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'The Fabric of India' at the Victoria and Albert Museum

Exhibitions

LOOKING EAST

*'Hunting and Gathering:
China, Tibet and East Turkestan'*
Alberto Levi Gallery,
24 Via San Maurilio,
Milan, Italy
Through 2015
Reviewed by Daniel Shaffer

Rug dealing is bred in the bone for Milan gallery owner Alberto Levi. But that does not mean that he is a dyed in the wool traditionalist. He understands the need for active promotion of the rugs and textiles that he loves, especially in lean

His current exhibition brings together three dozen pile carpets, rugs and trappings, many of them fragmentary, from north China, the Himalayan Plateau and the Tarim Basin, spanning the 16th to 20th centuries.

For my taste, the exhibition's particular strength lies among the antique Chinese pieces. A Kangxi period Ningxia *kang* cover, once in a Midwestern museum, has superbly balanced lotus medallions floating over a complex lattice ground (1).

Found in Inner Mongolia, and probably woven in Beijing, a lovely Ming-period fragment, no more

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times when many players in the antique rug game are in retreat.

His latest initiative is 'Hunting and Gathering', an annual series of themed rug exhibitions on show to the general public at his Via San Maurilio premises, which is also accessible internationally on his website, where full, interesting captions and analyses, supported by back and front zoom images, serve as a useful alternative, however ephemeral, to a good printed catalogue.

Levi's intention, as he puts it, is to revive the rug dealer's age-old role as a skilled and well-informed hunter and collector, travelling widely in person, not just through the internet, in search of the best rugs (many of which are hidden and never to be discovered online), then to put them aside until it is opportune to reveal them.

than a narrow strip, may be one of the earliest known Chinese pile rugs with a tiger pelt design (2). Another narrow strip, made in China but found in Lhasa, with the so-called 'standing water' pattern, probably comes from the border of a Ningxia Kangxi period imperial carpet (3).

A damaged but dramatic rug with two double-*dorjè* (crossed-*vajra*) motifs - the amuletic Buddhist thunderbolt symbol - is in all likelihood a fragment of a longer runner (4). It was made in Ningxia in the 17th century for a Tibetan monastery. Somewhat later in date, a very unusual pile yak collar, locally made in Tibet, has an overall 'rice grain' pattern, a design from the repertoire of antique Ningxia carpets (5).

There is much more besides, so see www.albertolevi.com



1 Qing dais cover with lotus flower medallions, Ningxia, north China, Kangxi period (1662-1722). 1.28 x 3.10 m (4' 2½" x 10' 2")