

HALI

CARPET, TEXTILE & ISLAMIC ART

ISSUE 157 AUTUMN 2008 UK £17 EUROPE £19 USA \$36 REST OF WORLD £22 \$42 www.hali.com



UNUSUAL
ANATOLIAN VILLAGE
WEAVINGS
SPANISH AND EAST
MEDITERRANEAN
CARPETS IN THE
MUSEUM OF
ISLAMIC ART, QATAR
A POSTCARD FROM
TRANSYLVANIA
AN INDONESIAN
TEXTILE COLLECTION
FOR LACMA
ANTIQUE RUGS AND
MODERN ART – A
SPECIAL REPORT

ALBERTO LEVI GALLERY



Tacheb, Bakhtiari tribe, West Persia, circa 1920, 227 x 80 cm (7'2" x 2'6")

GALLERY EXHIBITION:

PRIMAL

PRIMITIVISM AND ABSTRACTION IN TRIBAL TEXTILE ART

NOVEMBER 6 - DECEMBER 23 2008

ONLINE PREVIEW

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mothers had, even though they may be masterpieces," says Raffaele Carrieri of Altai Gallery in Milan 1, 2. "They are rolling them up and storing them away. They've found that nomadic carpets can give soul to the kind of space that wouldn't otherwise have it – spacious homes with clean lines, mirrors, wood." Looking round his gallery, with its stacks of tribal rugs and felts enlivening a predominantly concrete space, you can see his point.

"People understand these textiles in an instinctive way," says Carrieri. "They come without preconceptions, just with their eyes, their souls and their taste. People interested in knot count and dye types don't like this kind of thing, but people with large minimalist spaces and an open mentality are drawn to these objects that lack decoration, but are full of the history of man, of life itself."

"The nomadic way of life has never changed, so in a sense their textiles are among the oldest there are. They were born out of personal necessity and remain untouched by the technical possibilities that have evolved over the centuries. They look just as they would have done maybe 10,000 years ago. But the aesthetic of nomadic textiles goes perfectly with modern minimalism because it effectively does the same thing: it cuts out everything superfluous. Although they sometimes have an explosive effect, there's nothing ornamental about them. They contain nothing but elements vital to the nomad: softness, warmth and protective symbols."

He holds up a long, ragged *filikli* from Anatolia with two adjoining concentric square designs in vivid red, black, orange and pink, pointing out: "It has such a modern look because it is the exact opposite of the precise, finely knotted, sophistication of the classic urban carpet." This would certainly make a potent statement in a minimalist home.

Carrieri works almost exclusively with Italian architects and interior designers, including Antonio Citterio, Piero Lissoni, Erna Corbetta and Studio Vudafieri. The majority of his rugs go to homes outside Europe: in Shanghai, Moscow, Dubai and the US. "Nothing else takes up so much space in an interior," he says. "If you get it wrong, the whole thing is wrong."

Just a stone's throw from Milan's grandiose cathedral, the winding back street of Via San Maurizio leads me to Alberto Levi's gallery where the modernist aesthetic is again very much in evidence 7. Here the visitor finds a space that is more a contemporary art gallery than a carpet shop, with 'art rugs' hanging and lying comfortably close to tribal offerings with an equally contemporary feel. "People whose parents had carpets as status symbols want their homes to be exactly the opposite," says Levi. "They want big open-plan spaces with 360° perspectives where rugs, sometimes overlapping, can define areas. They are not collectors. What they see in tribal rugs is something intangible – perhaps soul."

Ten years ago when he opened the gallery, Levi had no doubt that things were changing rapidly. "My aim was to appeal to a younger clientele, one in touch with the world of design. I made a conscious decision not to present classical carpets. At the time there were plenty of antique carpet dealerships, so why open another? Milan is a capital of fashion and design and the Milanese love the avant-garde so it made sense to open a place where the carpet could be seen more as a piece of modern design."

Levi mounts regular shows on modernist themes. "In 1999, I had a seminal exhibition called 'Minimal', which showed carpets that were antique but had a minimal, graphic aspect: gabbehs, minimal kilims, *tülü*, *sofreh*.... I realised that my customers were asking not 'is it old?' but 'is it beautiful?'" Since then he has had no doubt that for the new clientele it is the aesthetic of a piece that is of prime importance. "Times have changed and the concept of homes has changed. The carpet as we previously saw it has practically disappeared. Today it has to marry the environment. Now even mechanically made rugs, such as Art Deco and 1970s Verner Panton creations have acquired a value."

"Persian kilims with black and white stripes, once used to protect knotted carpets, are now among the textiles most sought after by interior designers. These were first shown by David Black



7 Mazandaran kilim, Central Persia, ca.1900. 2.10 x 3.49m (6'10" x 11'4"). Alberto Levi Gallery, Milan

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Alberto Levi