

# Meeting Ornaments: The Textile Tradition in Slovenia and Lithuania

The Velenje Museum in Slovenia and the Znavykai Museum in Lithuania have set up a joined virtual exhibition to celebrate the meeting of two cultures and the common European heritage. The exhibition Meeting Ornaments tells a story of the textile traditions of countries 1.500 kilometers apart but which are still representative of the common European heritage. The exhibition presents the textile tradition of the Znavykai region in southwestern Lithuania, that of Šalek Valley, and the broader Slovenian traditions.

The exhibition is the result of the Erasmus+ mobility project visit of the Velenje Museum team from Slovenia to the Znavykai Museum in Lithuania in 2019. "Flax and Linen Heritage in Museum Activities: Connecting the Past and the Future" is a two-year project, run under the reference 2019-1-SI01-KA104-060349.



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**Velenje Museum,** October 2020

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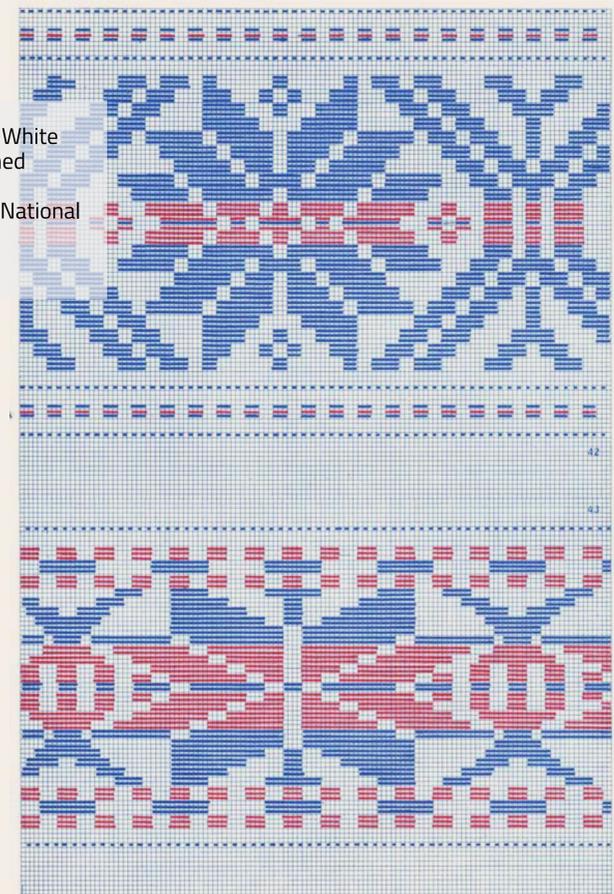
# Textile Heritage Connecting Cultures

An ornament is a sign and a means of identification, something that represents its place and culture of origin. Finding the same ornament on an item of another culture gives an impression of closeness that is much like kinship.

Ornaments reflect distinctive cultural and social meanings and a specificity of historical backgrounds. In some cases, they tell us about common roots, encounters and exchanges, sometimes hundreds of years in the ancient past.

Textile, a universal domain of everyday life of people across the globe, is an excellent meeting place of cultures, may it be a chance for a glimpse or a deeper look.

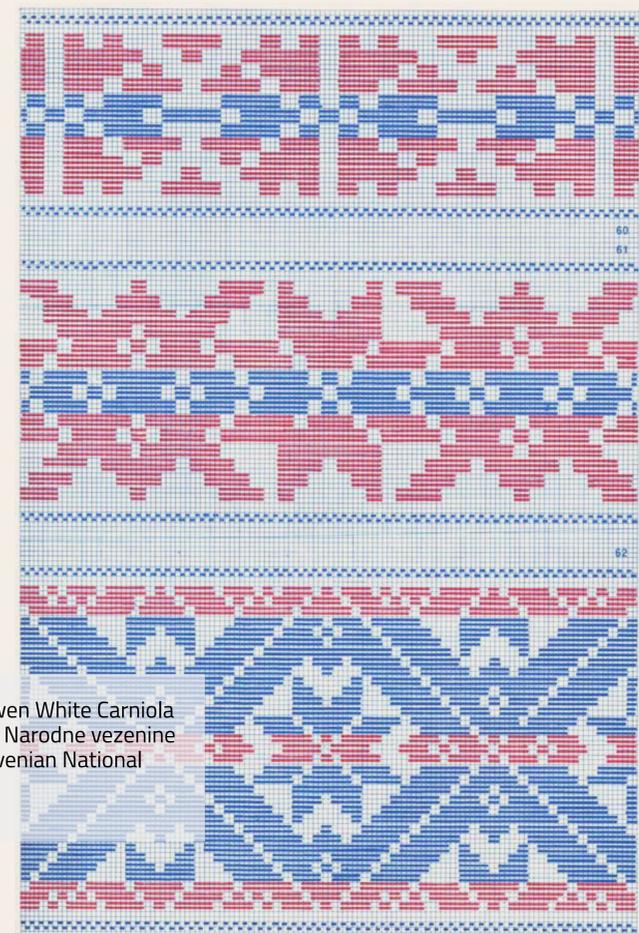
Patterns of intervoven White Carniola towels, published in Narodne vezenine na Slovenskem (Slovenian National Embroidery). Slovenia.



Traditional sashes from the Zonavykai region. National M. K. Čiurlionis Museum of Art Archive, published in Zanavykų tekstilės tradicijos (Zanavykai Textile Traditions). Lithuania.



