



# View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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

## February 28: Lee Talbot on the Inaugural Exhibition of the “New” Textile Museum

Throughout history, textiles have served as powerful expressions of individual, cultural, political, and social standing. Lee Talbot's NERS lecture previews the Textile Museum's upcoming show “Unraveling Identity: Our Textiles, Our Stories.” Scheduled for the fall of 2014, this exhibition will mark the grand reopening of the Textile Museum in a newly constructed building on the George Washington University main campus. Including nearly a hundred spectacular objects created across the globe over more than two millennia, “Unraveling Identity” will be the largest show ever presented by the Textile Museum during its eighty-eight-year history. In addition to highlighting the textile treasures in the exhibition, Lee's presentation will provide an overview of the museum's new storage and display facilities and its plans for future programming.



Lee Talbot

Lee Talbot is Curator of Eastern Hemisphere Collections at the Textile Museum, where he specializes in East Asian textile history. Before joining the TM staff, he spent two and a half years as curator at the Chung Young Yang Embroidery Museum at Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul, Korea. He is a PhD candidate at the Bard Graduate Center in New York and is writing his dissertation on textiles and women's culture in Joseon-dynasty Korea.

### Note Newton Meeting Place!

**Date:** Friday, February 28

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

**Place:** Durant-Kenrick House, 286 Waverley Avenue,  
Newton Centre, MA, 02458

**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, and follow directions above.

**Parking:** On Kenrick Street. Parking places at the end of the Durant-Kenrick House driveway may be used for dropping off people or supplies, but **NOT for parking during the meeting.**

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

## March 28: Michael Grogan, “Thirty-Five Years in Oriental Rugs”

On March 28, Michael Grogan—known to New England Rug Society members not just for his auctioneering but also for his generous support of NERS—will again welcome us to a meeting at his Dedham gallery, Grogan & Company. This time Michael himself will be the featured speaker, telling us of his “Thirty-Five Years in Oriental Rugs.”

Michael’s interest in carpets began in 1978 when, at the age of 21, he was a summer intern in the rug department at Sotheby’s New York. After training there for a year, under John Edelmann and Vojtech Blau, he was named department head when John quit Sotheby’s to start Edelmann Galleries. Michael remained at Sotheby’s—becoming director of Arcade Auctions, director of Sotheby’s Appraisal Company, and ultimately a vice president of the firm—until 1987, when he left New York to found his own auction business. Grogan & Company, originally headquartered in Boston and subsequently located in Dedham, deals in antiques and fine art of all types. Michael gives frequent lectures and has appeared on *Antiques Roadshow* as an expert in the various media that he auctions. Nevertheless, he has maintained his original interest in oriental rugs. In his presentation for NERS, he will share with us some of his insights about the history of the rug market, as well as entertaining us with stories of specific carpets, collectors, and dealers.

### March 28 Meeting Details

**Date:** Friday, March 28

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

**Place:** Grogan & Company, 22 Harris St., Dedham, MA, 02026

<http://www.groganco.com>

**Directions: From Boston,** take Mass Pike (Rt. 90) west to Rt. 128/95 south. Take exit 17 (Needham-Rt. 135). Go east on Rt. 135 (High Street) approximately two miles into Dedham Center. At the light, take a left onto Washington Street. Harris Street is one block down on the right.

**From west of Boston,** take Mass Pike (Rt. 90) east to Rt. 128/95 south and proceed as above.

**From the north,** take Rt. 93 south to Rt. 128/95 south and proceed as above.

**From the south,** take Rt. 95 north to Rt. 128/95 north. Take exit 15 (Rt. 1 east). Follow Rt. 1 east through several lights until you come to Washington St./Rt. 1A (with a Dunkin’ Donuts on the left). Bear right (as in a rotary) to turn left onto Washington St. Harris St. will be your first left, with the gallery immediately on the right.

