



PROFILE

SMOOTH AS SILK

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Mary Jose is showing
her personal collection of
Chinese silk textiles



Textile conservator Mary Jose is sharing her personal collection of exquisite Chinese silk textiles in an exhibition called *Lustrous Lives*.

Mary, who owns *Fabric Of Life*, at North Adelaide, has been collecting richly detailed and coloured Chinese silk textiles for the past 20 years.

"I went on a textile tour to southwest China in 1990. I was on the inaugural flight into Kunming, and saw works made by the Chinese minority group, the Miao," she says.

The Miao people of south west China are skilled at handicrafts such as intricate silk embroidery which is colourful and complicated but with clean lines.

"These textiles from the 19th and 20th centuries aren't being made any more so they're museum quality items," Mary says.

The eclectic range of textiles on display includes costumes, panels and sleeve bands from jackets, Chinese imperial costumes and collars from the early 1800s and embroidery from Vietnam when it was part of French Indochina.



Mary's brother Nicholas Jose; a former cultural counsellor at the Australian Embassy in Beijing and also a textile collector, has contributed to the exhibition with a costume he obtained from the Peking Opera when they toured Australia in 1989.

Mary says the Chinese pioneered the use of silk and were fundamental in the development of the world silk industry.

"They refined the spinning, weaving and embroidery of silk to its highest level," she says.

The network of trade routes that connected China, India, and Europe, known as the Silk Road, was one of the world's main thoroughfares for goods and ideas travelling both east and west.

"As garments, the use of silk itself was an indication of status," Mary says.

Lustrous Lives is at *Fabric Of Life*, 141 Melbourne St, North Adelaide, from March 1 to 21.