



# View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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

## April 25: A Night at the MFA, featuring Rugs from the Gerard Paquin Collection



**Gerard Paquin, in front of an eighteenth-century embroidered Mughal summer carpet in his collection.**

On the evening of Friday, April 25, the Department of Textile and Fashion Arts at the Museum of Fine Arts will again play host to the New England Rug Society. This year's event focuses on rugs and bagfaces from the collection of NERS member Gerard Paquin, ten of which are currently on view in the Upper Colonnade Gallery of the museum. Due to competing preparations for the annual MFA extravaganza Art in Bloom (which opens the next morning), our meeting time is tight, and the MFA asks NERS members to adhere strictly to the following schedule:

- **At 7 p.m. sharp**, Gerard will begin a gallery talk in the Upper Colonnade Gallery, discussing the rugs and bagfaces exhibited there.
- **At 7:45**, members will proceed to the former Trustees' Room in the West Wing to view a selection of MFA rug and textile treasures that have seldom or never been exhibited.

### April 25 Meeting Details

**Date:** Friday, April 25

**Time:** 7:00 p.m. **(Talk begins—please be prompt!)**

**Place:** Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

**Directions:** <http://www.mfa.org/visit/getting-here>

**Parking:** Valet parking is available at the Huntington Entrance (see **Entry**, below). Or park in the open surface lot or the garage, both off Museum Road.

**Entry:** Use the **HUNTINGTON ENTRANCE** (on Huntington Avenue, the side of the Museum facing the T).

**Admission:** MFA members should present their membership cards just inside the Huntington Entrance. Julia will distribute complimentary tickets to NERS attendees who are not MFA members. Proceed up the Grand Staircase to the Upper Colonnade Gallery.

**Gathering point:** Upper Colonnade Gallery, for the gallery talk.

• **At 8:30**, a light reception will follow in the Textile and Fashion Arts Department study area. It will conclude at 9:20, after which NERS members may explore the rest of the museum until its 10 p.m. closing.

Gerard, who lives in Hatfield, MA, and owns Hugo's Bar and a bicycle shop in nearby Northampton, is better known to fellow NERS members as a dedicated and discerning collector. His wide-ranging interest in rugs and textiles of the Islamic world encompasses their aesthetics, their roles in society, and their trade; he has published articles in the *Textile Museum Journal* and *HALI*, and has given presentations at ACOR and to numerous rug societies. His many years of "beating the bushes for treasures" (his words) have taken him to Turkey an estimated score of times, as well as to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

## May 25: Annual NERS Picnic, with Moth Mart and Show-and-Tell



Members shop the moth mart at the 2013 picnic.



A Caucasian pile *mafrash* face (or its owner's comment about it) brings smiles at the 2013 picnic show-and-tell.

The annual picnic, the last event of the 2013–14 NERS season, will be held on Sunday, May 25—rain or shine—at Gore Place, the lovely grounds of the former governor's mansion in Waltham. We'll again have a huge enclosed tent with water and electricity, nearby bathroom facilities, tables and chairs for all, and plenty of lawn space. Bring your own picnic lunch and we'll provide soft drinks, coffee, and tea.

Lunch will be preceded by the now-traditional and ever-popular "moth mart"; we invite NERS members (whether dealers or not) to bring things to sell, swap, or give away. Past offerings have included rugs, bags, kilims, and other textiles; books and periodicals; and even tribal jewelry and clothing. Buying is of course encouraged!

### Picnic Details

**Date:** Sunday, May 25

**Time:** noon to 4 p.m.

**Place:** Gore Place, 52 Gore Street, Waltham

**From the Mass Pike:** Take exit 17 and follow signs to Rt. 20 westbound (Main St. in Watertown). After 1.5 miles, turn left onto Gore St. at the second of two adjoining traffic lights (Shell station on right). Proceed 0.2 miles on Gore St. Turn left (through center island) to Gore Place entrance.

**From Rte. 128:** Take exit 26 onto Rt. 20 eastbound (it starts out as Weston Road and becomes Main St.). After 3.3 miles turn right on Gore St. at the first of two adjoining traffic lights (Shell station on left). Proceed on Gore St. as above.