Patterns of intervoven White Carniola towels, published in Narodne vezenine na Slovenskem (Slovenian National Embroidery). Slovenia.



# Textile Tradition in Slovenia

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Slovenian textile heritage is as diverse as the country's cultural geographical mixture of the Alpine, Mediterranean and Pannonian worlds and their picturesque terrains of forests, hills and valleys.

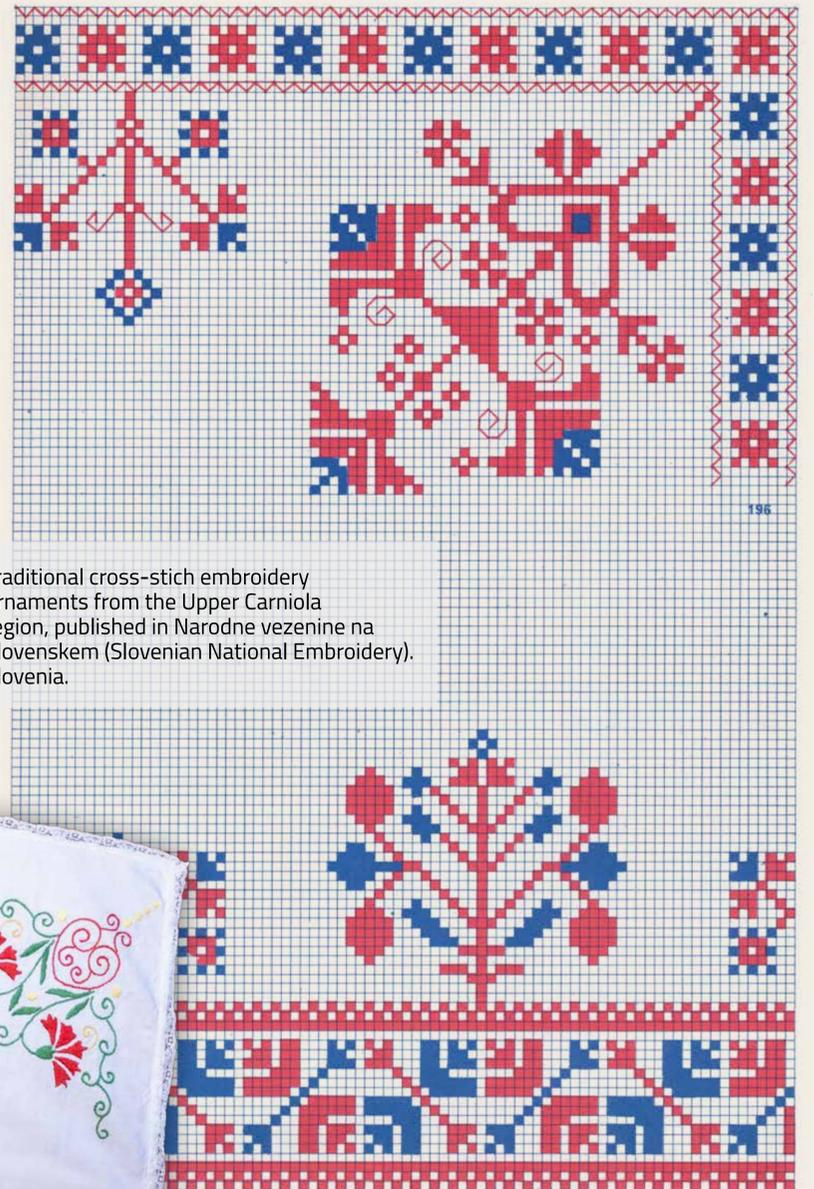
Ornaments from White Carniola, which originated from the weaving technique patterns, Upper Carniola's cross-stitch embroidery, the famous Idrija lace, Prekmurje's Pannonian-like embroidery – it is a diverse palette of stories that reflect hundreds of years of Slovenian cultural heritage evolution.

Various motifs found in red, blue, brown, and black colours are the most typical of the country's decorative textile heritage. Today, the embroidered ornaments and the diversity of techniques are a testament to the long-lasting Slovenian textile tradition.

Traditional embroidery ornaments collected by Albert Sič, published in Narodne vezenine na Kranjskem (National Embroidery of Kranjska), Slovenia.



Traditional cross-stitch embroidery ornaments from the Upper Carniola region, published in Narodne vezenine na Slovenskem (Slovenian National Embroidery), Slovenia.



Easter basket cover, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, flat stitch embroidery, Velenje Museum collections, Slovenia.



A fragment of the embroidered motif, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, flat stitch embroidery, Velenje Museum collections, Slovenia.



# Textile Tradition in Lithuania

Lithuania's textile tradition is an essential part of its cultural identity. It was one of the European countries which had been known for flax and linen export as early as in the Middle Ages. Its textile tradition and heritage rests on the very rich brocade weaving traditions that are still alive today.

The embroidery tradition follows the common European techniques – especially whitework with the ornamentation done in crochet lace technique that decorates Sunday-best clothes and home textiles. In Lithuania, as well as in Slovenia, ornaments, colours and techniques tell us about regional differences.

The Zanyvykai region stands out with its special combined weaving technique with pastiched floral motifs, whitework and a variety of colours, including beetroot red, violet, orange, green, and dark blue.

