



Colcha embroidery on sabanilla cloth

Date

after 1919

Primary Maker

Artist not recorded, possibly a member of the Graves family

Medium

Wool

Description

Support, patched old plain weave homespun or sabanilla, from old woolsacks. Design, center, four large intertwined

rattlesnakes. On four outer sides, four crucifixions with red corpus. In smaller scale, 14 penitentes in profile, four blue horses and eight pigeons on very large scale. Clouds and four-pointed tan stars. Solidly embroidered all over in colcha stitch with light natural background. Yarns, handspun and Germantown, handspun of commercial dyes, ravelled from old blankets. During the 1920s and 1930s, people enthusiastically collected Southwest material culture. To capitalize on this growing market, Elmer Shupe, a blanket trader, founded a cottage-industry for colcha-making in the Mormon settlement of Carson, New Mexico. Early operations produced patchwork foundations of salvaged sabanilla covered with unraveled yarn from old Rio Grande or trade blankets. With this peculiar mix of recycled materials, embroiderers stitched fanciful pictorial scenes of local, often romanticized, themes to appeal to tourists and transplants. This sensational example of a "Carson colcha" exoticizes the religious practices of the lay Catholic brotherhood, Los Hermanos Penitentes, and juxtaposes them with a blend of pan-southwestern imagery, including a Saltillo-inspired central medallion and diamondback rattle snakes. Although Carson colchas primarily promoted commercial interests, the work influenced later community-driven revivals and contemporary colcha design.

Dimensions

Overall: 48 1/16 x 79 1/8 in. (122 x 201 cm)