



ARMENIAN RUGS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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MAY, 2007, JIM ALLEN LECTURE

On Wednesday evening, May 16, 2007, the San Francisco Bay Area Rugs Society (SFBARS) and the Armenian Rugs Society (ARS) jointly hosted rug dealer and writer Jim Allen, who presented a lecture and slide show at the Simonian Rug Co. in San Mateo. Following a reception featuring delicious middle eastern food catered by La Mediterranee restaurants, Peter Poullada, the president of the SFBARS, and Levon Der Bedrossian, president of the ARS, gave brief announcements, and then Peter introduced the speaker to the audience.

The title of Jim's talk was "Armenian Rugs without Inscriptions." Noting that the current category of collectable Armenian rugs consists mainly of rugs inscribed with Armenian writing and dates, Jim said that, largely through the work of the ARS, the rug world is now coming to terms with the important role Armenians have played in rug culture and rug weaving through the ages. The thesis of his talk was that "it is time to expand the definition of Armenian rugs to include those weavings that have symbolic, technical, or geographical associations with Armenia or expatriate Armenians."

After going over basic facts about Armenia—its strategic location between Europe and Asia and early



Jim Allen

embrace of Christianity (301 A.D.)—Jim described how he saw "a symbolic association between some Caucasian weavings containing small Christian crosses worked skillfully into their designs and an Armenian provenance." He defined a "minimalist Christian cross" as "one that is elongated by a single additional knot towards the weaving's bottom, metaphorically towards the Earth, like the true cross." Rather than being comprised of five knots, these elongated crosses are made of six knots, and might indicate the weaver's desire to represent herself as a Christian. Jim further described Caucasian rug designs as "simple yet psychologically profound," noting that "the contribution of Armenian artisans through the centuries to the great reservoir of Caucasian rug designs only recently is becoming adequately appreciated."

Jim referred to demographic data on the populations of the Caucasus Mountains given in an article written by Murray Eiland. This data shows there were far more Armenians in the Karabagh region in the

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Levon Der Bedrossian and Peter Poullada

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings! The year is more than halfway upon us, and it's been a healthy year so far. Many of you attended the May sixteenth joint lecture with the Bay Area Rug Society at Simonian Rugs in San Mateo. Jim Allen presented a slide lecture focusing on Hidden Crosses in Armenian Rugs. It was an informative and entertaining lecture, shedding light on the conscious practice of weaving hidden crosses into rugs by Armenian rug weavers within the restrictive political and religious climate of the Ottoman Empire.

We are all looking forward to the August event in Seattle, during which the ARS and the Seattle Textile and Rug Society will hold a joint meeting to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Emmanuel's Rugs. The event will be marked by a rug exhibit, a lecture on Armenian rugs by Barry O'Connell, and (of course) a show-and-tell. Much gratitude and thanks to Thea Sand, President of Emmanuel's and the fourth generation of her family to run the business, for putting this event together.

Once again, this past spring I spent a couple of weeks in Yerevan, the ever-changing and dynamic capitol of Armenia. Together with author Vahram Tatikyan, we are pushing forward the project to translate his book *Ancestral Carpets of Karabagh* into English. The process has started, and I'll have more details in our next newsletter.

When I am in Yerevan, I visit and revisit some of the museums. This time it was a delight to revisit the Folk Art Museum on Abovyan Street. Hundreds of artifacts are displayed on both levels of the building. The display comprises artifacts made of four different materials: Wood, metal, clay and textiles. On this visit, I was particularly impressed by the clay *Aghamans*, salt containers in the form of female figures.

I hope you all have a good summer. Don't forget to throw a few of your rugs out in the sun to rejuvenate the aging wool knots and to keep the moths away. Your rugs will rejoice in the sunshine, and if you look at them with fresh eyes, they will tell you a new story.

—Levon Der Bedrossian

PETER LYMAN (1940–2007)

It comes as sad news to the Bay Area rug community that Peter Lyman passed away on Monday, July 2, after a battle with cancer. He was 66. Peter was a past president of SFBARS and an active and highly knowledgeable collector of antique oriental rugs and other art objects, mainly from the Himalayas and China.

Peter began his collecting career thirty years ago while in Lansing, Michigan, in the good hands of Moishe Alexanian, a local Armenian carpet dealer who first tutored Peter in rugs and other textiles. Friends and acquaintances knew of Peter's extraordinary passion for art and his wide-ranging interests and tastes in both antique and contemporary works.

