



# View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. 21 No. 2 November 2013

[www.ne-rugsociety.org](http://www.ne-rugsociety.org)

## November 15 Meeting: Koos de Jong on Saddle Rugs from China and Beyond

Absorbing and emulating the horse-riding culture of the nomadic peoples on their northwestern borders, the Chinese were among the earliest creators of practical and beautiful textiles and tack for their horses. Koos de Jong has recently published an extensive study of the history of these articles, *Dragon & Horse: Saddle Rugs and Other Horse Tack from China and Beyond*. His talk for NERS—titled “The Dragon Chasing the Horse, or Was It the Other Way Around?”—will focus on rugs made to go over and under saddles, saddle flaps, and horse blankets. Looking to Chinese painting, sculpture, and applied arts for visual clues, he will address the dating and geographic origin of these saddle rugs and will assess how “Chinese” they really are.

Koos de Jong is an art historian and past member of the scientific staff at the Historical Museum in Amsterdam. Over the course of his career he held directorial posts in numerous museums and art-related institutions in the Netherlands and published widely on subjects ranging from

Dutch medieval art to modern ceramics. Since his retirement in 2009 he has focused his scholarly research on East Asian art; in addition, he is a private collector of Chinese art and oriental carpets.

NERS members are encouraged to bring Chinese rugs, especially saddle covers and other horse-related items, for a post-lecture show-and-tell.

### Note New Meeting Place!

**Time:** 7:00 p.m.

**Place:** Durant-Kenrick House, 286 Waverley Avenue, Newton Centre, MA

**Directions:** From Boston and east, take Mass Pike to exit 17 and follow signs for Boston/Newton Centre, making a U-turn over the Pike. At Newton Centre sign, go RIGHT on Centre St. for 0.1 miles. Go LEFT on Franklin St. for 0.3 miles. Turn RIGHT on Waverley and go 0.2 miles. House is on LEFT.

**From Rt. 128 and west,** take Mass Pike to exit 17, turn RIGHT onto Centre Street and follow directions above.

**From Watertown Square:** Take Galen Street (Rt. 16) toward Newton Centre for 0.4 miles. Continue to Washington St. toward West Newton/Newton Centre, making a U-turn over the Pike. At Newton Centre sign, go RIGHT on Centre Street and follow directions above.

**Parking:** Park on the even-number side of Waverley Avenue or Kenrick Street. A driveway leading up to the Durant-Kenrick House has four parking places; these may be used for unloading supplies or dropping off people but not for parking during the meeting.

**Food:** Members whose last names begin with **H** through **P** will provide food. Please arrive before 6:45 to set up and stay to clean up afterwards.



Koos de Jong discussing a Chinese saddle rug

## September Meeting Review: Walter Denny on Carpets in New Museums and Galleries of Islamic Art

On September 6, NERS veteran speaker Walter Denny opened the new season with a talk titled “Islamic Carpets and New Museums of Islamic Art: What’s Happening?” For the past six years, Walter has been a consultant to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, mainly involved in the renovation and reopening in 2011 of the Met’s galleries of Islamic Art. During that period he has observed similar projects in other major museums.

Walter’s first image showed the recent reinstallation of the Ardabil Carpet—perhaps the world’s most famous rug—at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It is now displayed lying flat, behind very specialized glass, and is only fully illuminated one minute out of thirty. Walter proceeded to the new Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar (1). Noting with amazement the MIA’s ability to amass an entire collection in just the last few years, he called the effort a tribute to the director’s energy, moxie, and large budget. As an example, he cited the stunning Schwartzberg Carpet, acquired from Vienna, with huge sums expended for acquisition and cleaning. By contrast, Walter disparaged the Louvre’s new Islamic galleries, at least with respect to carpets, which he said were disappointingly selected and displayed (2). Later in the talk he added, “This is not

a ‘dis-the-Louvre’ lecture; I have one of those in my computer, but this is not it.”

Continuing to other museums housing Islamic art, Walter praised the David Collection in Copenhagen, and looked forward to the opening of the new Aga Khan Museum in Toronto. He mentioned that the carpets and textiles in the George Walter Vincent Smith Museum, in Springfield, MA, which has been under renovation for a number of years, still aren’t back on public display. He noted new galleries in Detroit and Cleveland but lamented the small display space allotted to Islamic art in Cleveland.