**From Newton:** Go north on Crafts St. Turn right (at traffic light) on North St. Cross the Charles River and go straight. The street eventually becomes Gore St. Gore Place entrance will be on right.

**Parking:** Use the parking area on the estate grounds.

And do not forget the final show-and-tell of the season! Bring one or two of your treasured items—mystery textiles or rugs, exotic specimens you think fellow members should know more about, or wonderful acquisitions you want to share.



## February Meeting Review: Lee Talbot on “Unraveling Identity”



### 1. Lee Talbot addresses his NERS audience.

On February 28, Lee Talbot **(1)**, Curator of Eastern Hemisphere Collections at the Textile Museum, discussed the new facilities of the museum and the inaugural exhibition, “Unraveling Identity: Our Textiles, Our Stories,” slated to open in November 2014.

The “new” Textile Museum will be in two locations, each with clusters of functions. The main, public museum building will be part of a larger museum complex at the Foggy Bottom campus of George Washington University in DC **(2)**. It will include galleries offering almost 9,000 square feet of exhibition space (compared to about 3,000 at the S Street location), plus a textile learning center, the Arthur Jenkins Library, the museum shop, multipurpose and classroom spaces, exhibit-preparation areas, and staff offices. A second structure, the Collections and Conservation Resource Center, is being completed at the GWU Science and Technology campus in Ashburn, VA, near Dulles airport. In addition to storage and conservation facilities, it will have a textile freezer (for pest control), as well as a photography studio, a study-and-research area, and a dye-analysis laboratory—dedicated spaces that were lacking in the TM’s S Street location. There will also be a loading dock; S Street had none, and larger crates had to come in through the front entrance, sometimes even requiring removal of the door.

Transfer of the TM’s 19,000-plus textiles from S Street to Ashburn will begin in June and will take four months to complete. An inventory of all of the textiles in the TM collection determined that approximately 8,500—many of them fragments in drawer storage—required intervention before moving. The survey itself yielded a few interesting finds, including a mummified finger in one of the textiles.



### 2. The future Textile Museum building at George Washington University, 21st and G Streets, Washington

After describing the new facilities and the preparations for moving into them, Lee devoted most of his talk to the initial exhibition, "Unraveling Identity." Its five main objectives, he explained, are supporting the museum's mission to expand public knowledge of the merits and importance of textiles, showcasing the richness of the permanent collection, introducing the current TM audience to the new location, attracting new audiences, and involving academic disciplines at GWU and elsewhere. The exhibition includes eighty-five objects from the permanent collection, plus another thirty on loan.

"Unraveling Identity" progresses through six main themes. An introduction presents the concept of textiles as identity markers, beginning with a textile presumably familiar to every visitor—the T-shirt. From this well-known item, the introductory section moves to insignia badges from China that communicate an individual's identity and status, a Peruvian Huari tunic whose patterning with musicians conveys its owner's high social standing, and a fireman's costume from Edo, Japan, that indicates its wearer's occupation.

The first theme of the exhibition is the role of textiles in transformative life events such as birth, circumcision, marriage, and death. Examples include a Tekke Turkmen "bird" *asmalyk* (wedding-procession camel decoration), a bed tent brought by a Greek bride to her wedding, and a Chinese *long gua* (surcoat). With roundels that signify a member of the imperial family, this surcoat (3) most likely belonged to the late-nineteenth-century Empress Dowager, who ruled through her son and nephew and was the real power "behind the curtain." This first section of the exhibition will also include more recent textiles associated with major life events, such as a Japanese wedding kimono dating from 1938–39, a Japanese wedding dress from 2000, and a George Washington University graduation robe.

The second theme is the ability of textiles to transform identity temporarily. Items in this category include a Peruvian Nazca mouth mask, a Japanese Kyogen costume, and a 2005 knitted rendition of a Batman costume.