**Parking:** On both sides of the building, or in the public lot just past the overpass.

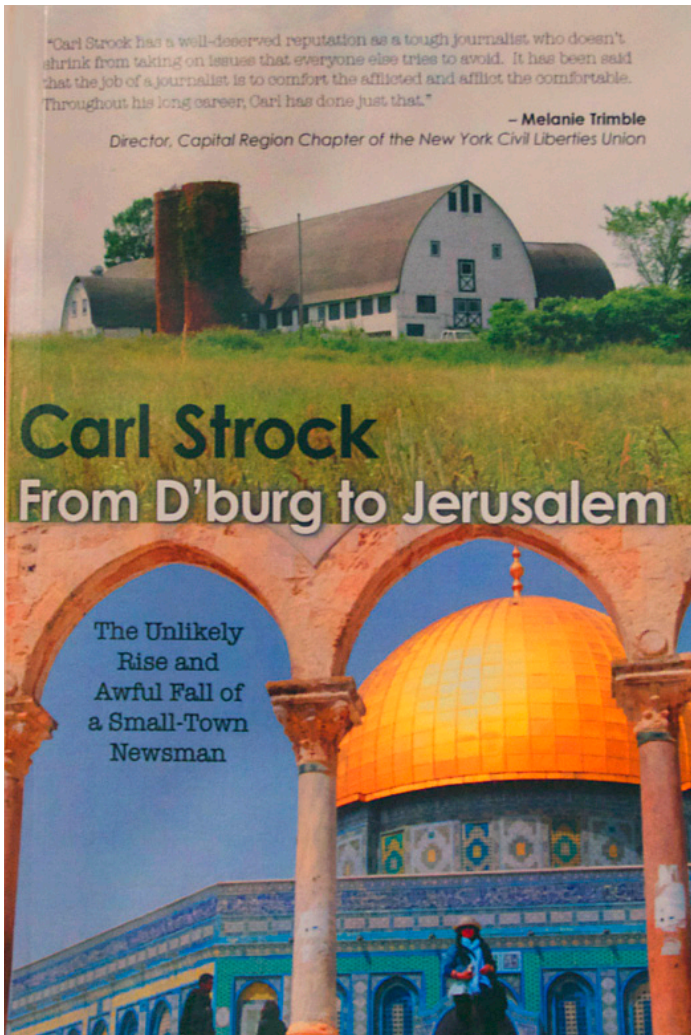
**Food:** To be provided by members whose last names begin with **A** through **G**. Please arrive before 6:45 to set up, and stay to clean up afterwards.



Michael Grogan takes bids on a rare Salor *ensi* featured in his auction on May 22, 2011. The rug sold for \$241,500.



## Other than Carpets: Carl Strock's New Book Is a Great Read!



### Cover of *From D'burg to Jerusalem*

Nowhere in it does the word “rug” appear. But longtime NERS member Carl Strock has published a memoir of his years as a small-town newsman, and it’s a kick.

Following stints as a peacenik and then a journalist in Southeast Asia, Carl signed on with the *Daily Gazette* in Schenectady, NY, in 1981. Before long he was promoted to columnist, a job that over the ensuing twenty-five years was to bring him—and his readers—much joy and frustration, amusement and anger. His book is the story of that ride.

Schenectady had become a backwater after its glory days as a GE hub, and the tales Carl recounts of its citizens are fascinating, maddening, and hilarious. You’ll revel in his Runyonesque portraits of rogue cops, misguided social workers, stupid judges, wacky psychologists, sleazy lawyers, animal-rights fascists, corrupt FBI agents, militant religious leaders—all what you’d expect from a TV drama, but all very real.

Over the course of his journalistic adventures, Carl publicly addressed virtually the entire gamut of challenging

issues facing communities today. In his explorations of rampant dishonesty, unfairness, and hypocrisy, even the beatification of an American saint undergoes his scrutiny. Perhaps my favorite tale of all is of the school janitor who ran an entire city school department by terrorizing its leaders, until he finally ended up in jail.

The book’s subtitle, *The Unlikely Rise and Awful Fall of a Small-Town Newsman*, portends an interesting if not dramatic ending, and the story does not disappoint. I’ll leave that to the reader without further revelation except to recount the final lesson: when armed with a BB gun, don’t go shooting at battalions of howitzers. His final tale bears chilling witness to the power of power to sway the truth.

The book is an easy and enjoyable read, replete with self-deprecating humor. Carl tackles difficult subjects—particularly organized religions—with honesty, clarity, and insight, and the reader, like those who once read his columns, may strenuously disagree as well as cheer him on. But his candor is irreproachable; he tells it like it is. It may be provocative, but it’s indeed refreshing as well.

You can buy *From D'burg to Jerusalem* online from Amazon, or directly from Carl at [carlstrock.com](http://carlstrock.com). At the latter, I’ll bet that for NERS members he’ll even include an autograph.

Mark Hopkins



Author and NERS member Carl Strock

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

On November 15, Koos de Jong (1) addressed NERS members with a talk titled “The Dragon Chasing the Horse, or Was It the Other Way Around?” The Dutch art historian was just finishing up an ACOR-sponsored lecture tour of fifteen North American rug societies, following the publication of his recent study, the two-volume *Dragon & Horse: Saddle Rugs and Other Horse Tack from China and Beyond*.

