



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. 19 No. 1 August 2011

www.ne-rugsociety.org

September Meeting: Judith Dowling on Japanese Folk Textiles

Art of the people [folk art] is the essential need to make and use objects that are unfragmented expressions of head, heart, and hands. (Soetsu Yanagi, Japanese philosopher)

Judith Dowling, a scholar and dealer of Japanese art, will open the 2011–12 NERS season with her presentation, “Japanese Folk Textiles.” The meeting will be held at 7:30 on Friday, September 23, in the Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA), Watertown. Judith will begin by discussing several kinds of important folk textiles, the techniques used to make them, and the role they had in Japanese life. Following this, she will show pieces from her collection.

Judith received her M.A. in East Asian Studies from Harvard University. In 1989 she and her husband established the Beacon Hill gallery Judith Dowling Asian Art, which specializes in Japanese paintings, ceramics, lacquer, textiles, and folk art. A founder of the New England East Asian Art seminars, she has lectured and written numerous articles on Japanese art.



Judith Dowling (photographed by Ann Nicholas).

Eight years ago NERS members were enchanted by a talk on Japanese *rozome* (wax-resist) textiles. Judith’s talk promises to delight us with more insight into Japanese textile traditions. NERS members are encouraged to bring their own examples of Japanese folk textiles for a show-and-tell.

October Meeting: Nurhan Atasoy on Ottoman Imperial Tents

We are delighted that Nurhan Atasoy, an eminent authority on Islamic and Turkish art, can be with us to present “Ottoman Imperial Tents.” The meeting will take place at 7:30 on Friday, October 21, at First Parish in Lincoln.

Ottoman sultans and their courts used imperial tents as mobile palaces for state ceremonies, daily outings, and military campaigns. Accordingly, Ottoman tent makers drew their inspiration from multi-structure palatial architecture, using gorgeous embroideries to suggest tiled-and-painted interiors.

Dr. Atasoy is currently a Resident Scholar at the Turkish Cultural Foundation in Istanbul. In addition to teaching art history at Istanbul University, she has organized numerous major exhibitions and has written (*continued, page 2*)

September Meeting Details

Date: Friday, September 23

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Place: Armenian Library and Museum of America
65 Main Street, Watertown

Directions:

Go to Watertown Square. (Out-of-towners, get off the Mass Pike at exit 17 and follow the signs.) Take Main Street (Rt. 20) westbound (left turn if coming from the Pike). Church Street is at the first traffic light, and the museum building is on the right-hand corner.

Parking:

Turn right on Church Street and enter the municipal lot on the right. Most meters are free after 6 p.m., but check to make sure!

(October Meeting Preview, continued)
scores of articles and twenty-one books, among them
Ipek: Imperial Ottoman Silks and Velvets.
She invites NERS members to bring examples of
Ottoman-era costumes and textiles (not necessarily tents!)
for a show-and-tell following her presentation.



Ottoman tent interior. (Photo from Nurhan Atasoy)

October Meeting Details

- Date:** Friday, October 21
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Place: First Parish, Bedford Road, Lincoln
Directions:
From Rt. 95 (128), take exit 28B, Trapelo Road West. Proceed west about 2.5 miles to a stop sign at the five-way intersection in Lincoln. (There’s a white planter in the middle of the intersection.) Go right on Bedford Road for 0.1 miles to Bemis Hall, a large brick building on the right. First Parish is on your left.
From Rt. 2, take Bedford Road, Lincoln Center exit (eastbound, turn right at light; westbound, go through light, turn right, and circle 270° to cross Rt. 2 at the light). Proceed 0.9 miles to Bemis Hall, a large brick building on your left. First Parish is on your right.
Parking:
Park in the lot behind the parish house, along the street, or in front of Bemis Hall provided that building is dark and not in use.

The Textile Museum to Move

On July 24, the Textile Museum, Washington, announced a forthcoming move to the Foggy Bottom campus of the George Washington University, where it will become a cornerstone of a new museum scheduled to open in mid-2014. Exhibitions and programs will be presented to the public in a custom-built, approximately 35,000 square-foot building bearing the names of both the Textile Museum and the George Washington University Museum. Until the new facility opens, the Textile Museum will continue operating at its current location.