Traditional sashes from the Zanyvykai region. National M. K. Čiurlionis Museum of Art collections, published in Zanyvykų tekstilės tradicijos (Zanyvykai Textile Traditions). Lithuania.



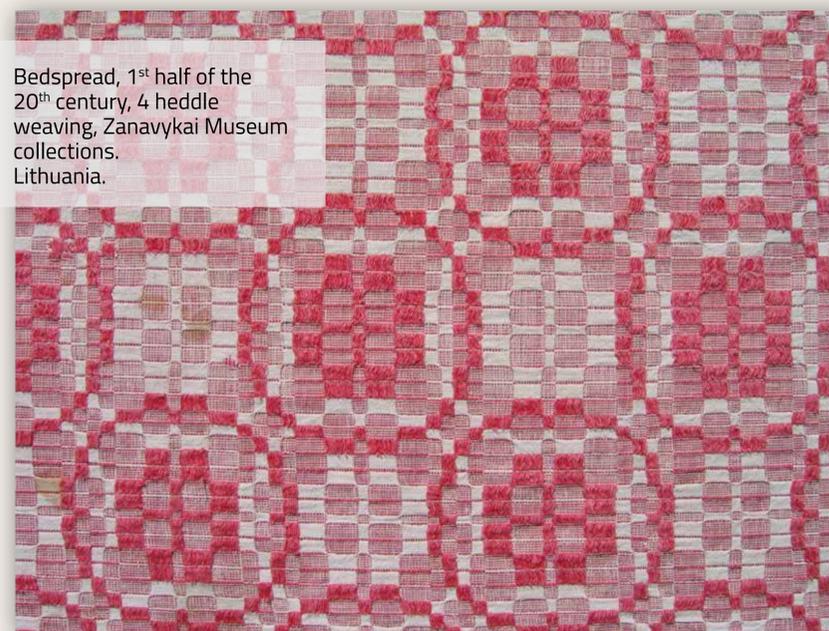
Fragments of traditional aprons, 19<sup>th</sup> century, combined weaving technique with pastiched floral motifs, "Židinys" Gallery collections, published in Zanyvykų tekstilės tradicijos (Zanyvykai Textile Traditions). Lithuania.



Fragments of traditional aprons, 19<sup>th</sup> century, combined weaving technique with pastiched floral motifs, Zanyvykai Museum and National M. K. Čiurlionis Museum of Art collections, published in Zanyvykų tekstilės tradicijos (Zanyvykai Textile Traditions). Lithuania.



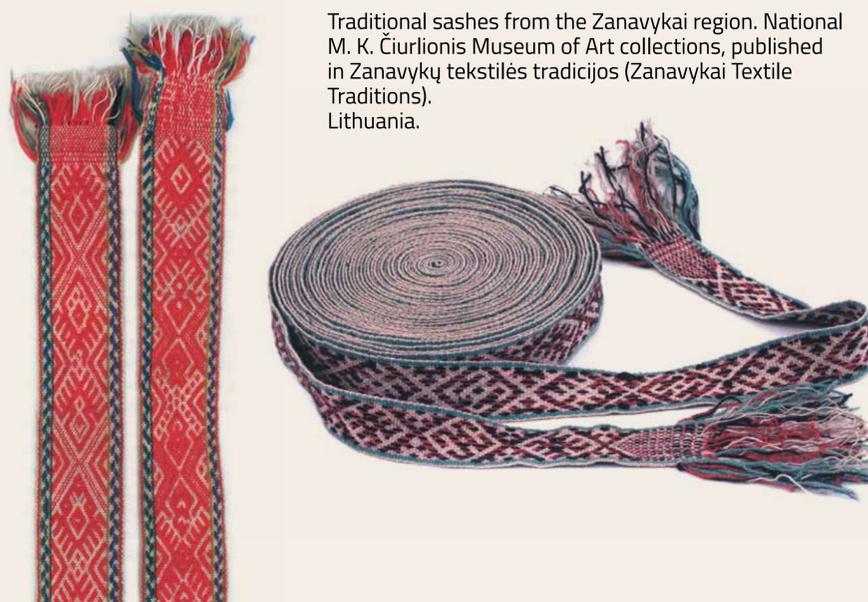
Bedsread, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 4 heddle weaving, Zanyvykai Museum collections. Lithuania.



Carpet from the cemetery chapel, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, combined weaving technique with pastiched motifs, Barzdai. Lithuania.



Traditional sashes from the Zanyvykai region. National M. K. Čiurlionis Museum of Art collections, published in Zanyvykų tekstilės tradicijos (Zanyvykai Textile Traditions). Lithuania.



# Techniques

Technique is what defines the ornament to a great extent. Pattern weaving through four, eight, twelve, sixteen or more heddles enables complex patterns and easier repetitiveness, and is the basis of geometric ornaments, although limited in colour combinations.

Embroidery offers a richer palette of ornamentation and colour combinations, defined by the technique – the freely drawn designs or those made by counting threads.

Easter basket cover, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, flat stitch embroidery, Velenje Museum collections, Slovenia.



Bedspread, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 8 heddle weaving, Zanavykai, Lepšiai village, Inga Nėnienė archive, Lithuania.



Towel, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, crochet lace decoration and embroidered monogram, Velenje Museum collections, Slovenia.