The third theme of the exhibition is identity aggrandizement. Showing an Uzbek robe as an example, Lee noted that it increased the wearer's apparent size. In many



**3. Empress's wedding surcoat (*long gua*), China, mid-19th century, Textile Museum 1985.33.288**



societies, size itself is a symbol of health, wealth, and power, independent of the grandeur of the textile. A Peruvian Chimu loincloth would have emphasized its wearer's masculinity via pattern and fabric placement, whereas a red dress with a gigantic train, by the contemporary American artist Beverly Semmes, exaggerates the notion of femininity. The choice of materials also contributes to aggrandizement; feathers, for instance, add volume to items ranging from a Chimu crown to a Givenchy wedding dress. Finally, shoes—including Elton John's towering silver platform boots—can increase height.

According to Lee, textiles also convey cosmopolitan identity, the exhibition's fourth theme. Examples include a Portuguese embroidered hanging or cover with a Persian rug design, a Mamluk carpet, and a Safavid jacket made of silk possibly woven in India. A Peruvian hanging in Spanish Colonial style displays a curious mixture of references,

including a pious Christian motif of a pelican, surrounded by creatures taken from Ming Chinese rank badges (4). A Javan hip wrapper made between 1939 and 1944 sports images from the popular Flash Gordon comics.

The fifth theme of "Unraveling Identity" deals with political identity. Again contrasting older and newer, Lee showed a Chinese Qing dynasty imperial robe and a Safavid jacket, followed by the gown and other textiles in a video of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation. For a politicized object at the other end of the wealth spectrum, Lee highlighted Gandhi's spinning wheel, symbolizing the effort to replace imported British textiles with local ones. Returning to the regal theme, Lee illustrated Michelle Obama's 2009 inauguration dress and coat, designed by Isabel Toledo and known as the "Lemongrass Ensemble." He pointed out that its color deviated from the red, white, or blue of other first



4. "The Pelican in Her Piety," tapestry-weave hanging, Peru (Spanish Colonial), 18th century, Textile Museum 91.50



ladies' inauguration suits, thereby signaling change and optimism. Other garments from this section of the exhibition include a Korean *husu* (court apron), a nineteenth-century Malaysian sultan's sarong, a Peruvian Incan tunic (1460–1534), and a twentieth-century royal corpsman's tunic from Cameroon (5). Hangings, covers, and carpets are also represented; among these Lee illustrated a fourteenth-century Spanish hanging from Granada, a fourth-century Greco-Roman hanging, a fifteenth-century Spanish armorial carpet, a seventeenth-century Mughal carpet, a nineteenth-century Chinese throne cover, and an eighteenth-century throne cover made in Iran for the Thai royal court. A final exemplar of the theme was an eighteenth-century Yomud main carpet collected by TM founder George Hewitt Myers. Lee noted that, even if this carpet was not a royal object, it conveyed prestige.

The sixth and final theme of the the exhibition is spiritual identity, which Lee again illustrated with a diverse group of textiles. Items explicitly used in religious activities

include a Chinese Daoist priest's robe, a Huari sacrificial textile, an Anatolian "coupled-column" prayer rug, and a pile-woven Egyptian Torah curtain with a Hebrew inscription. Also in this category are spiritually linked items of more recent manufacture, such as a twentieth-century Japanese Buddhist pilgrim's jacket, its white fabric covered with "stamps" from pilgrimage locations; the garment functions, as Lee put it, as a "wearable passport." *Act 8*, a 1974 construction by the fiber artist Gerhardt Knodel, is a rainbow-like arch. A 1999 work by Shihoko Fukumoto replicates a Japanese tea ceremony room entirely in fabric. The last items in the spiritual-identity section are funerary, and recall the past. One is a ca. 1500 Spanish tomb cover with a phoenix design. Another, a Peruvian Paracas mantle made around 250–100 BCE, is the oldest item in the entire exhibition.