Rug and Textile Events

- Future NERS 2011–12 meetings**
Nov. 18: Tom Hannaher, “Molas” (First Parish, Lincoln)
Feb. 10: A Night at the MFA
March: Peter Poullada, “Lebab Turkmen and Their Interactions with the Local Uzbeks” (date and location TBD)
Apr. 20: Collector Series: Alan Varteresian (location TBD)
May TBD: Picnic (Gore Place, Waltham)

Exhibitions
MFA, Boston: The superb exhibition “Global Patterns: Textiles and Dress in Africa” is on view in Gallery 280 (Art of Asia, Oceania, and Africa) through January 8, 2012. In addition, four striking Chinese carpets from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—two from museum holdings and two from a private collector—are on display in the upper colonnade area of the museum.

- Auctions featuring rugs**
Nagel, Stuttgart, Sept. 13 (Carpets and Islamic art)
Christie’s, London, Oct. 4 (Oriental Rugs and Carpets)
Sotheby’s, London, Oct. 5 (Arts of the Islamic World)
Bonham’s, London, Oct. 5 (Islamic Art)
Grogan, Dedham, Oct. 16 (October Auction)
Rippon Boswell, Weisbaden, Nov. 28 (Carpets)

Fairs and shows
Satirana Textile Fair, Italy, Sept. 14–18
Antique Rug and Textile Art Association (ARTAA) Show, San Francisco, Oct. 20–23

Co-Chair Report

Leadership
We, Ann Nicholas and Julia Bailey, have completed our first season as co-chairs of NERS and will continue in that role. Other steering committee members staying the course are Lloyd Kannenberg, who oversees beverages and AV equipment; Jim Sampson, who manages membership tasks; Bob Alimi, our webmaster; newsletter writer Jim Adelson, who ably reports on speaker presentations; and regular or occasional newsletter contributors Jeff Spurr and Ann.
Three steering committee members are retiring, and one is giving up his current duties. We will miss Gillian Richardson, who for years has provided us with food (including her beloved orange cake); Linda Hamilton, who last year took over her friend Janet Smith’s role in printing and mailing the newsletter; and Tom Hannaher, who will nevertheless be one of our speakers this fall. Yon Bard has resigned as editor and publisher of *View from the Fringe*, although he will remain on the steering committee as advisor and occasional photographer.

We are delighted to announce that two new members, Louise Dohanian and Joel Greifinger, have joined the committee. Louise and her husband, Buzz, are longtime NERS members (whom we thank for storing and transporting our projector screens) and owners of Bon Ton Rug Cleaners in Watertown. Joel, who teaches social studies at Newton North High School, is a contributor to the online rug-discussion forum Turkotek. Welcome, both of you!

Meetings and speakers, 2010–11
The past season’s meetings illustrate the liveliness, variety, and popularity of our speaker program. We returned to First Parish, Lincoln, for the three fall sessions. In September, Washington Hajji Baba member **Austin Doyle** focused on the widely admired rug types of the eastern Caucasus. Our October meeting honored NERS member **Mae Festa**, with images and “live” examples of her exquisite textiles presented by **Jeff Spurr**. In November, **Stefano Ionescu**, the noted Romanian scholar, author, and tour guide, introduced us to the infamous Theodor Tuduc and his clever carpet forgeries. The Festa and Ionescu events both featured special book launches, of *Mae Festa: 50 Years of Collecting* and *Handbook of Fakes by Tuduc*.

The **Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**, graciously hosted our February meeting. Members braved blizzard-clogged roadways to hear MFA curator and NERS member **Lauren Whitley** present textile highlights of the new American Wing; we also admired four early Caucasian rugs on special exhibition and enjoyed a reception in the department of Textile and Fashion Arts. In March, at our new Somerville venue, we heard former Boston University chemistry

professor **Richard Laursen**’s audience-friendly analysis of dyes in nineteenth-century Uzbek suzanis. At our April meeting, hosted by the **Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA)**, in Watertown, head curator **Gary Lind-Sinanian** talked about complexities of the term “Armenian rug” and led us on a gallery tour of rugs donated to ALMA by collector and former dealer Kasper Pilibosian (see Jim Adelson’s review on page 4).