# Weaving Ornaments

Tablecloths, altar cloths, bedspreads, carpets, towels, aprons, and sashes are the main textile pieces created with the patterned weaving technique in Lithuania. Geometric ornaments are rich in variations of damask, diamond, herringbone, 8-pointed stars, and other motifs, combined with elements such as triangles, rhombs, zigzags, and squares. A typical floral pattern from the Zanavykai region is a tulip or a lily.

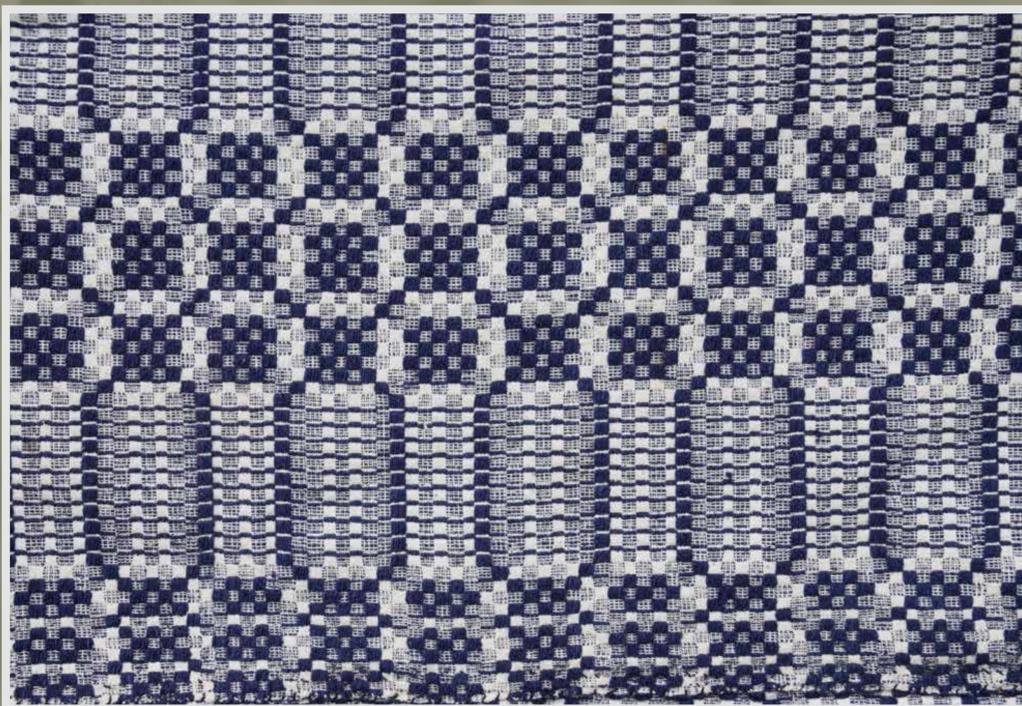
Ornaments carry similar names and symbolic meanings, as it is common among cultures throughout Europe. Some Lithuanian patterns resemble the traditional White Carniola ornaments created with the interwoven technique, and the ornaments found on the ancient woven fabrics in Slovenia.



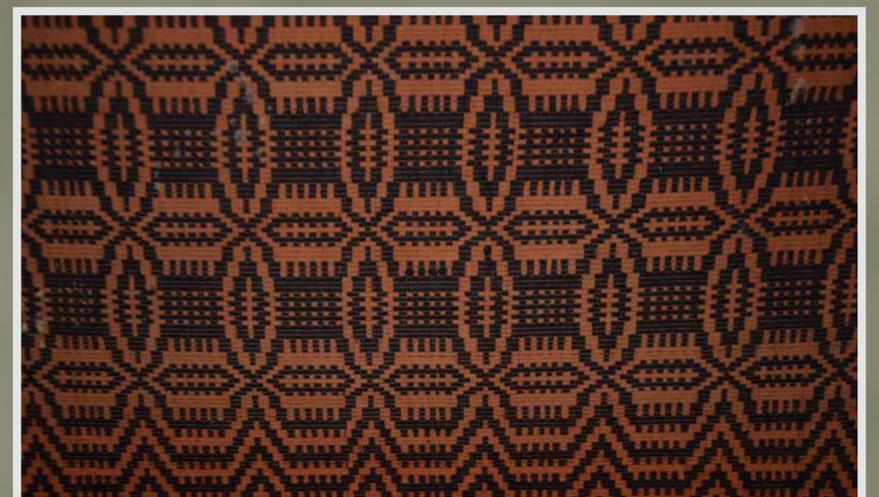
Cover, 19<sup>th</sup> century, rhomb weaving, Gelgaudiškis church. Lithuania.



