

# HALI

CARPET, TEXTILE & ISLAMIC ART



ISSUE 166 WINTER 2010 UK £17 EUROPE £19 USA \$36 REST OF WORLD £22 \$42 [www.hali.com](http://www.hali.com)

KARAPINAR RUGS  
MEDIEVAL TEXTILES  
IN THE HALBERSTADT  
TREASURY  
THE PARACAS  
COLLECTION IN  
GOTHENBERG  
AMERICAN COLONIAL  
EMBROIDERY AT  
THE MFA, BOSTON  
ARTS & CRAFTS  
CARPETS AT CRAB  
TREE FARM  
ISLAMIC ART FROM  
THE AL-SABAH  
COLLECTION  
TURKMEN RUGS  
& CHINESE MATS  
AT 'ARTS', SAN  
FRANCISCO

ISSN 0142-0798





## EXHIBITIONS

# TAKEN AS FOUND

MONIQUE DI PRIMA

Beneath the bustle of Milan's old town, among the foundations of the city's ancient architecture, we find an exhibition of carpet fragments that lies at the very foundation of Alberto Levi's love of traditional antique oriental weavings.

**A CURIOUS TOURIST**, keen to escape the crowds, might explore the back streets of Roman and Romanesque Milan, still present amid the curving walls and soaring cornices of the old city, once the domain of great Milanese families, whose names mark its streets and squares.

Here our adventurous visitor will find a treasure trove of antique shops and traditional restaurants and, not far from the basement carpet warehouse that once belonged to his father, Alberto Levi has created a home for his own carpets. The interior, with vast windows looking out on via San Maurilio, boasts cosy rooms with towering walls – ideal for the contemporary rugs that Alberto offers to style-conscious Milan.

But the passion for the old, and the skill of a chemist by trade but an artist by nature, has not disappeared. As we walk down the industrial staircase to the undercroft referred to in his first



exhibition in this space ('From the Vault', HALI 162, 2009, p.107), we discover new treasures: fragments of antique carpets and kilims, eternally fascinating to Alberto, that he has collected over a period of around 25 years travelling around the world, browsing catalogues, and searching through auction houses small and large.

I visited on a mild but rainy autumn day, and recall that the colours of the Anatolian pieces **1,2** (a favourite theme), of the sweet Mughal tiger cub **4**, the stunning Ming peony, the vibrant splendour of the 'vase' carpets, made it seem like spring. Above all, I think of the title 'As Found', so apt for this exhibition of pieces presented just as they were discovered, without any restoration – fragments or items of study that Alberto happily discusses with clients and fellow enthusiasts.

It is rare to find such a quantity and variety of carpets and kilims – a Cabinet of Curiosities,

from as far back as the 15th century to the mid-19th. Alberto mentions the names of Heinrich Kirchheim and Christopher Alexander, as well as colleagues such as Alberto Boralevi and Bertram Frauenknecht who have paid attention to fragments for some time. A considerable proportion of the collection, perhaps more in line with Western tastes with roots in Neoclassicism rather than Eastern styles, reflects the idea that a carpet can be used as a piece of contemporary art.

It doesn't take a great leap of imagination to picture them in a New York loft, on the walls of an arty studio or nonchalantly leaning against a designer sofa. Or perhaps in the home of the art critic David Sylvester, immortalised in Sotheby's London catalogue of 26 February 2002, or in the ultra-elegant creations of Axel Vervoordt at TEFAF Maastricht, or the Palazzo Fortuny, like a slash by Fontana or a Khmer torso in grey sandstone.

Owning a complete classical period carpet isn't affordable for everyone, but a lovely Safavid fragment can be had for the price of a late 19th century Caucasian rug. And tastes have changed: houses are less dusty and full, interiors more open, even incorporating different functions in the same room. In these spaces, where contemporary pieces are made to order, Alberto Levi can bring things together with consummate taste, and an 'as found' carpet can find a new lease of life.

The collection also offers the keenest collectors the opportunity to study and compare. Gazing at the Konya fragment **3** from the same rug as an *Orient Stars* fragment (pl.174), its knots clearly visible, the light warps and the pink wefts, the shape of the extended 'S' of a magnificent aubergine, one's enthusiasm overflows faced with such pure contrasts (red, blue and white), in which every tone is saturated and yet full of shade at the same time.

There is more to the collection than Anatolian village pieces, which comprised almost half the exhibition. In addition there are pieces of a more formal, workshop nature: a large *saf* fragment would have been a fine exhibition on its own in the brick vault, displayed beside a small fragment of an Ottoman carpet with jagged little medallions that reminded me of a Turkish-inspired Alcaraz, as well as a number of kilims that hung in the centre of the room beneath a wonderful – very worn but complete – east Caucasian kilim **1**.

For a quick trip to the world of carpets from Spain to Tarim and back, you can take a look at these and other pieces in the online catalogue: full but not complete, it is an invitation to take a closer look. An exhibition for collectors, but also for anyone who might be interested, attracting art lovers and sophisticated interior designers with its modernity.

*Monique di Prima's Italian language rug primer Saper Vedere: Il tappeto published by Mondadori Electa will soon publish an English language edition*

#### AS FOUND

Alberto Levi Gallery  
Via San Maurizio 24  
Milan, Italy

[www.albertolevi.com](http://www.albertolevi.com)

11 November – 24 December 2010



**1** The vault with Alberto Levi's 18th century Ushak saf and other antique carpet fragments

**2** Anatolian village rugs in the vaults

**3** Central Anatolian village rug fragment with 'S'

motifs, Cappadocia, ca. 1600. 1.55 x 1.10m (5'1" x 3'7")

**4** Mughal animal and palmette carpet fragment, north India, ca.1600. 0.42 x 0.77m (1'4½" x 2'6")



**3**



**4**