Finances and Membership
Our finances have remained sound; we even ended the 2010–11 season with a slight budget surplus. Memberships decreased negligibly, from 132 to 128, suggesting an encouraging stabilization of our numbers; we continue to be one of the largest and most active American rug societies. Our “New England” moniker and Boston-area base notwithstanding, NERS members are geographically far flung, as shown by the current tally of their whereabouts:

Eastern Massachusetts	103
Western Massachusetts	4
Connecticut	6
Vermont	4
Maine	2
Rhode Island	2
New Hampshire	1
New York	3
Indiana	1
Texas	1
California	1

Special acknowledgment is due to our Supporting and Patron members, whose “above and beyond” generosity has helped maintain our financial health. Supporting members for 2010–11 are **Linda Hamilton, Ann Nicholas and Richard Blumenthal, Mitch and Rosalie Rudnick, Klaudia Shepard, Steve and Harmony Spongeberg**, and **Peter Walker**. Patron Members, who support NERS at the highest level, are **Jim Adelson and Debbie Sheetz, Julia and Doug Bailey, Richard Belkin, John Collins, Louise and Armen (Buzz) Dohanian, Jeremy and Hanne Grantham, Michael and Nancy Grogan, Tom and Ann Hannaher**, and **Lloyd and Susan Kannenberg**.

In conclusion, we the co-chairs extend to you—and all NERS members—our warm thanks for your support during the past season. We hope that, in the forthcoming months, you’ll continue to offer the encouragement and enthusiasm so necessary in keeping our society vital and rewarding.

April Meeting Review, by Jim Adelson

On April 15, Gary Lind-Sinianian, Head Curator at the Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA), gave a brief talk on Armenian rugs and the Kasper Pilibosian collection, after which he led NERS members through selections from the collection on display in the current carpet exhibition. Gary began by acknowledging that there is considerable variation in the usage of the term “Armenian rug.” He cited an extreme example—a letter sent to him from a Kuwaiti dealer, claiming, on the weakest and most ridiculous of grounds, that the particular rug being offered was Armenian. In this case, the attribution was pure sales pitch.

Gary noted that some claim the Pazyryk rug to be Armenian, again on flimsy grounds. The writer Volkmar Gantzhorn, in his book *The Christian Oriental Carpet*, gives Armenians a central role in the design of Oriental rugs, but Gary indicated that he was skeptical about this. Historical references to Armenian rugs are unclear: did the writer mean that the rugs were woven by Armenians? woven in Armenia? sold in Armenia? sold by Armenians? or something else? Gary pointed out that Armenia had a mixed ethnic population for a long time, until after the genocide, and that this adds to the complexity in defining what “Armenian rug” means.

Turning to Kasper Pilibosian, Gary mentioned that Pilibosian had trained with noted Boston-area rug dealer Arthur T. Gregorian and had then opened his own shop. Now 92 and blind, Pilibosian generously donated 119 rugs to ALMA three years ago. (Gary immediately added that the great majority of the donated rugs were probably not made by Armenians.)

Following Gary’s remarks, we followed him downstairs to the first-floor exhibition space, where a number of pieces from the Pilibosian collection were on display, along with other rugs belonging to the ALMA. (Incidentally, NERS helped make this exhibition possible, with a thousand-dollar donation that supported two interns who processed and registered the Pilibosian rugs and helped prepare them for exhibition.)

Gary first commented on a Karabagh rug, noting the repeated use of a motif resembling the letter S—in Armenian, the first letter of the word for “Lord.” He turned next to a Gendje rug with boteh forms, saying that it was likely not Armenian. The next piece was a so-called cloudband Karabagh. The well-known cloudband motif originated in China and, according to Gary, was reinterpreted in its Caucasian form as a *vishap*—a water-protecting dragon. The next piece featured a Lesghi-star



Gary Lind-Sinianian, leading another ALMA tour. (Photo courtesy of ALMA)

design; Gary noted that the Lesghi people were not Armenians. The next example was a Karabagh with a pattern of realistic roses. Gary stated that such pieces were made for the Russian market, which at the time emulated French taste and affection for such floral designs. He moved on to a Karabagh rug with a vertical-stripe design that, in his opinion, copied that of a Kashmir textile. Subsequent examples included Karabagh, Moghan, and Fachralo Kazak rugs.

Passing by a distinctive pictorial rug not from the Pilibosian collection, Gary related the story of this “Tooth Rug of the Near East Relief” (illustrated in *View*, Aug. 2008, p. 3), which was awarded to the Armenian orphanage with the best dental-hygiene record and would hang there for a year before being passed to the following year’s winner. Above a large molar, the rug has an English-language inscription that reads, “Mouth Cleanliness Contest.”