Highly versed in the art and artifacts of traditional cultures, Peter felt strongly about furthering a public presence and appreciation for art. Among other art-related activities, he donated important pieces to museums and worked with the Art History Information Project at the Getty Trust. Aside from his talents as a collector of Asian art, Peter was a gifted and dedicated teacher. Known for his mentoring skills, he developed an almost legendary reputation among his students.

Following his teaching at Michigan State, he spent a few highly successful years at USC, which were followed by an appointment to the position of University of California Librarian. Most recently, he served as Dean and instructor in The School of Information at UC Berkeley, becoming known for his research on online information and social networks on the Internet. For those of us who knew him, Peter was a friend and teacher extraordinaire, an inveterate art lover, and a caring and giving human being. His presence, vision, and generosity will be sorely missed.

—Robert Dunn

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nineteenth century than any other ethnic group. Beyond statistics, Jim looked for clues to the weaver's reasons for intentionally putting crosses in her rugs. He showed slides of a few rugs he had examined, including two Shirvans and a Lori Pambak rug, all nineteenth century weavings. He also discussed the similarities between some rug designs and the carvings on old Armenian churches, showing photographs of carvings from Dr. Lucy Der Manuelian's article in *Weavers, Merchants and Kings*. Jim spent a great deal of time explaining his analysis of one particular Lori Pambak rug, which he suspects was an Armenian wedding rug. He based this opinion on the Christian crosses, the Tree of Life design (which he thought might represent two family trees), and the stylized birds, animals, pomegranates, and sheepskins, which he maintained gave information about the "two families along with



Attendees enjoy the wonderful buffet



Waiting for the lecture to begin



Shirvan prayer rug being displayed

significant ecclesiastical symbols and designs." Also striking was the similarity of this design to one of the church carvings he had shown us. His fascinating analysis of this rug, with birds representing the two lovers who first notice each other (shown at the bottom of the rug), fall in love (as the two birds gaze at each other in the lower portions of the upper quadrants of the rug), and eventually marry (shown by the two lovebirds kissing atop the Tree of Life) made for a wonderful narrative, and was an excellent example of possible meanings subtly woven into a rug.

A lively show-and-tell session followed the talk. A number of audience members had brought rugs to share, which were discussed and enjoyed by all.

This was an interesting and enjoyable evening, and we hope the ARS and the SFBARS have occasion to meet together in the future.

—Karleen Hall



Karleen Hall and Levon Der Bedrossian, right hand corner

AFGHAN WAR RUGS ON EXHIBIT IN SAN JOSE

The current exhibitions at the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles explore themes of war, politics and patriotism. These exhibits demonstrate how textiles, both historical and contemporary, can powerfully express responses to world events. Of special interest

This exhibition is being co-presented by the San Francisco Bay Area Rug Society and the Armenian Rugs Society, and the San Jose Peace Center. Pat Markovich, member of both SFBARS and the ARS, is a well-known collector of these Afghan war rugs. She



Afghan War Rug

to the oriental rug community is the exhibit *Woven Witness: Afghan War Rugs and the Afghan Freedom Quilt*. This exhibition is described as "...exploring the impact of war on the evolution of traditional Afghan rug design, from the Russian invasion through the current U.S.-Taliban war. Whether individual rugs were woven as political statements, personal reflections, or as souvenirs for soldiers, only the weavers could reveal for certain. Regardless of intent, these examples are a powerful testament to the relevancy of the rug form, its expressive capacity, and the ability of a people to adapt to the ravages of war."

will be giving a talk during the exhibition, which runs from July 17-September 23, 2007.

The museum is located at 520 South First Street, San Jose, CA 95113, and is open Tuesday-Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$6.50 for adults, \$5.00 for seniors and students with ID, and free to members and children under 13. Entrance is also free to the public on the first Friday of each month. For information: Visit www.sjqiltmuseum.org. or call (408) 971-0323.

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AUGUST MEETING IN SEATTLE

Pack up and prepare for a trip to Seattle! Our membership coordinator, Thea Sand, is working diligently with the Seattle Textile and Rug Society and the Armenian Rugs Society to plan a joint meeting, to be held at Emmanuel's Rug and Upholstery Cleaners, her family business.