Following this “tour,” Walter understandably spent the most time talking about the new galleries at the Met, which expanded the space available for the display of Islamic art by 35 to 40 percent, most of which has been used for carpets and textiles. Even with increased space, there remain many constraints on carpet and textile presentation, including factors of wall height, lighting, platforms, and hanging systems. The Met has set conservation requirements for carpets and textiles: silks can be displayed for only three months and pile carpets for twelve to twenty-four. Following exposure, carpets and textiles are stored for five to six years. Walter noted that the Doha museum doesn’t practice such



1. A gallery of the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar



rotation: its collection has fantastic items but little depth, so pieces must be kept on display. He maintained, “With sufficient depth, rotations are a blessing, not a curse.” By increasing display opportunities, he explained, they help attract new donations and bolster the prospective donor’s confidence that gifts will be shown rather than just linger in storage.

Beyond the issue of rotation, Walter addressed the broader question, “What do we show?” He observed a deep-seated museum prejudice favoring the “traditional heavyweights”—antique carpets from Persia and Anatolia. Two prominent twentieth-century collectors and museum donors, James Ballard and Joseph McMullan, nevertheless bucked this trend and collected both classical and non-classical pieces, which they subsequently donated to the Met and (in Ballard’s case) to the St. Louis Art Museum. Walter himself professed some fondness for “wild cards” from outside classical Persian and Anatolian weaving traditions: for example, the Love Carpet (named for its donor) in the Met, a finely woven seventeenth-century silk rug filled with European pictorial motifs. He also noted that museums are now willing to show fragments, since the public has grown more tolerant of them and they’re generally much easier to display. Still focusing on the Met, Walter mentioned another challenge peculiar to this institution: the Robert Lehman Collection, whose many disparate objects, including rugs and textiles, are exhibited together in a separate wing of the museum and have their own display rules.

Even after a particular object has been selected for

exhibition, there are sometimes difficult challenges in preparing it. For example, getting the Emperor’s Carpet—a sixteenth-century Safavid Persian court rug—ready for display required a massive undertaking and expenditure. Previous restoration, including eight hundred patches, were painstakingly removed. All told, the giant carpet (25’ x 11’) required eighteen thousand person-hours of work. It additionally needed epigraphic interpretation, which involved deciphering and translating the damaged Persian inscriptions in its border.

Walter next considered the focus and direction of research in museum carpet and textile collections. Structural analysis continues at the forefront, aided by new technology such as smaller and more affordable microscopes. Dye analysis can lead to surprising discoveries: Walter showed a “classical” Anatolian carpet he’d exhibited and published because it fit his theories, only to find out from its dyestuffs that it was a fake. On the other hand, such research has sometimes exonerated rugs: the Salting carpets, for example, were for a time considered nineteenth-century Turkish forgeries but are once again viewed as sixteenth-century Persian court weavings.

The Anhalt Carpet (3) is another rug redeemed by analysis. It was acquired by the Met in 1946 as sixteenth-century Persian, but in 1973 was judged a fake by three luminaries of rug scholarship: Friedrich Spuhler, May Beattie, and Charles Grant Ellis. Their reasons were different: Ellis claimed the rug had the wrong yellow color; Beattie considered its condition too good; and Spuhler cited design imperfections that, in his view, wouldn’t have been



**2. One level of the new Islamic art wing, Louvre, Paris**



### 3. Installing the Anhalt Carpet at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

consistent with a sixteenth-century origin. Walter challenged these dismissals. Close examination showed plenty of wear: all the browns had been replaced, some quite crudely. Color analysis revealed the source of the yellow to be larkspur, used in carpets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but not much since. And comparable design flaws appear on other carpets of that period, including the Ardabil.

Many more rugs, Walter noted, have languished under a similar shadow of suspicion. The Trinitarias Carpet, in the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia, was originally believed to be Persian, then labeled a fake, and lately judged to be a great Mughal carpet.

Walter closed his talk with a summary of the biggest challenges facing museums today. One is the high price of acquiring museum-worthy carpets, with wealthy Doha and the future Louvre Abu Dhabi setting the pace. Another is display and storage, given that the weavings, often very large, can be on view for only a small percentage of the time.

