



THE TEXTILE MUSEUM

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UPCOMING EXHIBITION PROVIDES A LENS INTO CULTURES AROUND THE WORLD THROUGH TEXTILES

Please join us for a press preview Thursday, October 16 at 9 am.
RSVP to Annie Laurie Sánchez at asanchez@textilemuseum.org
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***Timbuktu to Tibet: Rugs and Textiles of the Hajji Babas* is on view at
The Textile Museum October 18, 2008 through March 8, 2009**

October 9, 2008, Washington, D.C. — This fall The Textile Museum will take visitors on a journey through North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and beyond in ***Timbuktu to Tibet: Rugs and Textiles of the Hajji Babas***, an exhibition examining the central role that rugs and textiles play in diverse cultures around the world. Through the display of 90 Oriental carpets and other woven objects, the exhibition showcases the dazzling beauty of the pieces and explores the context in which they were created and used within cultures on several continents. *Timbuktu to Tibet* is on view October 18, 2008 through March 8, 2009.

With textiles, people around the world express their diverse traditions, lifestyles, fashions and technologies, all while addressing fundamental physical, aesthetic and spiritual needs. Textiles serve as clothing, provide shelter and accompany rituals. Through material, color, pattern, design and other facets, textiles reveal an individual's wealth, social status, occupation, and religious and ethnic associations, as well as a culture's values, codes and social order. *Timbuktu to Tibet* illuminates these encoded messages and explores the varying functions of



Cover, Eastern Caucasus,
Daghestan, 20th century.
Wool; felt. Marshall and
Marilyn R. Wolf Collection.

carpets and textiles. By examining the practical uses and complex iconography of the rugs and textiles on view, the exhibition offers visitors a deeper look into the lives, beliefs and events that shape cultures around the world.

Exhibition Themes

One of the determining factors in how textiles have been made, decorated and used, from Africa to East Asia, is whether they originate in nomadic or settled cultures. The textiles produced by these two types of societies differ greatly in their aesthetic, technical and functional qualities; because of their continuous interaction, however, nomadic and settled people have shaped each other's textile traditions.



Saddle bag, detail, Shahsevan tribe, Iran, 19th Century. Wool; weft wrapping and tapestry weave. Bruce and Olive Baganz.

Nomadic Textiles: Caravans and Animal Covers

In nomadic societies, textiles facilitated life on the move and provided a medium for artistic expression. They were made for personal use, solely by women, and only sold in times of extreme hardship. Beyond their practical role as furnishings and other items for everyday living, textiles were used as decoration on animals and in tents during special occasions such as weddings, religious ceremonies and when hosting guests. Traditional designs were passed down by memory from grandmother to mother to daughter, with little change over five or more centuries. Many familiar motifs have now-forgotten origins, such as the hooked motif rendered in a variety of color combinations on a bag woven by women of the Shahsevan tribe in northwestern Iran.

This motif was common to several Iranian and Turkic weaving communities of West and Central Asia. Its origin has never been satisfactorily explained, but the ease with which it was memorized ensured its continued use with little change over 500 years.

Urban Objects: Luxury Goods for the Fashion Leader

Textiles with the most intricate designs, complex weave structures, and expensive silk and metal yarns were produced by people living in settled societies who had greater financial and human resources. For centuries, the wealthy urban elite and ruling families provided the assets to sustain highly specialized and skilled craftsmen, from designers to weavers, who worked on major textile projects. Settled societies also had adequate time and financial means to pursue sericulture, or silk cultivation, and to grow cotton, both of which produce important materials for weaving.

In traditional Islamic urban societies, the fashion leader was the king, shah, sultan or local ruler who, according to the ideals of the time, would maintain an artistic establishment employing poets, artists, musicians and a great variety of skilled craftsmen. These craftsmen produced items of the highest quality, such as weapons, furnishings, clothing and animal trappings for the court's use. These courtly styles were closely followed by people of lesser means, who were always keen to stay in fashion. High

on the list of desirable items were silk textiles, which were produced by the most advanced technology of the times and often were the most expensive items in circulation. These silk textiles were frequently copied using a less expensive material or a technology such as embroidery that did not require large, complex looms.

Village Weavings: Women's Work

Existing between the highly commercialized textile industries of urban centers and the personal weavings made in nomadic societies are objects produced in villages. Village weavers, always women, worked at home creating textiles for themselves and for sale. This part-time self-employment supplemented the family income and allowed the women to fit the weaving work into their days while also keeping an eye on their children. Textiles made within these communities tended to have strong primary colors and bold designs. Their patterns often emulated the sophisticated urban originals but in execution retained the simple beauty and style of a distinct local character.