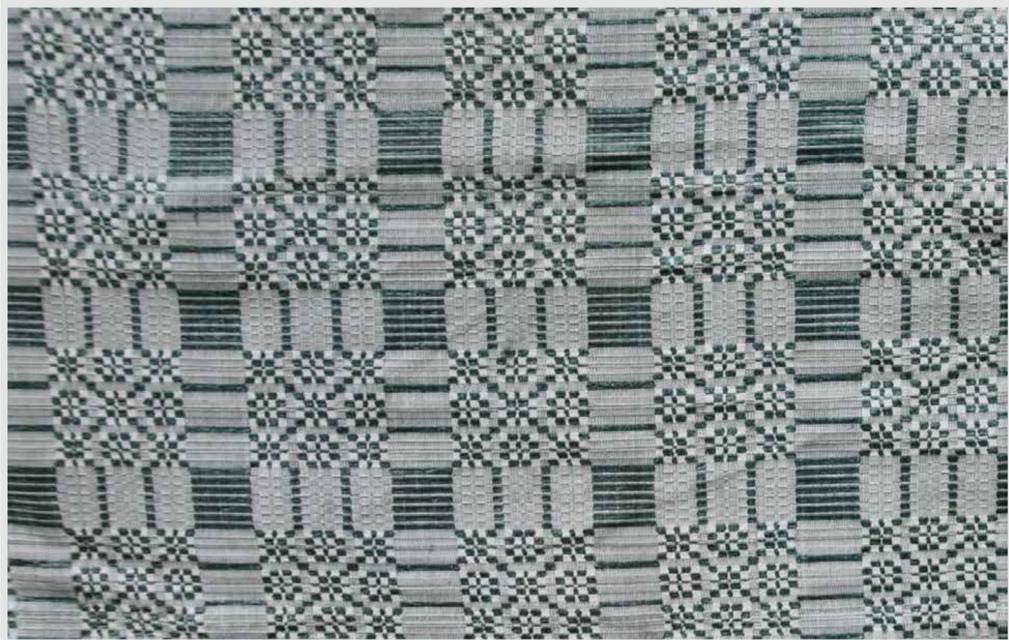
Altar cloth, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 8 heddle weaving, Sutkai church. Lithuania.



Cover, 4 heddle weaving, Paežerėliai church. Lithuania.



Altar cloth, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 8 heddle weaving, Barzdai. Lithuania.



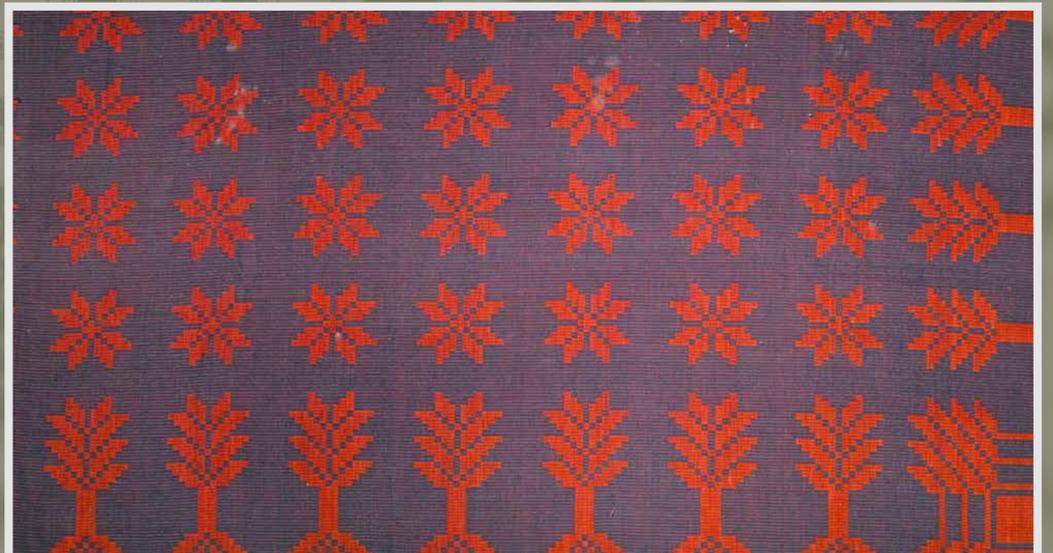
Altar cloth, 4 heddle weaving, Kretkampis church. Lithuania.



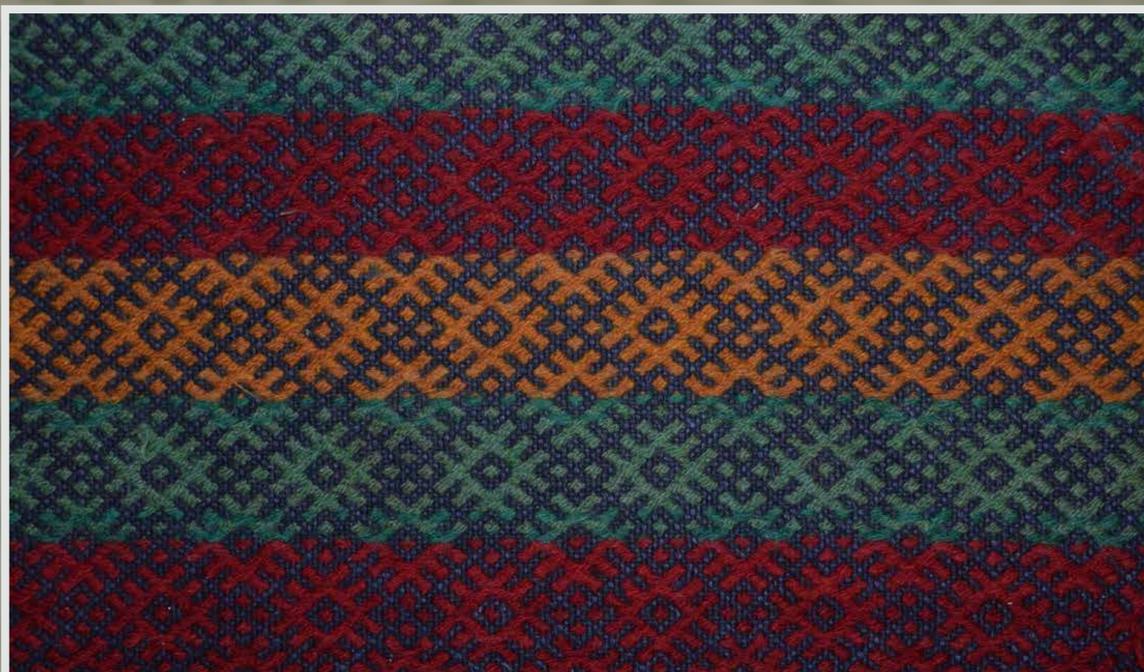
Carpet, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, pick-up weaving, Lukšiai church. Lithuania.