Following the presentation, attendees had many questions. To a query about the type of glass used for carpet display, Walter replied that the best glass was very expensive,

and that all varieties of glass emphasize the separation of the visitor from the artwork. Asked about the new Textile Museum, Walter responded that despite his great fondness for the longtime TM “home” on S Street, the new building will have more exhibition space, higher ceilings, and climate control—the lack of which hindered display of the TM collections and made it difficult to get loans. To questions about conservation and cleaning approaches, Walter replied, “We don’t restore anymore; we conserve,” and indicated that the Met does not wash its carpets, although some other institutions do. Finally, a member asked whether, given the challenges that Walter had described, museums would turn more to smaller, non-classical rugs that would be less expensive to acquire, conserve, store, and display. Walter answered that yes, institutions like the Met were moving in this direction.

Our great thanks to Walter for sharing his knowledge of the issues involved in displaying Islamic art—carpets in particular—at the Metropolitan and other museums around the world.

*Jim Adelson*



## Lawrence Kearney to Head Skinner Rug Department

Gary Richards's retirement from Skinner had a number of us—sellers and buyers alike—worried that the specialty carpet sales begun thirty years ago by the late Louise Woodhead Feuerstein (see p. 9) would now be discontinued. We are therefore relieved and delighted that Skinner has hired NERS member and frequent speaker (see pp. 6–8) Lawrence Kearney **(1)** as Specialist in the Department of Oriental Rugs and Carpets. Lawrence is already well into organizing his first rug sale, scheduled for January 25, 2014. He is being assisted at Skinner by Erika Jorjorian, whom we welcome as a new member of NERS. Our congratulations to you both!



**1. Lawrence at ALMA, about to introduce his audience to Deco-to-Modernist hooked rugs**

## The Textile Museum Bids Farewell to S Street

Taking its theme from the exhibition “Out of Southeast Asia: Art That Sustains,” the Textile Museum Fall Symposium, held October 12–13, included six lively presentations on textiles of Indonesia, East Timor, Laos, and Thailand, followed the next day by a large and spirited show-and-tell **(2)**. At the farewell reception preceding the symposium, attendees joined throngs of other TM members in celebrating the museum's

eighty-eight years on S Street. Brand new and much larger quarters on the Foggy Bottom campus of George Washington University are now under construction and are expected to open in October 2014. (At our February 28 NERS meeting, TM curator Lee Talbot will tell members about the “new TM” and its inaugural exhibition; see the next issue of this newsletter for details.)



**2. At the Fall Symposium show-and-tell, the last one at the S Street location of the Textile Museum, NERS member Jeff Spurr comments on a much-admired weft-ikat ceremonial cloth (*cepuke*) from Bali or neighboring Nusa Penida.**



## October Meeting Review: Lawrence Kearney on Deco-to-Modernist Hooked Rugs

On October 4, at ALMA, longtime member Lawrence Kearney spoke on a topic new to NERS, in a presentation entitled “Art Deco and Modernist Hooked Rugs.” He started by outlining three major design categories into which these rugs, made in America between 1920 and 1960, could be sorted—“Art Deco,” “hybrid Deco,” and “Modernist.” Nevertheless, he emphasized that his categories were not hard and fast, observing, “Deco designers seem to have been ready to appropriate any idea from any culture, as long as the resultant design was striking and capable of infinite stylization.”

In his introduction, Lawrence noted that hooked rugs in the first category employ classic Art Deco motifs in a straightforward and direct way. He illustrated a number of examples, with design elements such as diagonals, concentric ripples, and machinelike repetitions (1). “Hybrid” Deco rugs combine Deco elements with designs found in other textiles. Here, Lawrence showed pieces with motifs taken from nineteenth-century hooked rugs, American quilts, oriental rugs, and Navajo rugs. Hooked rugs in the

third category, Modernist, reflect designs originally found in other media, such as Paul Klee paintings, Frank Lloyd Wright drawings, or even circuit boards.

Lawrence then stepped back to describe the context of Art Deco design generally. The death, damage, and disruption of World War I prompted a complete rejection of the ideals and aesthetic of the Victorian Age and a simultaneous transition from elite-driven standards of taste to mass consumerism.

