

ORIENTAL RUGS

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Samarkand Carpets Show at Doris Leslie Blau

SAMARKAND CARPETS

New York galleries often stage exhibitions on Asian themes during Asia Week (which started this week and is actually two weeks).

This week Doris Leslie Blau, a gallery with hundreds of antique and modern carpets at 306 East 61st Street, in Manhattan, opened a show (though March 26) of about 60 Samarkand carpets made between 1880 and 1930. It is noteworthy because few American dealers sell these rugs.

Samarkand rugs are not woven in Samarkand, the second-largest city in Uzbekistan. Most come from the villages of East Turkestan, in China, and are then passed through Samarkand, a 2,700-year-old city. It was a market town on the Silk Road, the trade route between China and Europe.

“Everything was going on there,” said Nader Bolour, the owner of Doris Leslie Blau. “Samarkand was stuck in the crossroads between India and Russia, China and Europe.”

The city has been inhabited since 700 B.C. Alexander the Great conquered it in 329 B.C. The Mongols sacked it in 1220. Tamerlane made it his capital in 1370.

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“Samarkand is history’s definitive melting pot,” Judith Glass, an antique-rug consultant, writes in the catalog. The carpets “display themes from many cultures, including China (with fretwork borders, lotus blossoms and cloud bands); India (with the swastika denoting infinity); Turkey (with bold reciprocal borders and carnations); and Persia (with floral trellis work).”

These are sturdy wool rugs, not like silk Persian carpets. “The weave in these carpets is actually quite coarse,” Mr. Bolour said. “They are all about color and design, not fineness of weave.” He is attracted to their unusual color combinations. “None are red and blue like Oriental carpets,” he said. “They have very soft colors with a little tweak: magenta with acid green, peachy beige with brown, saffron yellow with lacquer red, bone with brown or slate blue.”

Each rug incorporates woven symbols. Three medallions together may represent Buddha. Pomegranates signify prosperity and fertility.

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