

Royal Weaves

Traditional textile arts of Malaysia

In preparation for Royal Weaves exhibition, a programme of cultural exchange was conducted to allow the artisans in Malaysia to teach the research team from The Prince's School of Traditional Arts about the beauty of their craft, as well as demonstrate their technical expertise. In exchange, the PSTA research team taught workshops which highlighted universal design principles which were reflected in the textile arts of Malaysia.

The first of the cultural exchanges took place in Kuala Terengganu in the East Coast of Malaysia, where the art of songket flourished and continues as a major craft. The present Sultan of Terengganu is currently the King of Malaysia. His wife, the Queen, Seri Paduka Baginda Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Nur Zahirah, is patron of a foundation that "aims to preserve and enhance Malaysia's indigenous craft and heritage by helping to improve the livelihoods of artisans, weavers and craftsmen".

Our hosts from Yayasan Sultan Azlan Shah and Kraftangan in Perak welcomed us for the second of the cultural exchange programmes. The embroiderers took the lead in the cultural exchange, presenting a demonstration of every step of the making of tekat. This hands-on learning gave the PSTA team a much better understanding of the skills required to produce the finely crafted designs.

In the course of this two week visit, important lessons were learned, mutual understanding was fostered, and a sense of cooperation towards a common vision and goal was developed. The participating organisations agree that there is a need for sustaining traditional arts and moving them forward as part of a continuity of the tradition. Part of that continuity can be maintained in building an understanding of the principles of the traditional art and creating contemporary designs from them.

