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Kali

Joan Cummins: Hello. I'm Joan Cummins, the Brooklyn Museum's Lisa and Bernard Selz Curator of Asian Art. Hindu mother goddesses have their roots in the ancient belief systems of India. While all of these goddesses are protectors and saviors, a few, such as the warrior Kali, are also ferocious and bloodthirsty. Kali is a complicated figure, simultaneously feared and adored. She is associated with the opposing forces of destruction and creation, death and salvation, and has been characterized as both vicious and nurturing. Today she is worshipped primarily in eastern India, in Bengal and surrounding areas. The imagery on this plate includes a central core filled with seed forms, symbolizing productive or creative power and referencing Kali's association with the cycles of nature. The plate is painted in deep reds, purples, and browns that repeat in the shapes stitched into the runner and in the illuminated letter *K*. These colors are reminiscent of mythical accounts of Kali as a warrior goddess who drinks the blood of demons and whose thirst can never be satiated. Kali is often depicted with four, eight, or ten arms, and the fingerlike forms on this runner reference her multi-armed manifestation. The undulating shapes on the runner were made using layers of sheer iridescent fabrics, called *luminaires*, which were then covered in shimmering white fabrics to create a pearlescent effect. This layering suggests the flayed skin of a human corpse, and refers to Kali's victims, the vanquished forces of evil. The Heritage Floor names around Kali's place setting are those of other goddesses and female figures who have been depicted as harmful, as guarding the doorway to death, or have been thought to exemplify a so-called devouring female energy.