Carpet, pick-up weaving, Gelgaudiškis church. Lithuania.



Altar cloth, 19<sup>th</sup> century, pick-up weaving, Gelgaudiškis church. Lithuania.



Carpet, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, pick-up weaving, Ilguva church. Lithuania.



Altar cloth, 19<sup>th</sup> century, 4 heddle weaving, Kaimelis church. Lithuania.

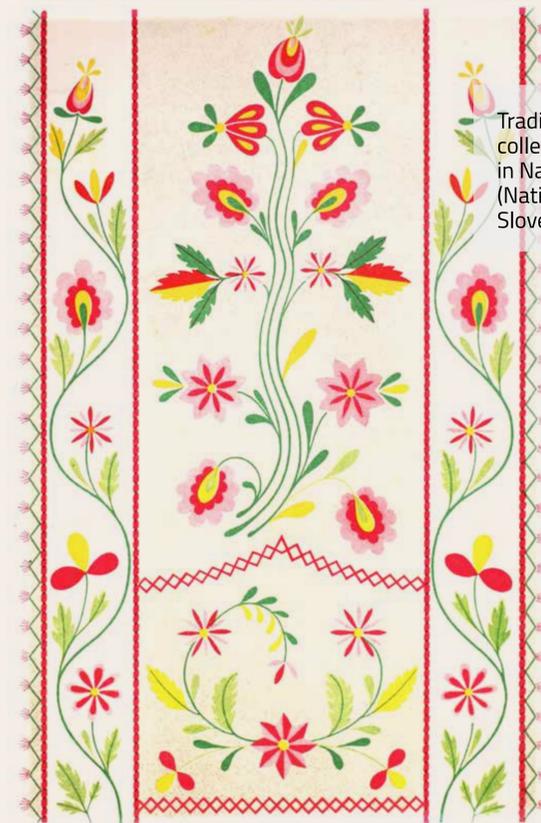
# Embroidery Ornaments

When it comes to Slovenian embroidery, traditional floral patterns prevail. The motif of carnation is widely accepted as the most typical and widespread ornament motif. It originated in the Upper Carniola region and is created mainly with the cross-stich technique, but is popular with other techniques as well.

Among the other patterns, the bird motif – peacocks, cocks, pigeons, doves, ravens – is to be found on White Carniola interwoven ornaments, as well as geometrical 8-pointed stars, rhombs, squares and a variety of their combinations. The symbol of a human heart, an image of unchangeable form, is widespread in all types of embroidery techniques. Tablecloths, bedsheets, pillowcases, towels, and garments are to be found among those decorated with various embroidery techniques.



Traditional cross-stich embroidery ornaments from the Upper Carniola region, published in Narodne vezenine na Slovenskem (Slovenian National Embroidery). Slovenia.



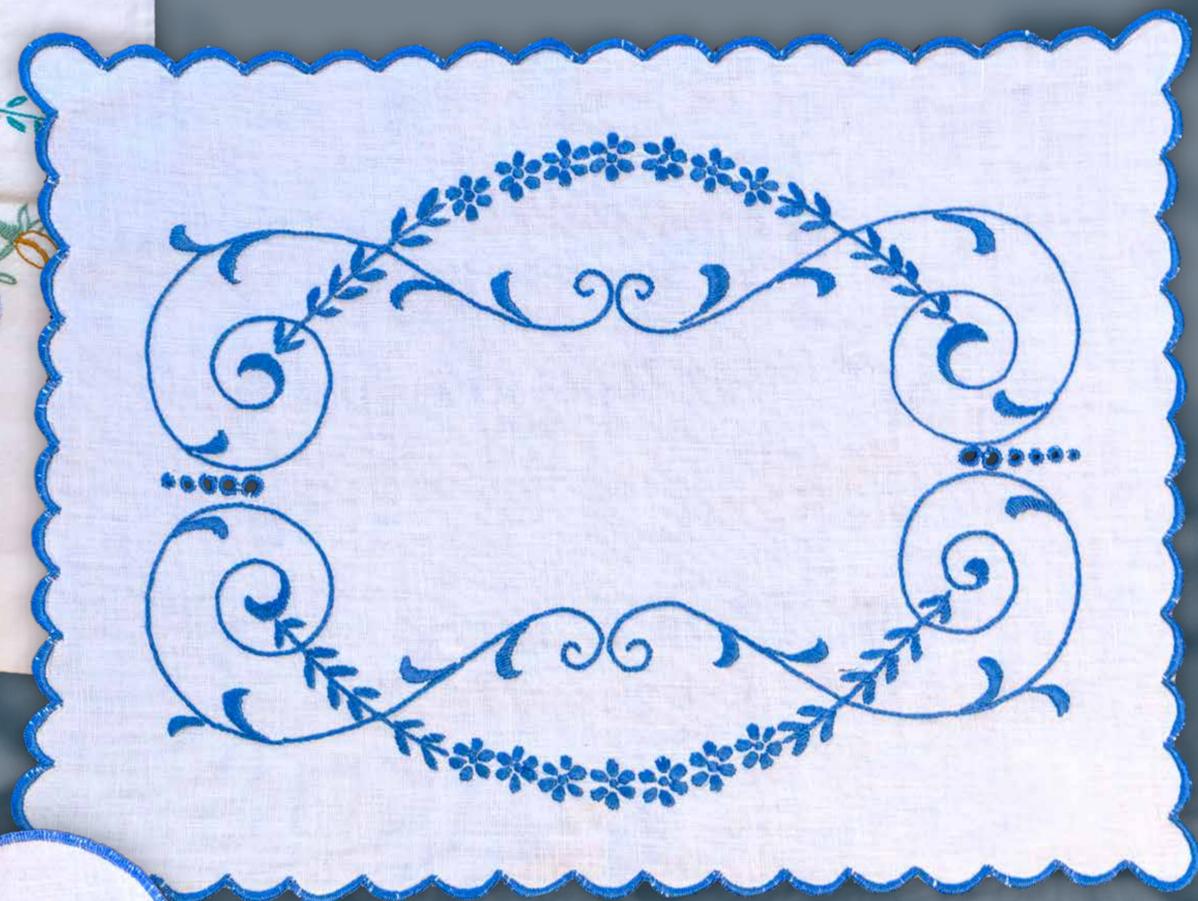
Traditional embroidery ornaments collected by Albert Sič, published in Narodne vezenine na Kranjskem (National Embroidery of Kranjska). Slovenia.



