Textile Museum’s collections.

**History of Kashmir Shawls**

Originally worn by rich and noble men, Kashmir shawls were made under imperial patronage and often presented to foreign dignitaries. As the shawls came West, they became a woman’s fashion, and 19<sup>th</sup>-century European textile manufacturers imitated their designs using industrial looms. A center of shawl production in Paisley, Scotland lent its name to the Kashmir shawl pattern. Prompted by the European traders, Kashmiri weavers and embroiderers incorporated European designs into their handmade shawls.

**Origins of the Buta**

Centuries before the *buta* design decorated Kashmir shawls, stylized representations of leaves, trees, and flowers were exchanged between textiles of Asia and the Mediterranean.



An example of the *buta* design explored in [A Garden of Shawls](#).

**Shawl fragment**  
Kashmir  
19<sup>th</sup> century  
The Textile Museum 1969.28.20  
Gift of Ronald Harvey Goodman

## A Garden of Shawls - 2

Floral representations adorned other garments and textiles – evoking gardens and garden architecture as well as birds and scenes of the hunt – in the medieval textile traditions of India, Iran, Byzantium, Sicily, and Spain. The motif of framed leaves with bent tips and a flower head reappeared in a variety of representations throughout the early modern period and before. In courtly gardens and palaces some actual plant arrangements in containers apparently reflect textiles, just as textiles and architectural ceramics and sculpture may reflect actual arrangements of plants. A Garden of Shawls includes examples of these precursors to the *buta* design, including tapestry-woven textiles of linen and wool used or made in pre-Islamic Egypt, silk textiles from Iran, and resist-dyed cotton textiles imported to Egypt from northern India, or coming from the storeroom of an Indian palace. In these weaving traditions, floral motifs represent flowers, trees, and leaves with overtones of wealth and power.

### **Associations of the Buta**

The complex origins of the *buta* design have infused it with a dense set of references. *Buta* in Hindi or Urdu means bush or shrub, but the design came to represent a leaf, tree, foliage, flower-cluster, or seed cone – sometimes all at once. Focusing on selected elements of the motif can make a single *buta* appear to be a flower bud, a whole tree, a sprouting plant or shrub, a potted plant, or a bouquet. By simply shifting the scale of the *buta*, or one of its parts, from small to large and back again, a single image can take on multiple meanings. A flowering stem may become a tree, or a leaf-shaped silhouette may stand for a tree's whole crown – or just one of its boughs. In its coded garden representations, the *buta* can also simply represent the life force of the garden.

The *buta* motif, and its relationship to the garden, defines the Kashmir shawl as a garment of luxury, refuge, comfort, and grace. Like Indian gardens of the Mughal period, the earliest floral Kashmir shawls express the safety of a strong dynasty. The later 19<sup>th</sup>-century shawls, nurtured by European interest in Asia, are fantasy gardens of another kind, especially welcome in the increasingly urban and industrial environment in which people lived. Even today the *buta* continues to fascinate people and inspire new textile designs that unite diverse parts of the globe.

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**Related Symposium**

**27<sup>th</sup> Annual Rug Convention**

**"Indian Textile Traditions: Exchange & Transformation"**

October 15-17, 2004

Complementing and expanding ideas from the exhibitions *Floral Perspectives in Carpet Design* (August 27, 2004 – February 6, 2005) and *A Garden of Shawls: The Buta and Its Seeds* (October 1, 2004 – March 6, 2005), this two-day conference will explore the enduring influence of Mughal art as expressed in textiles and carpets. Participants will enjoy a rich program of presentations by scholars and researchers, receptions, exhibition tours, and a “Show-and-Tell” of related textiles.

**Speakers include:** **Dr. Joseph M. Dye III**, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Curator of South Asian and Islamic Art, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; **Steven Cohen**, independent textile historian, London; **Jeff Spurr**, Cataloguer for Islamic Art, Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University; **Dr. Eunice Dauterman Maguire**, Curator, Johns Hopkins University Archaeological Collection; **Arlene Cooper**, independent scholar, New York; **Carol Bier**, Research Associate for Islamic Textiles, The Textile Museum.

**Fee:** \$215 for Textile Museum members; \$260 for non-members (includes a one-year membership to The Textile Museum). Optional Saturday lunch: \$20. Advance registration required. Registration forms and additional information can be obtained by calling 202-667-0441, or visiting [www.textilemuseum.org/rugconvention.htm](http://www.textilemuseum.org/rugconvention.htm)

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Founded in 1925 by George Hewitt Myers, The Textile Museum is an international center for the exhibition, study, collection and preservation of the textile arts. The Museum explores the role that textiles play in the daily and ceremonial life of individuals the world over. Special attention is given to textiles of the Near East, Asia, Africa and the indigenous cultures of the Americas. The Museum also presents exhibitions of historical and contemporary quilts, and fiber art. With a collection of more than 17,000 textiles and rugs and an unparalleled library, The Textile Museum is a unique and valuable resource for people locally, nationally and internationally.

The Textile Museum is located at 2320 'S' Street, NW in Washington, DC. The Museum is open Monday - Saturday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm and Sunday 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Admission is free; suggested donation is \$5.00. For further information, call 202-667-0441.

**For more information or images**, please contact Cyndi Spain at 202-667-0441, ext. 17, or by email at [cspain@textilemuseum.org](mailto:cspain@textilemuseum.org) or visit [www.textilemuseum.org/about/pressroom.htm](http://www.textilemuseum.org/about/pressroom.htm).