Hooked rugs fit the desire for modern style and mass consumption. They used inexpensive, widely available materials: recycled burlap grain sacks for the foundation, and remnants of old clothing for the pile. A few companies manufactured such rugs, but most were made by individuals—generally women aged 10 to 60—weaving for their own families. Hooking rugs required only simple equipment and relatively little practice (in comparison with knotting oriental rugs). Nevertheless, in Lawrence’s view, some of the women who made these rugs brought exceptional artistic talent and skilled execution to their



1. “Pure Deco” hooked rug



projects. Their pieces represent the modern democratization of design—anyone could do it, for her own home—rather than the traditional model of artisans creating works for rich consumers.

Lawrence brought many rugs from his collection, and used them to illustrate and provide more detail for his talking points. In the first group were those he characterized as “pure Deco,” woven from the 1920s through the late 1940s. Lawrence’s examples had simple, emphatic designs, frequently with repeats. For the most part, the color palette was cool, with slate blue, gray, teal, and indigo dominating. Black outlining of design elements was commonly used as a visual focus.

Lawrence then moved to “hybrid Deco” rugs, with elements from a number of traditional, typically nineteenth-century designs. He showed rugs that drew their influences from Victorian-era flower-and-vine motifs (2), and other examples with far-flung textile sources including Turkmen carpets, Navajo Two Grey Hills rugs, and possibly even Anatolian *elibeline* kilims (3).



2. Victorian-style flora on a “hybrid Deco” rug



3. An *elibeline*-inspired “hybrid Deco” rug?

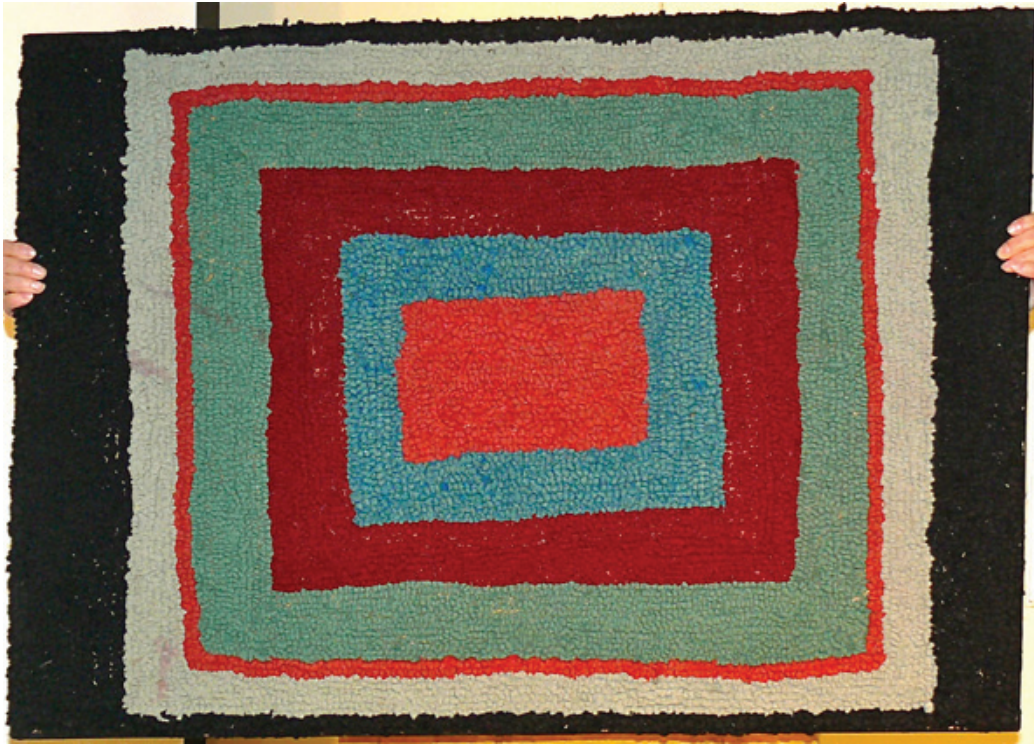


The rugs in Lawrence's last, and chronologically latest, category, "Modernist," were made from the late 1940s through the 1950s. The examples that he showed (4) utilized a lighter and more diverse palette, with more primary colors. In some cases, the design placements were looser, while in

others, design repetitions increased.