This year marks the one hundredth anniversary of Emmanuel's, which was founded in Seattle in 1907 by John Manoug Emmanuelian, an Armenian immigrant from Aghin, a village in central Turkey. In 1904, John had come to New York, where he worked for Donjian, Inc., one of the largest rug importers at that time. Moving to Seattle, John started out selling rugs door to door from the streetcar. He eventually opened a showroom downtown in the Stimson Building, at the corner of Fourth and University. The company is now headquartered at 1105 Rainier Avenue South.

Thea is the fourth generation of her family to run Emmanuel's, and she is grooming the fifth generation to take over in twenty years or so—her two adult children work with her and her other employees. Along with cleaning Oriental rugs by hand at the shop, Emmanuel's has three on-location carpet cleaning trucks and employs skilled specialists to restore antique rugs. The company also sells imported rugs and has an upholstery cleaning operation. Their reputation is one of the best in the northwestern United States.

In celebration of the centennial of the business, Thea has invited Barry O'Connell to speak on the evening of Saturday, August 18. Barry is the author of *Oriental Rugs and Persian Rugs: the O'Connell Notes* (at www.spongobongo.com), *Notes on Oriental Rugs and Persian Rugs by Barry O'Connell* (at www.persiancarpetguide.com), and numerous other articles and on-line rug blogs. He also worked with Harold Keshishian on his www.hadjin.com pages. Barry's talk is entitled "The Armenian Rugs of Erivan and Borchaly in the Nineteenth Century." He will present his ideas on what defines an Armenian rug, as well as discussing Kazak rugs and the effect of various wars in the region on the production and style of rugs made by Armenians.

The meeting will begin at 5:00 p.m. There will be refreshments, and attendees will have the opportunity to enjoy a display of Armenian rugs. At 6:00 p.m., Barry O'Connell will speak; after his lecture there will be time for show-and-tell. Audience members are encouraged to bring Kazak, Shirvan or Karabagh rugs (not necessarily inscribed or given an Armenian provenance) to share. Other textiles from Transcaucasia are also welcome.

The evening is free of charge to all.

Members of the Armenian Rugs Society will be arriving at the Seattle-Tacoma Airport on Friday

afternoon, the 17th. Most of us will be staying at the Sheraton Seattle Hotel, 1400 Sixth Avenue, Seattle 98101. If you're planning to attend, call (206) 621-9000 as soon as possible for reservations. Thea tells us that Seattle is a tourist mecca at this time of year, so hotels fill up quickly.

On Friday evening, we plan to meet at a restaurant for a no-host ARS dinner. Levon Der Bedrossian, our president (and a noted San Francisco restaurateur), is investigating Seattle dining places and will choose a restaurant for us. This evening will be a chance to renew friendships, enjoy good food and good company, and discuss rugs and other favorite topics.

On Saturday there will be time for sightseeing before the meeting, and on Sunday, Thea and members of the Seattle Textile and Rug Society are checking out some textile-related activities for those of us who are interested in an excursion. This should be a wonderful weekend!



Thea Sand, President of Emmanuel's Rugs and Upholstery

MEETING LOCATION AND DIRECTIONS

Emmanuel's Rug & Upholstery Cleaners is located at 1105 Rainier Ave So., Seattle, WA 98144. Free off-street parking is available in the Emmanuel's lot and at nearby businesses. Phone number is (206) 322-2200.

From I-5 North

Take the I-90 E/Dearborn St./Airport Way exit (EXIT 164) toward Bellevue/Spokane/4th Ave So. Take the Dearborn St. exit, turn LEFT on So. Dearborn St. Turn RIGHT onto Rainier Ave So. Go exactly 2 blocks to Norman St and turn RIGHT into the lot.

From I-5 South

Merge onto I-90 via EXIT 164A toward Spokane. Take the Rainier Ave So exit (EXIT 3). Turn LEFT onto Rainier Ave So. and turn LEFT into the lot.

Armenian Rugs Society
939 N. Amphlett Blvd.
San Mateo CA 94401 USA



The Armenian Rugs Society, founded in 1980, is dedicated to the preservation, documentation, and advancement of the artistic and cultural contributions made by Armenian rug weavers to the rich and vibrant history of textile arts.

ARS MEETING IN SEATTLE

Come to Seattle the weekend of August 17-19, 2007, to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Emmanuel's Rugs and Upholstery, to learn what Barry O'Connell has to say about Armenian Rugs, and to eat, drink, and be merry! Details are inside, or check our website at www.armenianrugssociety.com.