Following Lee's talk, there were various questions from the audience. The first inquirer asked whether all the pieces in the exhibition were "for the one percent" (presumably



5. Royal corpsman's tunic, Bamum people, Cameroon, early 20th century, Textile Museum 2007.30.3

meaning textiles intended for the very top tier of the society in or for which they were made). Lee responded that the curators, conscious of conveying that impression, had also sought to include textile items from a larger population, such as the pilgrim's "passport" jacket and the fireman's coat. A second questioner asked how far along the TM was in digitizing images of the collection. Lee responded, "Not far at all," explaining that what imaging existed was typically related to the textiles included in past exhibitions. The next question concerned whether there were workshops in "hands-on" textile making planned for the new facility. Lee answered that TM staff were contemplating such projects, even one that would include GWU students in creating woven cell-phone covers. Another attendee then asked how the TM-GWU merger got started. Lee responded that the

earliest discussions had been initiated by a TM trustee with connections at GWU, but noted that even Myers himself had known the TM would have to move, because the S Street building eventually wouldn't be suitable. The final questioner asked whether the new association with GWU would lead to more research opportunities with faculty and students. Lee said he expected that such projects—for instance, the involvement of the GWU Chemistry Department in dye analysis—would come about when the facilities and the physical moves were completed.

Our thanks to Lee for sharing detailed information on the "new" Textile Museum and its opening exhibition. Here's hoping that many NERS members will get to Washington to savor TM textiles—whether familiar or previously unseen—in an impressive new setting!

Jim Adelson

## Rug and Textile Events

### Auctions

Dedham

Grogan & Company, June Auction (includes rugs),  
June 8

Wiesbaden

Rippon Boswell & Co., Major Spring Auction:  
Collectors' Carpets, May 31

### Exhibitions

Boston, MFA

"Carpets from the Gerard Paquin Collection"  
through August

"Quilts and Color: The Pilgrim/Roy Collection"  
April 6–July 27

Cleveland, Museum of Art

"Luxury Silks from Islamic Lands 1250–1900"  
through April 27

New York, Metropolitan Museum

"Carpets of the East in Paintings from the West"  
through June 29 (see painting opposite)

Vienna, Museum für angewandte Kunst (MAK)

Opening of the reinstalled carpet gallery  
April 8



**Gabriel Metsu's 1659 *A Musical Party* (MMA 91.26.11) includes a "chessboard" carpet draped over the table. It's in "Carpets from the East in Paintings from the West."**

**Photo credits:** p. 1 Gerard Paquin; p. 2 Jim Sampson; p. 3 (top) Doug Bailey; pp. 3 (bottom) and 4–6 Lee Talbot; p. 7 HALI; p. 8 (left) Doug Bailey; pp. 8 (right), 9, and 10 (right) Michael Grogan; p. 10 (left) Mitch and Rosalie Rudnick; p. 11 Doug Bailey; p. 12 Sotheby's; p. 13 Skinner



## March Meeting Review: Michael Grogan on Thirty-Five Years of Oriental Rugs



### 1. Michael Grogan begins his NERS presentation.

On March 28, amidst furniture and decorative items in his Dedham auction gallery, Michael Grogan entertained NERS attendees with a presentation on his thirty-five-year involvement with oriental carpets **(1)**. He opened his talk with an enthusiastic, “I just love looking at good rugs.” He then emphasized that, even after so many years, he still focuses on the beauty of a rug—plus its commercial potential—and doesn’t attempt to bring academic criteria into its appreciation. (He added that while many rugs are beautiful, the same isn’t necessarily true of some of the characters and dealers associated with them.)

Michael explained that in 1978, when he was still a student at Boston College, he had accepted a summer internship at Sotheby’s, New York. He showed a photo from that summer, in which he and the head of Sotheby’s rug



### 2. John Edelmann, Vojtech Blau, and Michael pose before Blau’s mid-sixteenth-century Persian animal carpet in 1978.

department, John Edelmann (who was in the audience at the meeting), flank the renowned New York dealer Vojtech Blau **(2)**. The three are posed in front of an important Persian classical carpet belonging to Blau, which would figure later on in Michael’s talk.

At the end of the summer, John Edelmann indicated that he would soon be leaving Sotheby’s and encouraged Michael to continue there, as a potential successor. So Michael stayed, and when John departed in April 1979 to open his own rug-auction gallery, Michael became a Sotheby’s department head at the tender age of 22, with barely a year of auction-house training under his belt.

Although Michael had had no prior personal experience with rugs, he did have a “hereditary” connection to them.