While some starting snags in the audiovisual setup of his high-tech talk were being resolved, Koos began with a personal anecdote: a revelation by his mother, only when his book was underway, that her father had been a saddle maker. Koos added that his own early purchases included a Chinese ceramic figure and a Milas prayer rug, because he wanted to collect things that required using all of his senses, not just his eyes.

The formal part of his presentation opened with a film clip of riders in a Chinese setting—one of a number of riveting excerpts from *Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan* (2007) that were sprinkled throughout the talk. Turning to rugs, Koos debunked the formerly common opinion that pile weaving came late to China: published research of Michael Franses and Hans König has now discredited this view. Regarding saddle rugs in particular, Koos himself has found written evidence of textile ones from the fifth century BCE onward, as well as many visual sources of evidence—not only saddle rugs themselves but also ceramics, paintings, sculptures, reliefs, and other arts that depict these objects.

Koos’s examples spanned almost 2500 years. (He later explained that so many ancient items survived because they were preserved either in desert conditions or in the freezing cold of areas such as Tibet.) The very earliest saddle rugs were felts, but over time various other techniques were introduced. Koos showed a detail from the Pazyryk Carpet (5th–3rd century BCE) depicting Scythian riders with what appear to be decorated felts, and in comparison a wood and leather saddle from the same period that had been excavated from Xinjiang province. Another example from Pazyryk was an approximately contemporary felt and gilt-leather saddle rug decorated with a griffin attacking an ibex. He also showed horse blankets of similar age; such blankets were used not during riding, but for the horse’s warmth before or after. One interesting example had a felt base produced by nomads but covered by an imported embroidered Chinese silk of the Warring States period (475–221 BCE).

Progressing chronologically, Koos illustrated a larger-than-life ceramic cavalryman and horse, with many tack items clearly shown, dating from the Qin Dynasty (221–206



1. Koos de Jong

BCE). More examples dated to the Western Han and Eastern Han dynasties (206 BCE–220 CE), including a ceramic horse with a felt saddle rug and woven fragments from an actual saddle rug. Another saddle rug had gold-inlaid decoration showing a tiger. The oldest knotted-pile piece, according to Koos, was a wool rug of Roman or Hellenistic design; whether this item was imported or woven in Xinjiang, copying a foreign design, was unclear. On a ceramic figure from the end of the Han period, the horse’s saddle had acquired a pommel.

Koos illustrated other advances in horse equipment, such as a Jin Dynasty (317–420) ceramic horse whose saddle now had added stirrups. From the Tang Dynasty (618–907) he showed a Mongolian wood and leather saddle and a woven under-saddle rug. An eighth-century funerary sculpture depicted a camel with a rug on its back, atop which were five musicians; a contemporary horse figure made of wood, straw, and painted clay sported a saddle rug.

Subsequent periods yielded a greater range of visual material. A Song painting on silk of a falconer and horse, dating between 1201 and 1230, depicted both a tigerskin under-saddle rug and a top-saddle rug. Preserved from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) was a piece with silk





**2. Tang ceramic figure of a female polo player, first half 8th century, Musée Guimet, Paris**

pile and brocading on a cotton foundation, with dragons as the main decoration. A surviving saddle cover in wool pile, donated by Joseph McMullan to the Metropolitan Museum, was subsequently (and in Koos's opinion, unwisely) deaccessioned. An early Ming stone sculpture depicted a saddle rug of lacquered leather; Koos noted that an actual lacquered-leather saddle rug of similar age had been found in Tibet.

Many examples remain from the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Illustrating an under-saddle rug from Ningxia dating from the first half of the eighteenth century, Koos noted that most under-saddle rugs were woven in two pieces and joined, and that most had four strap holes (sometimes covered or rewoven subsequently). He then showed a Gansu under-saddle rug; according to him, Gansu weaving was atypical in using madder. Other examples of the period included an eighteenth-century Xinjiang under-saddle rug with knotted silk pile; a Ningxia under-saddle rug with a leaf design and square strap holes; and a Ningxia top-saddle rug with a pair of singing birds, a matrimonial symbol. He explained that top-saddle rugs are usually smaller than those made for under-saddle use, and are constructed in one piece with no strap holes. Additionally, he showed

a small, rectangular Ningxia rug, ca. 1800, likely used as a top-saddle rug; a late-eighteenth-century Beijing wool knotted-pile under-saddle rug; a Qianlong rug from the same period; and a nineteenth-century Ningxia example that had been exported to Tibet, where an extension piece had been added.