Objects in the Exhibition

The Textile Museum's showing of *Timbuktu to Tibet* features selections from the exhibition *Woven Splendor from Timbuktu to Tibet: Exotic Rugs and Textiles from New York Collectors*, on view earlier in 2008 at the New York Historical Society.

Preeminent scholar Jon Thompson, recipient designee of The Textile Museum's 2008 George Hewitt Myers Award for his lifetime achievements in the field of textile arts, served as guest curator of the initial presentation and authored the

accompanying catalogue. Sumru Belger Krody, associate curator of Eastern Hemisphere Collections, organized The Textile Museum's showing. Textiles featured in The Textile Museum presentation include:

- A vivid 20th-century wool felt from Daghestan in the Eastern Caucasus, today used as a wall or floor covering but still linked to the nomadic past through its name, *arbabash* (cart cover)
- A wall hanging from 19th-century Turkey or Syria illustrating architectural and floral motifs
- An elaborately embroidered saddle cover, fashioned to adorn a horse belonging to Azerbaijani nomads in the 1800s

"Following the approach Thompson took at the New York Historical Society, we sought to tell the story of the people who made the objects, the ways they lived and worked, and the functions of the



Saddle cover, Azerbaijan, 19th century. Judy Brick Freedman Collection. Photo by Don Tuttle Photography.

pieces they created,” said Sumru Belger Krody, associate curator of Eastern Hemisphere Collections at The Textile Museum. “This allows us to explore the cultural context in which the objects were made and used in addition to showcasing the textiles as beautiful works of art. This unique approach makes the material more accessible to those less familiar with the textile arts, and deepens our appreciation and understanding of their significance.”

Who are the Hajji Babas?



Wall hanging (detail), Turkey or Syria, 19th century.
Collection of Gail Martin.

The exhibition’s title refers to the New York-based Hajji Baba Club, the nation’s oldest society of rug and textile collectors, which celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2007. *Timbuktu to Tibet* features rugs and textiles either held in the private collections of Club members or donated by them to The Textile Museum and other institutions. The Hajji Baba Club draws its name from the hero of a 19th-century English novel by James Morier, *Hajji Baba of Isaphan*, the first in his *Hajji Baba* series. Over its 75 years, the Hajji Baba Club has enormously impacted the appreciation of rugs and textiles as art. Members of the Club have donated objects to the collections of many major museums, including The Textile Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Harvard University’s Fogg Museum and Winterthur Museum.

The Hajji Baba Club currently boasts 185 members, including museum curators and directors, auction house directors and board members of the International Conference on Oriental Carpets.

George Hewitt Myers, founder of The Textile Museum, was himself an active member of the Hajji Baba Club. “By exploring the history of the Hajji Baba Club in *Timbuktu to Tibet*, we are able to celebrate the contributions of Club members past and present, and to chronicle how the Western understanding and appreciation of traditional textiles have changed over the 20th century,” said Krody.

Related Programming

THE TEXTILE MUSEUM FALL SYMPOSIUM

“Cultural Threads: Exploring the Context of Oriental Rugs and Textiles”

October 17–19, 2008

The Textile Museum Fall Symposium is designed to bring together individuals interested in learning about textiles and to promote scholarship, camaraderie and the informal exchange of ideas. Drawing inspiration from The Textile Museum’s fall exhibition, *Timbuktu to Tibet: Rugs and Textiles of the Hajji Babas*, this weekend conference provides an engaging exploration for textile experts and novices alike. Participants enjoy a varied program of presentations by scholars and collectors, evening receptions, an exhibition tour and a special “Show-and-Tell” session. For program details and to register, visit

www.textilemuseum.org/symposium.htm, call (202) 667-0441, ext. 64, or e-mail reception@textilemuseum.org.

REGISTRATION IS LIMITED. PLEASE REGISTER EARLY.

EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION (ends September 30):

\$215/members; \$260/non-members (includes a one-year TM membership); **\$175/students with valid ID** (includes a one-year TM membership)

STANDARD REGISTRATION (after September 30):

\$260/members; \$305/non-members (includes a one-year TM membership); **\$215 students with valid ID** (includes a one-year TM membership)

PUBLIC GALLERY TALK & TOUR: *Timbuktu to Tibet: Rugs and Textiles of the Hajji Babas*
Saturday, October 24, 11 am

Explore the new exhibition in a tour led by Sumru Belger Krody, associate curator of Eastern Hemisphere Collections. FREE; no reservations required. Limited to 35 participants.