Our thanks to Lawrence for sharing his knowledge about a category of rugs that few NERS members have explored, and for bringing to the meeting so many examples to examine "in the flesh"!

*Jim Adelson*



4. Two of Lawrence's "Modernist" hooked rugs, exhibiting spare (above) and exuberant (below) design schemes



## In Memoriam: Louise Woodhead Feuerstein

We are saddened to report that former NERS member Louise Woodhead Feuerstein, 76, died of ovarian cancer in her Brookline home on September 13. Married to Aaron Feuerstein in 1988, Louise was instrumental in the redesign and rebuilding of his family business, Malden Mills, after a disastrous fire in 1995 burned its Lawrence factories to the ground.

At the resurrected Malden Mills, Louise created and ran the retail store and helped administer a division of the company that made and sold velvet upholstery fabrics. In addition, she meticulously restored the couple's historic second home in Berlin, MA, dyeing and weaving all its textile furnishings.

But fellow NERS members—at least we veterans—may best recall Louise from her years at Skinner, then headquartered in Bolton. Although hired in 1977 to work in administration, she soon became Skinner's textile expert. In May 1983, she organized the first Skinner sale devoted entirely to rugs and carpets. From then until she left the auction house to marry Aaron, she ran twice-yearly carpet sales, arranged many adjunct lectures and panels, and vetted rugs and textiles for Continental and Americana sales and on-site estate auctions. Her interest in carpets continued after her departure from Skinner; for example, she and Aaron acquired a major fragment of the important seventeenth-century “von Hirsch” Northwest Persian garden carpet, which they generously lent to the 1991–92 exhibition “Through the Collector's Eye” (no. 31 in the print and digital catalogues, the latter viewable under “Gallery” on the NERS website). Also in the early '90s, in their Brookline home, Louise hosted

a meeting of the New Boston Rug Society (the forerunner of NERS) with Jon Thompson as speaker.

We remember Louise with great admiration and fondness, and we extend our condolences to Aaron.



**Louise Woodhead Feuerstein, at the preview of a Skinner rug and carpet auction in Bolton, ca. 1987**

### Future NERS Meetings

- **February 28** (venue TBD): Lee Talbot, “Unraveling Identity: Our Textiles, Our Stories”
- **March 28** (Grogan & Co., Dedham): Michael Grogan, “Thirty-Five Years in Oriental Rugs”
- **April 25** (MFA): “A Night at the MFA, Featuring Rugs from the Gerard Paquin Collection”
- **May** (date TBD, Gore Place, Waltham): Picnic

### Rug and Textile Events

#### Auctions

Boston: Jan. 25, 2014, Skinner, Oriental Rugs & Carpets  
Wiesbaden, Nov. 30, Rippon Boswell, Collectors' Carpets

#### Exhibitions

Boston, MFA: “Hippie Chic,” through Nov. 11  
Boston, MFA: “Carpets from the Gerard Paquin Collection,” Nov. 21–Aug. 2014  
New York, Metropolitan Museum: “Fifty Years of Collecting Islamic Art,” through Jan. 6, 2014  
New York, Metropolitan Museum: “Interwoven Globe 1500–1800,” through Jan. 5, 2014

**Photo credits:** p. 1 Koos de Jong; pp. 2–4 Walter Denny; p. 5 (1) Yon Bard, (2) Julia Bailey; pp. 6–8 Yon Bard; p. 9 Julia Bailey.



**Contributors to this issue:** Julia Bailey (editor),  
Jim Adelson, Yon Bard. **Distributor:** Jim Sampson.

**NERS 2013–14 Steering Committee:** Jim Adelson,  
Robert Alimi, Julia Bailey (co-chair), Yon Bard, Louise  
Dohanian, Joel Greifinger, Mark Hopkins, Richard Larkin,  
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](http://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 seven or more 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](http://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](mailto:jahome22@gmail.com).



**The New England Rug Society**

P.O. Box 290393  
Charlestown, MA 02129

**In this issue:**

November 15 Meeting Preview	1
September Meeting Review	2–4
Skinner Hires Lawrence Kearney	5
Textile Museum Symposium	5
October Meeting Review	6–8
In Memoriam: Louise Woodhead Feuerstein	9
Calendar, Photo Credits	9