

Object Summary



Embroidered and Appliquéd Cotton Tent Panel (Khayamiya)

20th century

Egypt (Cairo)

Object Summary

Cotton

Overall: 94 1/8 x 89 3/8 in. (239 x 227cm)

This appliquéd cotton tent panel depicts two “windows” of distinct, tessellated geometric patterns above which there are two bands of stylized vegetation. Between these two registers in an inscription in rather unwieldy Arabic; the second part (to the viewer’s left side) reads “all art seeks”, but the first part (on the viewer’s right side) has puzzled many scholars who have attempted to read it. The words might be misspelled, or they might be derived from Hebrew or Coptic dialects incorporated into Egyptian Arabic. Our best guess is that it reads “the Nile of Egypt erased”, which is rather cryptic! Tent panels such as this example would have been commissioned for a special celebration: a wedding, a circumcision, or another festive shared event which required a temporary structure to accommodate and host guests. Brightly colored and quickly made, they were regarded as somewhat “disposable” and the craftspeople who specialize in their making have not traditionally enjoyed a high status. There has been a renewal of interest in the making of khayamiya, with Egyptians commissioning panels which incorporate traditional motifs as well as pop culture iconography, as well as renewed interest in their craftsmanship and making.