Of a “sunburst” Karabagh, Gary noted that its medallion design is said to be derived from the coat of arms of Prodhian-Dopian, a long-standing aristocratic Armenian family. He concluded with three pieces not donated by Pilibosian: a set of larger-scale salt bags, a Karachov rug inscribed in Armenian “in the year of 1913,” and a Karabagh rug inscribed “1900.”

Thanks as always to Gary and ALMA for hosting our April meeting, and in this case for his comments on Armenian rugs and the Pilibosian collection.

May Meeting Review: NERS Picnic

Over forty members and guests attended the annual NERS picnic on May 21, again held on the spacious grounds of Gore Place in Waltham. Sunny weather favored a “moth market” under the trees and lunch at outdoor tables. A few examples from the afternoon show-and-tell, photographed by Yon Bard, are illustrated here.



Left, from top: silk appliqué Kazakh collar, Kirman pile carpet fragment, Central Anatolian (Mut?) kilim, Fachralo Kazak pile prayer rug.

Right, from top: Shajsavan kilim-and-soumak mafrash side panel, Miao sewn-resist valance (detail), Khamsa (?) soumak khorjin face, Hashtrud or Khamsa (?) mafrash side panel, Yomud pile chuval.

International Conference on Oriental Carpets XII: NERS Members Report



1. Ann and Rich at the ICOC Dealers' Fair, Stockholm.



2. Safavid Persian velvet coat, Royal Armory.

Ann Nicholas and Rich Blumenthal comment:

The ICOC was a three-day whirlwind attended by about five hundred rug aficionados from around the world. To get to the conference site, we took a commuter train from central Stockholm, through an enormous and sometimes confusing station. We saw many old friends from the rug world and made some new ones, bumping into some at restaurants, where we ate smorgasbords piled high with shrimp or smoked salmon, and encountering others wandering in the train station. The event was packed with informative talks, a rug fair with forty-four high-end dealers showing many fine textiles (1), three exhibitions of choice pieces from local collections, and evening receptions at several local museums, where some extraordinary weavings were brought out of storage especially for us.

With everything crammed into such a short time, it's not surprising that many of our memories are like snapshots. The exhibits in the Royal Armory, however, come quickly to mind. There was an extraordinary seventeenth-century silk velvet coat with figural motifs of a young prince in Safavid court costume (2), which had belonged to Queen Christiana. Also from the Safavid period were three shields patterned with wrapped silk threads (3); these were seventeenth-century war booty from the Prague treasury of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II. Undoubtedly the most glorious exhibit was the famous sixteenth-century silk hunting carpet with gold and silver threads (4), probably made in Kashan. Like many of the ICOC attendees, when we first saw it in all its magnificence we were speechless. However, one well-known ruggie, who is rarely at a loss for eloquent phrases, could only mutter, "That's f***ing mind blowing!"

Jeff Spurr elaborates:

The talks at ICOC XII were typical: the good, the not so good, and the perfectly awful all following one another. As is always the case, I had to miss one of the sessions that I most wanted to see (on rugs in paintings), to do "due diligence" to the Central Asian textile crowd by attending the Asian session previous to my own.

As with most conferences, the principal reason to be there is to see old friends and colleagues and meet new ones. But an ICOC also means that exhibitions will not be far away; at this one there were special shows of rugs and textiles brought from all over Sweden and shown for one night only, one set in one palace, one in another, on successive nights. Unfortunately, arrangements for people to see these special exhibits were badly managed.

(ICOC Report, Jeff Spurr, continued)

Perhaps this is inevitable when herding large numbers of people around cramped quarters, and getting them there to begin with. There was lots of grumbling about the absence of food and drink, but that would have required a major police effort by the organizers to insure that some dolt didn't spill on some precious textile.