Traditional embroidery ornaments collected by Albert Sič, published in Narodne vezenine na Kranjskem (National Embroidery of Kranjska). Slovenia.



Pillowcase, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, flat stitch embroidery, Velenje Museum collections. Slovenia.



Small tablecloth, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, flat stitch embroidery, Velenje Museum collections. Slovenia.



Small tablecloth, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, flat stitch embroidery, Velenje Museum collections. Slovenia.



Tablecloth, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, flat stitch embroidery, Velenje Museum collections. Slovenia.

# Whitework Ornaments

Whitework embroidery is popular in home textiles and altar coverings in churches, as well as for decoration of details on women's garments, mainly shirts and scarves.

Altar cover, 19<sup>th</sup> century, whitework, Kaimelis church.  
Lithuania.



Tablecloth, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the  
20<sup>th</sup> century, whitework, Velenje  
Museum collections.  
Slovenia.

# Crochet Lace Ornaments

Crochet lace, adorning the diverse home textiles and some elements of garments, is widely used in both Slovenian and Lithuanian traditions.



Tablecloth, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 8 heddle weaving, crochet lace decoration, Ašmučiai village. Lithuania.



Cover, 19<sup>th</sup> century, crochet lace and macramé decoration, embroidered monogram, Kaimelis church. Lithuania.



Pillowcase, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, crochet lace decoration, Velenje Museum collections. Slovenia.



Towel, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, crochet lace decoration, Velenje Museum collections. Slovenia.

# Ornaments at Home

Home is the space where various decorated textile pieces find their place and function – to decorate the everyday life.

Wall covering in the Gril homestead, Velenje Museum, Slovenia.



Traditional bed arrangement in Zanavykai Museum exhibition, Lithuania.



Living room in the Gril homestead, Velenje Museum, Slovenia.



Towel, embroidered monogram and macramé decoration, Zanavykai Museum collections, Lithuania.



Embroidered tablecloth, Velenje Museum collections, Slovenia.



Traditional bed arrangement and the wall covering in the Gril homestead, Velenje Museum, Slovenia.



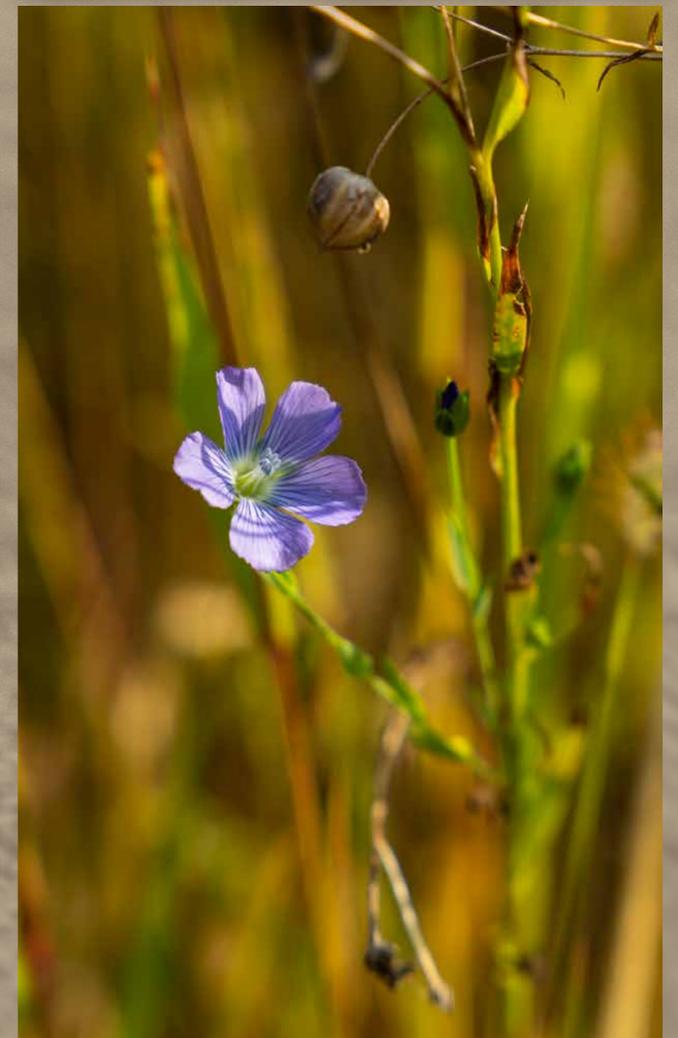
Room arrangement in ethnographic Suvalkietis homestead, Zanavykai region, Lithuania.