FAMILY FIRST SATURDAYS: “Dancing Along the Silk Road”

Saturday, November 1, 2-4 pm

Discover the delights of traditional Central Asian dance through a demonstration by the Silk Road Dance Company. Explore the exhibition *Timbuktu to Tibet: Rugs and Textiles of the Hajji Babas* and find inspiration to create your own Central Asian textile. FREE; no reservations required.

FAMILY FIRST SATURDAYS: “A,B,C, Arabic Alphabet ”

Saturday, December 6, 2-4 pm

Did you know that textiles tell stories? They are often told through images, but sometimes the maker writes the story on the textile. Explore the current exhibition and find stories written in Arabic. Elspeth Kursch, education intern, will teach families how to write their name in Arabic. Make a textile holiday card and sign you name in Arabic! FREE; no reservations required.

FAMILY FIRST SATURDAYS: “Ring in the New Year!”

Saturday, January 3, 2-4 pm

Ring in 2009 by creating a *ringyem*, a Tibetan New Year’s necklace. Learn more about Tibetan art and culture with a family guide in the exhibition. FREE; no reservations required.

FAMILY FIRST SATURDAYS: “Clothing from Timbuktu to Tibet”

Saturday, March 7, 2-4 pm

Drape, wrap and fold yourself in clothing from Timbuktu to Tibet and have your picture taken! Inspired by the exhibition, create a textile belt that tells your own unique story! FREE; no reservations required.

TEACHER WORKSHOP: “Timbuktu to Tibet: Textiles for Teachers”

Saturday, November 8, 10:30 am-1:30 pm

Learn how people the world over express their diverse traditions, lifestyles, fashions and technologies through the textiles they create. Materials for hands-on classroom activities and light refreshments are provided. Fee: \$5 per person. Advance registration required. Call (202) 667-0441, ext. 64.

EVENINGS AT THE TM

Join us for a dynamic series of programs planned for one Thursday evening each month beginning in November. Many aspects of cultures from two continents are explored in a vibrant array of presentations. Fee per lecture: \$15/members; \$20/non-members. Register for the series to receive a discount! Fee for the series: \$80/members; \$105/non-members. Advance registration required; space is limited. Call (202) 667-0441, ext. 64.

“Daily Splendors: An Exploration of the Culinary and Decorative Arts of Africa and Asia” Thursday, November 6, 6:30 pm

Join Amy Riolo, culinary historian and author of *Arabian Delights*, for a lecture, demonstration and book signing. Following the talk, enjoy a selection of delicious international foods.

“Indian Music: Surbahara and Sitar”

Thursday, January 8, 6:30 pm

Enjoy a special performance of traditional Indian music. Shubha Sankaran plays the surbahara, a cello-like instrument, and Brian Q. Silver plays the sitar, which is reminiscent of a violin.

FILM: “Gabbeh”

Saturday, December 13, 2:30 pm

An epic tale of forbidden passion and a romantic ode to beauty, nature, love and the textile arts, *Gabbeh* tells the story of a folkloric carpet with a hidden secret. Directed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, the film is introduced by Sumru Belger Krody, associate curator of Eastern Hemisphere Collections. *In Farsi with English subtitles*. FREE; advance registration required. Call (202) 667-0441, ext. 64.

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About The Textile Museum

Established in 1925 by George Hewitt Myers, The Textile Museum is an international center for the exhibition, study, collection and preservation of the textile arts. The Museum explores the role that textiles play in the daily and ceremonial life of individuals the world over. Special attention is given to textiles of the Near East, Asia, Africa and the indigenous cultures of the Americas. The Museum also presents exhibitions of historical and contemporary quilts, and fiber art. With a collection of more than 18,000 textiles and rugs and an unparalleled library, The Textile Museum is a unique and valuable resource for people locally, nationally and internationally.

The Textile Museum is located at 2320 ‘S’ Street, NW in Washington, D.C. The Museum is open Monday through Saturday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm and Sunday 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Admission is free with a suggested donation of \$5.00 for non-members. For further information, call 202-667-0441 or visit www.textilemuseum.org.

<p>For more information or images, please contact Annie Laurie Sánchez at 202-667-0441, ext. 77, or by email at asanchez@textilemuseum.org or visit www.textilemuseum.org/about/pressroom.htm.</p>
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