Michael's great-grandfather, H. Michaelyan, had been a prominent New York rug dealer; his considerable personal collection was sold at Parke-Bernet (later acquired by Sotheby's) after his death in 1952. In 2006 Michael had the satisfaction of identifying and re-auctioning (for a vastly higher price) a splendid runner that had once belonged to his great-grandfather (3).

The years Michael spent at Sotheby's were an energetic and exciting period for oriental rugs. Sotheby's then operated two New York rug venues, with classical and city carpets auctioned at the Madison Avenue gallery and tribal pieces typically sold at the 84th Street annex known as PB 84. A Madison Avenue auction would usually have 300 lots, and PB 84 might offer as many as 400. In addition, Christie's and John Edelman were busily conducting their own rug sales. Buyers came from the US, Europe, and the Middle East. While there have been ups and downs and recent record prices since that time, the overall level of activity in rugs and carpets, according to Michael, has never been the same.

For most of the rest of his talk, Michael showed rugs that he'd auctioned, often ones that had realized surprising prices and, in many cases, had an associated story. In 1980, for instance, he sold a Salor main carpet for \$33,000 at a time when most people didn't yet know what "Salor" meant. That same year, an outstanding Karachov Kazak brought \$30,000. Michael confessed that he had little idea of the demand for a reduced Mughal carpet, which at Sotheby's April 1981 sale reached \$110,000. In October 1981, a distinctive ivory-ground *asmalyk* with flowering-plant motifs was hammered down to Jon Thompson for \$50,000 [see Thompson's *Carpet Magic*, p. 100].

Michael actually spent only four years in Sotheby's rug department before moving to a different area within the firm and being succeeded by Bill Ruprecht. Nevertheless, even today he's pleased to be recognized by someone from those Sotheby's days, who will comment, "You're the rug guy." In 1987 he left Sotheby's to return to Massachusetts and start his own auction business.

**3. This Fereghan Sarouk runner was sold at the 1952 Parke-Bernet auction of carpets belonging to New York dealer H. Michaelyan, Michael's great-grandfather. It was resold by Grogan & Company on April 22, 2006 (lot 112), for \$42,500 plus the buyer's premium.**







#### 4. Pictorial rug, East Caucasus, Rudnick Collection

Among the highlights of his years in Boston and then Dedham, Michael said, were a Caucasian pictorial rug filled with riders and standing figures that he sold to Rosalie and Mitch Rudnick (4). Michael praised it as "quintessential folk art." A yellow-ground Kuba, brought by a picker in Boston, made \$80,500 in his December 2007 auction. In May 2011, he sold a rare *Salor ensi* for \$241,000 (5); it went to Peter Pap on behalf of a Boston collector. Michael found it in a home in Westhampton, NY, where he had gone to get three paintings and only by chance spotted the rug. He commented that the auctioneer's best friend is the question, "What else have you got?"

In another illustration of this point, Michael showed a slide of the Abadjian "star" Kazak, now owned by Ed Shein, a leading collector of American modernist paintings. Michael said that he himself had just missed a similarly great "star" Kazak, sold by Skinner [on June 5, 1988, lot 112], which had come out of a house in Lincoln. A few weeks before Skinner auctioneer Steve Fletcher got there, Michael had been in that house choosing some items, all of them on the first floor. He never saw the wonderful rug in an upstairs bedroom. Still rueful, he lamented to his NERS audience, "I don't have an Armenian nose; that Kazak was right over my head!"



#### 5. *Salor ensi*, sold by Grogan & Company in May 2011

Near the end of his talk, Michael returned to Blau's Persian classical carpet, describing it as very finely drawn and woven, in excellent condition, and probably contemporary with the Ardebil Carpet. After Blau died in 2000, Sheikh Saud Al Thani of Qatar inquired about purchasing it, but the Blau family, whom Michael was assisting, said they were not interested in selling. The sheikh made a series of offers, escalating to \$5 million and even \$5.5 million. Finally, in 2002, the family agreed on a strategy: they would tell the sheikh they felt the carpet was worth \$10 million but were willing to sell it for \$7.5 million. The deal was done. [The carpet is now in the Museum of Islamic Art, in Doha: see *HAL* 155, pp. 72 and 76–78.] Michael's commission was a small percentage of the selling price, but still a fair amount of money, which came at a critical moment. 2002, he recalled, was a terrible year in the auction business, and this single commission kept Grogan & Company going when the firm might otherwise have folded.