Virtually everything we saw had been in Sweden for a very long time, including some brilliant and early Swedish textiles that I essentially missed the evening of the conference's first full day. We were ushered into a large hall (of the Historiska Museet), a dot placed on our badges as we arrived. It was already fifteen minutes into the milling-around part when someone apprised me of the fact that the dot's color indicated which group one was in for seeing the exhibits. Quite a while later, I worried out loud to my friends that we might have missed our moment, so I rushed across the hall to find out. "The white dots left fifteen minutes ago!" was the response. The din of conversation was so great that it was impossible to hear the announcements. I grabbed my two white-dotted companions, and we rushed off. As stragglers, we had to hurry through the sundry rooms, hence the neglect of one whole room of textiles. However, I did see the Marby rug, and it was substantially more impressive "in the flesh" than in photographs, its wool pile still subtly glowing after all of these centuries. It had a presence I had not expected, and it was interesting to learn that the missing bits in the middle were due to the two medallions having been cut asunder (5) and reconfigured as an altar cloth once upon a time. For that reason it survived, so one can hardly complain.

The second evening's exhibits included weird stopover moments in two galleries (of the Royal Armory) devoted to royal carriages and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Swedish queens' garments on mannequins. However, this purgatory had its rewards: the view in one room of three Polonaise rugs, the famous silk-pile hunting carpet (4), a robe made from seventeenth-century Safavid velvet with the large figure of a youth in repeat (2), sundry examples of heavily bejeweled Ottoman weaponry (part of the booty from the failed Ottoman Siege of Vienna of 1683), and three Safavid targets (circular shields).

For lovers of village and tribal rugs, Polonaise rugs are perhaps a bit much; however, it was remarkable to behold them at a distance of less than two feet, in the same condition as the day they were made, their mainly pastel colors glowing, their silver and gold threads (brocaded in areas free of pile) completely intact as opposed to worn away. The only real sign of age was in one piece, which had had some black-dyed pile, now completely corroded.



3. Safavid shield, Royal Armory.



4. Safavid hunting carpet, Royal Armory.

(ICOC Report, Jeff Spurr, continued)



5. Marby rug (back, detail) with rejoined medallions.

I found these Polonaise rugs more approachable, literally and figuratively, than the hunting carpet, which had a dense crowd viewing it from the available side. However, what enchanted me most were the Safavid shields. I have admired similar Ottoman examples, also of fine cane wrapped with silk threads, but they have never been so sophisticated as these Persian examples. The most amazing (3) had elaborate animal combats and single animals (such as wolves whose antecedents in art go back to the fifteenth century), which were far more impressive than anything figural to be seen on the great carpet nearby. The fineness of their drawing, and of the elegant inscriptions in cartouches, indicated that the wrapping of the cane was done with single threads of silk. Strange was the way these had come to Stockholm: as part of the booty from the sacking by the Swedish army of Prague Castle, seat of Bohemian kings and Holy Roman Emperors, in 1648, the final year of the Thirty Years' War.

One of the exhibitions at the conference proper was dedicated to Scandinavian (primarily Swedish) textiles. It was filled with immensely charming pieces typically featuring brilliant color and many different formats and techniques. I saw embroidery I had never seen before. I also discovered that "röllakan" can signify a certain technique (or related techniques), not simply a type of cushion cover.

There was much to see in the Dealers' Fair, but I was particularly delighted to encounter superb examples of both the traditional (which is to say "real") white cotton-ground Shahr-i Sabz suzanis and the Lakai suzanis that were the subject of my ICOC talk. The latter included the most immense silk-ground example I have ever seen, and a couple of very interesting small pieces.

Gerard Paquin adds:

When I first heard that ICOC was to be in Stockholm, I was not terribly excited by the prospect of the location. However, Stockholm's extensive waterways, cool weather, and twenty-hour, high-summer days soon worked their charm. The conference schedule was jam-packed, as ICOC events usually are. A highlight was the Dealers' Fair, which was impressive in quality and quantity—among the best ICOC fairs ever, I would say. Although prices for many pieces were off the charts, there was so much good material that some wonderful rugs and textiles were within reach.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of Stockholm and the St. Petersburg extension was the chance to spend some time with the iconic rugs that one had only dreamed of ever seeing. In Stockholm it was the Marby rug (5), the Safavid hunting carpet (4), and the Lamm Fostat fragments (6). In St. Petersburg it was the Pazyryk felts (9), not to mention the rug (10) from the same tomb! Throw in our success in convincing the curators in the Russian Museum of Ethnography to unroll some of their many Kyrgyz reed screens (7), and you had the makings of a real week of rug adventures.