Koos finished his presentation with a number of “interesting aspects”—other horse-related items and practices. One was what he dubbed “horse bling-bling,” which included a silver headgear element (fifth to third century BCE) showing two fighting tigers; a silver pendant of a breast collar (first century BCE–first century CE) with a dragon horse and many animal elements; and a leaf-shaped, iron and gilt-bronze pendant showing paired geese, another symbol of happy marriage. Certain of Koos's “interesting aspects” reflected foreign influences, such as a Tang ceramic depicting a female polo player wearing Turkish trousers (2). Still others illustrated ceremonial functions including horses: for example, a 1739 or 1758 scroll painting by the Italian artist Giuseppe Castiglione portraying Emperor Qianlong astride a highly decorated horse.

After the formal presentation, Koos answered audience questions. Asked whether there were rugs used for other



purposes dating as far back as saddle rugs, Koos responded affirmatively, and cited palace rugs from the early Ming period and surviving Yuan-period rugs. Questioned about the origin of the Pazyryk Carpet, he indicated that he certainly wasn't sure but felt it was possibly Persian; he noted that the Persian Empire was much larger during that era. To a final question—whether under-saddle rugs were typically woven in two pieces so that rain would run down and off them on both sides—Koos replied that he believed so, and that the two-part construction also facilitated the shedding of sweat and mud. But he repeated that there are examples of under-saddle rugs woven in only one piece.



**3. Inner Mongolian under-saddle rug**



**4. Ningxia under-saddle rug**





#### 5. Mongolian leather under-saddle rug

Next came pieces from territories at the edges of China. First was a Mongolian leather under-saddle rug (5), which the owner placed in the first half of the seventeenth century and Koos thought to be eighteenth or nineteenth. A nineteenth-century tiger-design rug followed. An early

twentieth-century Tibetan saddle rug came next; according to Koos its butterfly shape is said to have been copied from the saddle rugs used by British and Indian soldiers in the Younghusband expedition that took Lhasa in 1904 (6). Following it was an under-saddle rug without strap holes.



#### 6. Tibetan butterfly-shaped under-saddle rug



A Tibetan under-saddle rug dated to the mid-nineteenth century had two of its four strap holes left open. Last in this set was a Tibetan saddle rug, also from the mid-nineteenth century, with a warp-faced back and a fretwork medallion design (7).

From further west, the third group consisted of Central

Asian pieces. It included two Yomut felts: an under-saddle rug (8) and a top-saddle rug with braided decoration (9), probably from the early twentieth century. A Kirghiz silk-embroidered trapping on velvet was perhaps used for ceremonial purposes. Last in the group was an embroidered Uzbek horse cover, probably from the late nineteenth century.



7 (top). Tibetan under-saddle rug

8, 9. Yomut felt under-saddle rug (l) and top-saddle rug (r)



The final two show-and-tell items differed greatly; one was a Chinese rug with a Caucasian design, and the other a Tibetan saddle of burl wood and velvet, although the pad may not have been original **(10)**.

Koos thanked the group for this varied selection; in turn, NERS thanks Koos for a millennia-spanning presentation that included a wealth of examples from different art forms. If only

this kind of historical record existed for all the other rug and textile areas we study!

This was our first meeting at the Durant-Kenrick House—a historic residence with a newly completed, modern addition for public events. The February meeting will again be at this venue. Please let Ann and Julia know how you like it, relative to our other meeting places.

*Jim Adelson*



**10. Member Tom Mond discusses his Tibetan burl-wood and velvet saddle.**

## Rug and Textile Events

### Auctions

New York, Sotheby's, Carpets and Textiles from Distinguished Collections, Jan 31  
Dedham, MA, Grogan & Company, February Auction (including rugs), Feb. 23  
Vienna, Austria Auction Company, Rugs and Carpets, Mar. 15  
Boston, Skinner, Fine Oriental Rugs and Carpets, Mar. 22

### Exhibitions

Boston, MFA: "Carpets from the Gerard Paquin Collection," through Aug.  
New York, Metropolitan Museum: "Feathered Walls: Hangings from Ancient Peru," through Mar. 16

### Fairs

San Francisco, Fort Mason Center, Tribal and Textile Art Show, Feb. 7–9

## Future NERS Meetings

- **April 25** (MFA): A Night at the MFA, featuring Rugs from the Gerard Paquin Collection
- **May 25** (Gore Place, Waltham): Picnic

**Photo credits:** p. 1 Lee Talbot; p. 2 Michael Grogan; p. 3 Carl Strock; p. 4 Yon Bard; p. 5 Musée Guimet; pp. 6–9 Yon Bard



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**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).



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**In this issue:**

Feb. 28 Preview: Lee Talbot	1
Mar. 28 Preview: Michael Grogan	2
Other than Carpets: Carl Strock's New Book	3
Nov. 15 Review: Koos de Jong on Saddle Rugs	4–9
Calendar, Photo Credits	9