Michael concluded his talk by showing the rug now holding the auction price record—the Corcoran Gallery's deaccessioned Clark sickle-leaf carpet, sold at Sotheby's in June 2013 for nearly \$34 million [see *View from the Fringe*, Sept. 2013, p. 7]. Michael didn't name the buyer, but he did





#### 6. Michael's NERS audience convenes among French antiques on offer at the next Grogan & Company auction.

note that the underbidder was from Boston, and mentioned Ned Johnson, Chairman and CEO of Fidelity Investments.

Following the talk, Michael took questions from the audience. Asked who had bought the sickle-leaf carpet, he responded that he didn't know; for reasons having to do with phone bidding at Sotheby's, he didn't think it had been Sheikh Al Thani. In answer to a query about what the market is like now, Michael replied, "It's okay. . . we're seeing more activity." Going back to the Corcoran deaccessions, another attendee asked what that museum is doing with the money from the sale of the sickle-leaf carpet and the other Clark rugs auctioned at the same time. The ensuing comments, from Michael and others, suggested that the Corcoran is facing significant financial challenges, may be leaving its current building, and will concentrate on its strength, American painting.

Another questioner asked Michael about the response of consignors whose pieces bring dramatically more than the auction estimate: whether they sometimes conclude that perhaps they shouldn't have sold. Michael said that usually a consignor in those circumstances is happy. He then elaborated on the consignment process: Grogan & Company, as a smaller regional auction house, doesn't like to give optimistically high estimates, out of concern that the consignor will think he or she will do even better at Sotheby's or Christie's. The big firms don't always serve the consignor well; Michael cited as an example a consignor who had taken a rug to Sotheby's, received a \$5,000–\$10,000

estimate, and then decided to have Grogan & Company sell the piece, which brought several times that much. When he knows the auction price is going to exceed the estimate substantially, Michael said, he'll often tell the consignor beforehand that there's a lot of interest and that the piece may do better than anticipated, so the result isn't a complete surprise.

After answering audience questions, Michael turned to John Edelmann and asked him to add a story. John described how he too had gone into rugs with no prior knowledge, and initially bought a rug that he thought was pretty nice. He showed it to another dealer, who told him it was a Sparta. John asked him, "Is that good?" The dealer replied, "No"—that the rug was virtually worthless. John said he was discouraged but not dissuaded, and his next acquisition was a Fereghan Sarouk that he bought for \$40 and sold for \$950, cementing his interest in rugs and his conviction there was money to be made from them.

The final question for Michael concerned his future auctions. Michael replied that the upcoming sale, on April 26, will feature the contents of A Room With A View Galleries in Boston and Brookline—including the French furnishings that surrounded us during the meeting (6). The next auction with rugs will be on June 8.

Our double thanks to Michael Grogan, both for hosting the March NERS meeting and for providing an engaging journey through his thirty-five years of rug auctions.

*Jim Adelson*



Auction Highlights: Aspirational Offerings at Sotheby's New York, January 31



Clockwise from top left: lot 1, Azerbaijan silk embroidery, \$112,500; lot 56, "eagle" Kazak, \$233,000; lot 82, Tekke "animal-tree" *asmalyk*, \$100,000; lot 92, Northwest Persian garden carpet fragment from the estate of Louise Woodhead Feuerstein (exhibited in *Through the Collector's Eye*, cat. 31), \$221,000. Prices include the buyer's premium.



Auction Highlights: Collectibles within Reach at Skinner Boston, March 22



Clockwise from top left: lot 95, Bukhara *suzani*, \$6765; lot 101, Bergama, \$15,990; lot 105, Bordjalu Kazak, \$10,455; lot 132, Kashmir moon shawl, \$4,920. Prices include the buyer's premium.



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**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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