# Flax and Linen Heritage

Flax, besides wool, was the main material used for textile in both Slovenia and Lithuania – from clothes to home textiles. Flax processing work was essentially connected to the life and year cycle as well as socializing of the peasant people. Traditionally, it was also used as a special form of payment in both countries.

Although conditions in mountainous Slovenia and on the plain terrain of Lithuania are different, flax growing and the making of linen products for everyday use was a norm and everyday demand in both countries. In the first half of the 19th century, the use of home-woven linen in Slovenia started to decline, as it began to be replaced by the cheaper imported cotton fabric.

Festive clothing has thus been mostly factory-made since 1840. At the end of the 19th century, the area of fields sown with flax in Slovenia decreased even more rapidly. In Lithuania, the long-standing tradition of domestic flax textile making and the late industrialization made textile a representative local industry. The handweaving custom is encouraged as a hobby until this day.



Flax plucking event at the Horse Museum in Lithuania.



Flax harvest at the Gril homestead, Velenje Museum, Slovenia.



# Slovenians Say: Flax is Flax, it Requires Work all Year and Day Round

In Slovenia, home-woven flax linen was widely used until the second half of the 19th century. Flax cultivation as well as the hand weaving tradition later remained to a greater extent in less developed regions of White Carniola and Prekmurje, although it was still present in Šalek Valley and elsewhere to a lesser extent. The well-known weaving center was Škofja Loka, followed by Kranj, White Carniola, Kočevje, Pohorje, Carinthia, and central Styria.

Weaving the linen was supposed to be a man's as well as a woman's job, but it was women who were primarily engaged in it for the needs of the home. In the case of mass-production, the professional linen-weavers in towns were exclusively men. Ethnologists disclose some regional cultural particularities in the tradition of processing flax. Slovenia represents the Central and

Southern European tradition of retting flax with laying on grass or a field of corn stubble.

Special small houses called pajštva for drying flax were used throughout the country. Spinning wheels were of the upright model, from the middle of the 19th century mostly the "Czech" type which enabled easier, faster and smoother spinning.

Linen shirt, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Velenje Museum collections. Slovenia.



# Lithuanians Call Flax Having a Hundred Jobs

In Lithuania, the flax cultivating and hand-woven textile tradition was present until World War II. In 1920s and 1930s, the country was among the top exporters of flax in Europe. Flax cultivating centers in the North and South of Lithuania formed geographically around the historical trade routes – the ports in Latvia and neighboring former Prussia (today Kaliningrad district, Russia). The Zonavykai region is in the South of Lithuania, close to the main river Nemunas and on the way to Prussia.

In Lithuanian villages, the looms were normally present in every house, as every woman was able to weave with 2 to 4 heddles as well as to spin. Weaving and making of domestic textile was a woman's work. Chests full of hand-woven textile was the dowry, and young girls needed to prepare to fill up the chests before getting married, all by themselves. Men weavers were rare – they were the weavers craftsmen working for landowners.

Ethnologists say that in comparison to Slovenia, Lithuania belongs to the region of North and Central Europe, known for the tradition of flax retting, both laying on grass and soaking in special ponds. The drying of flax was usually processed in special houses called jauja, while in some regions, it was done in the sauna premises. Spinning wheels where mostly of horizontal type, but the upright models can be found in the East Lithuania.

The weaving loom as part of the Zonavykai Museum exhibition. Lithuania.





Flax hecking combs, Zanavykai Lithuania..



The weaving shuttles, Zanavykai Lithuania.



The spinning wheel, Zanavykai Museum collections. Lithuania.



Flax hecking comb, Velenje Museum collections. Slovenia.



The spinning wheel in Zanavykai Museum exhibition. Lithuania.



The spinning wheel, Velenje Museum collections. Slovenia.

# Living Heritage Today

Today, museums and their collections play an active and important role in preserving and promoting cultural heritage.

Exhibitions and various educational programs for school children, workshops for adults, traditional crafts festivals and events bring museums and heritage to life and establish a place where the past meets the future. The ancient pieces of textile today tell the stories of how they are made, decorated, dyed, woven, and embroidered.



Spinning demonstration, Traditional crafts festival, Zanavykai Museum, Lithuania.



Flax-breaking demonstration, traditional "Autumn at the Gril Homestead" event in Velenje, Slovenia.



Traditional chest in the Zanavykai Museum exhibition, Lithuania.



Demonstration of rope winding, Zanavykai Museum event, Lithuania.



International Embroidery Festival in Velenje, Slovenia.



Educational activities in Zanavykai Museum, Lithuania.



Educational activities in Velenje Museum, Slovenia.