6. Lamm fragment, 15th century, Historiska Museet.



7. Gerard and group in Museum of Ethnography storage.

(ICOC Report, continued)

Julia Bailey continues:

Mother Russia...Day 1. About 120 strong, we bus across the Neva River from our hotel to the Kunstkamera Museum, where we are shown gaudy lengths of velvet ikat and somber Baluch pieces. More exciting are the permanent exhibits, especially the astonishing array of Northwest American art, much of it collected in the early 1800s. Lunch is at the grander Museum of Ethnography, which has mounted a special exhibition of large carpets; a Caucasian shadda depicting couples in four enclosures surrounded by legions of their friends and animals (8) is the winner, by my lights. The much-anticipated show-and-tell turns out to be a cruel tease: dozens of Turkmen treasures from Dudin, Bogolyubov, et al. are so hastily held up and whisked away that even viewers in the very front row have no chance to savor them, much less learn anything about their construction. "They've been published," says moderator Elena Tsareva, but that's not the point; Turkomaniacs, so near their hearts' delight and yet so far, are distraught.

Day 2. We brave the Hermitage. First we must listen to Russian museum types attempting to read papers



8. Shadda (detail) at the Museum of Ethnography.



9. Monumental Pazyryk felt in the Hermitage.



10. Pazyryk carpet, border detail.

in English about rugs and archaeological textiles that are not exhibited or otherwise viewable. But merely sitting in the marble-columned personal theater of Catherine the Great has its charms. Next we work our way through the teeming masses to the far end of the Winter Palace, where lunch and the Pazyryk finds await. In its place between huge-scale felt (9) and crude wagon, the famous carpet (10) declares itself, no doubt about it, an emigrant from a more refined realm. In a nearby gallery, laid out on tables just for us, are a fourteenth-century Persian zilû fragment and a para-Mamluk-inspired rug in soumak technique, the twin of one in the Textile Museum. But best of all, standing anonymous guard over these two textiles is venerable Hermitage Islamic curator Anatoly Ivanov himself. Late in the day, Doug and I make our way back to the twentieth-century section; the name "Shchukine" on an introductory label reminds me that we're about to see the greatest collection of Matisse paintings on earth. Yup, there it is, *La Danse*—can life get any better?

Days 3 and 4. We've signed up for a special viewing (twenty people at a time) of Turkmen rugs in the stores of the Museum of Ethnography. Sadly these are not all the stars with which we were tantalized two days ago; the killer asmalyks, for instance, don't reappear. A splendid old Salor chuval (12) and a white-ground Amu Darya prayer rug are the standouts. We reunite with the rest of the herd somewhere on the city outskirts, where they've been touring Hermitage conservation labs and storage facilities, and bus to Peterhof, an entirely restored, blindingly gilded confection mobbed with international tourists. Enough!—tomorrow Doug and I will defect from yet more summer-palace touring and return on our own to the Ethnographic Museum and the Hermitage, where for long stretches we have the Pazyryk finds all to ourselves. A farewell evening cruise on the Neva (13), and that's the end of the story.



11. Swedish felt appliqué in the Historiska Museet.



12. Salor chuval in the Museum of Ethnography.



13. White night on the Neva, from the boat.

Mike Tschbull bestows his awards:

Best textile seen: a tie between the Historiska Museet’s red-and-blue fifteenth-century applique felt (11) showing fabulous animals—griffons, lions, unicorns—and a Salor three-gul chuval face (12), claimed by Elena Tsareva to be fifteenth century, in the stores of the St. Petersburg Museum of Ethnography. Best ICOC presentation: Vedat Karadag, talking about fakes. I’m sure digital copies of his presentation are all over Turkey, and that the fakers have corrected their previous errors. Most memorable experience: another tie, between the boat ride on the Neva on the last night of the St. Petersburg experience (13) and the ride on the St. Petersburg Metro, ca. 70 meters under the Neva.

And Lauren Whitley lists her favorites:

The highlight for me was viewing objects at the Swedish Royal Palace, especially seeing the Safavid hunting carpet (4) as well as the Polonaise carpets, with all that gold on them! [Editor’s note: the MFA, where Lauren is curator in the department of Textile and Fashion Arts, has two would-be rivals of the carpets she mentions: a regal silk hunting carpet and a respectable Polonaise, whose condition admittedly suffers by comparison to the glitzy ones in Stockholm.]

