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A RUG REVERIE



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Nothing is everything

During Milan Design Week 2025, Alberto Levi Gallery will present the exhibition 'Il Nulla [Heech / Nothingness]' in collaboration with its long-term professional partner, the pioneering Lila Valadan. Rachel Meek asks Levi about the concept and the art of embracing the ineffable

Design Week brings hype, buzz and crowds to Milan each April. To counter the frenetic energy of the humming streets and happenings, Alberto Levi Gallery and Lila Valadan are inviting visitors 'to step beyond the hectic heartbeat of the city into a place quieter than silence—a realm where senses are recalibrated, beauty is distilled to its purest form, and true minimalism emerges through ancient weaving techniques and tactile narratives'. Their invitation sounds appealing, to say the least; and saying the minimum, or even nothing at all, is at the heart of their collaborative show 'Il Nulla [Heech / Nothingness]' showing at Alberto Levi Gallery during Milan Design Week 2025.

Heech, the Farsi word for 'nothingness' relates to a profound philosophy from Persian Sufism embracing the idea that creation springs from the nothingness which permeates the universe and resides within all of us and; to surrender to this emptiness is to dissolve the ego and discover wisdom, beauty, and unity. Valadan's Aleph collection of flatweaves embodies this infinite void of an ethos. Levi describes it as 'bridging past and future, carrying the belief that tradition is not about preserving ashes but keeping the fire alive.'

The show results from a decades-long professional relationship stretching back to—as Levi recalls—his 'first encounter with Lila Valadan's late husband, the esteemed Mohammad Naziri, at the inaugural Domotex fair'. He says, 'Lila and Mohammad stood out for their pioneering approach, curating a selection of visually stunning, antique and vintage South-Persian tribal rugs and flatweaves. Their keen eye for authenticity and artistic expression has always resonated with me, making our partnership a natural evolution over time. We have been representing the Lila Valadan brand in Italy since its inception, building a longstanding relationship based on a shared appreciation for exceptional craftsmanship and artistry in rug-making.'

Like everyone who was lucky enough to visit Valadan's momentous 'Night Time in a Palace' exhibition at Domotex Hannover in January 2024, Levi

was astounded by its impact. It increased his admiration for her boundless creativity, expressed not only in her rugs but also in the way she presents her collections. Describing the presentation as 'breathtaking in both concept and execution', he realised as soon as he saw it that such extraordinary work deserved to be showcased to a broader audience, 'particularly during Milan Design Week, where it could reach a diverse and design-savvy crowd'.

'Il Nulla' will embody the authenticity woven into Valadan's rugs which Levi describes as being 'woven by the same artisans who have passed down these skills for generations, using the same time-honoured materials and weaving techniques'. As he explains, 'This results in pieces that are not just beautiful to the eye but also deeply tactile and full of character. Each rug tells a story—there are no shortcuts—each rug is crafted with the finest wool, dyed using only the highest-grade natural materials. The result is an unparalleled level of craftsmanship evident in every fibre. These rugs exude quality, passion and a deep respect for tradition, which is something truly rare in today's market.'

The use of natural dyes extracted from pomegranate peels, saffron and walnut shells also elevates the collection, as Levi says: 'For me, this approach is like opening a window into the past—it creates a tangible connection to the origins of weaving, maintaining an unbroken thread between history and the present. Whether or not clients specifically request

01-04 Flatweaves by Lila Valadan

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it, they inevitably recognise and appreciate the depth and authenticity natural dyes bring to a piece. I do not doubt that the collection will leave a lasting impression... Many of the audience in Milan may not have fully realised how transformative and magical a rug can be. I expect visitors to be inspired, enchanted and to gain a newfound appreciation for the artistry and craftsmanship behind these remarkable pieces.'

In approaching the design labyrinth epitomised by Design Week, perhaps it is worth taking to heart the words of Lila Valadan: 'When everybody tries to be something, be nothing.'
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www.lilavaladan.com