Photos: Doug Bailey; Gerard Paquin; *Hali* Publications/ Facebook; Thompson and Canby, *Hunt for Paradise*, p. 229; www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200805/suitable.luxury.htm

OTC (Other than Carpets): The Oseberg Tapestry, by Ann Nicholas

This is the first installment of what we hope will be a continuing series on unusual or interesting textiles. Members are encouraged to contribute short articles, with photos, on textiles they find aesthetically outstanding, historically important, or otherwise noteworthy.

In AD 834 a Viking queen was buried in a gracefully decorated ship loaded with material goods for her afterlife. Over a millennium later, in 1904, her gravesite in Oseberg, Norway, was excavated; it contained hundreds of well-preserved artifacts. The queen’s burial ship (1) and its contents are on display at the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo. The artifacts include an unusually rich collection of textiles from the early Viking Age: bits of patterned carpets of wool and linen, some card weavings, many pieces of clothing and the ship’s sail, and fragments of what is known as the Oseberg tapestry (2). Although these textiles are generally in poor condition after having been buried for nearly 1200 years, they demonstrate the consummate skills of their weavers. Most were made at the royal court of Oseberg, a kingdom with enough wealth to create refined art from thin and fragile thread.

The fragmentary Oseberg “tapestry” was not made in the same technique as medieval and modern tapestries but with a more complex double-binding system—one for the figures and another for the background—seemingly evolved from card weaving. The linen or nettle wefts forming the background of the tapestry have disappeared with time, leaving only exposed wool warps, but the figures, in wool, remain. Their contours are outlined with different colored wool threads in a technique similar to soumak. Most of the colors have faded, yet one—a beautiful carmine red—clearly stands out.

The tapestry fragments, once part of a long pictorial strip, teem with figures of oversized horses, carriages, spears, birds, houses, trees, a ship, and other symbols (3). Archaeologists think the Oseberg tapestry was a wall hanging in a large Viking hall, and that it recounted important events and myths. Understanding the stories told by the tapestry might have been easy for Viking royalty and their guests, but to us the imagery of this extraordinary textile appears exotic and mysterious.

Photos: Rich Blumenthal. For more information, see www.absolutetapestry.com/en/history/oseberg



1. Oseberg burial ship, Viking Ship Museum, Oslo.



2. Oseberg tapestry fragment.



3. Detail of fragment showing horse and carriage.

Change of *View*

What has happened to *View from the Fringe*? As the new editor and publisher of the NERS newsletter, Julia Bailey decided that our esteemed publication was due for a makeover. But credit for the updated look ultimately goes to Julia's daughter, graphic designer **Sarah Trainor (www.trainor-design.com)**, who has generously donated her time to create a more colorful, spacious, and legible *View* and to tutor Julia in the intricacies of desktop-publishing software.

Contributors to this issue: Julia Bailey (editor), Jim Adelson, Doug Bailey, Yon Bard, Rich Blumenthal, Ann Nicholas, Gerard Paquin, Jeff Spurr, Mike Tschbull, Lauren Whitley. **Distributor:** Jim Sampson.

NERS 2011–12 Steering Committee: Jim Adelson, Robert Alimi, Julia Bailey (co-chair), Yonathan Bard, Louise Dohanian, Joel Greifinger, Mark Hopkins, Lloyd Kannenberg, Ann Nicholas (co-chair), Jim Sampson, Jeff Spurr.

If you haven't already done so, please renew your NERS membership now! You can pay online using a credit card: go to www.ne-rugsociety.org/NERS-paypal.htm and follow directions. Alternatively, you can mail your check, payable to NERS, to our Charlestown address (see the box opposite).

The New England Rug Society is an informal, non-profit organization of people interested in enriching their knowledge and appreciation of antique oriental rugs and textiles. Our meetings are held six times a year. Membership levels and annual dues are: Single \$45, Couple \$65, Supporting \$90, Patron \$120, Student \$25. Membership information and renewal forms are available on our website: www.ne-rugsociety.org; by writing to the New England Rug Society, P.O. Box 290393, Charlestown, MA 02129; or by contacting Jim Sampson at jahome22@gmail.com.



The New England Rug Society

P.O. Box 290393

Charlestown, MA 02129

In This Issue:

September meeting preview	1
October meeting preview	1–2
Announcements and upcoming events	2
Co-chair report	3
April meeting review	4
May picnic review	5
NERS members report on ICOC XII	6–10
OTC (Other than Carpets)	11
Change of <i>View</i> (editor's note)	12