SELDOM SEEN: DIRECTOR’S CHOICE FROM THE TEXTILE MUSEUM’S COLLECTION

Seldom Seen: Director’s Choice from the Textile Museum’s Collections presents a group of 28 rarely exhibited textiles selected by The Textile Museum’s new director, Donald Walker. Working in consultation with the Museum’s curators, Mr. Walker chose each object based on its compelling visual quality or aspect. The textiles included in the exhibition are varied in terms of culture and function, and represent the major geographic areas traditionally collected by the Museum. Included are textiles from South America, Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Japan. It is a tribute to the richness of The Textile Museum’s collections, which number more than 17,000 objects, that an exhibition featuring such first-rate but rarely seen textiles could be presented many times over, noted Mr. Walker.

The exhibition features many special pieces, including a stunning Persian kilim acquired by Museum founder George Hewitt Myers in 1926, the year after The Textile Museum was officially established. While widely published, the kilim has not been exhibited since 1987. It was a favorite of Myers, who used the design for his personal bookplate. Like many other classical Persian rugs, the pattern, adapted from designs conceived for manuscript bindings and illumination, features a central medallion, corner medallions, and a cartouches border. Birds and animals, real and imaginary, writhe and romp across a field of vines and blossoms. The kilim is in breathtakingly pristine condition, with luscious colors and shimmering metallic-wrapped threads. Also included is a Coptic tapestry, which has not been exhibited since 1982. The tapestry, representing an architectural assembly of two columns and a triangular gable, would have been used as a curtain or hanging. Another treasure, to be exhibited for the first time, is an embroidered Paracas-style alpaca mantle from the Museum’s extraordinary pre-Columbian Peruvian holdings. The mantle features five-falling, childlike figures with kering smiles and streaming hair.

The exhibition also includes a group of little-known early textiles from the Middle East with inscriptions or animals in roundels. African textiles include a cluter of objects from Cameroon—a BamilokScumbral hats, which have never been exhibited, and a Hausa beaded wrapper dress of extraordinary vitality. South Asian material includes a sari from the Gomelond of India with indigo-dyed wrapped threads and a skirt from Laos, on view for the first time ever, embellished with prismatic geometric patterns. Perhaps one of the most remarkable is an Ainu embroidered bark cloth with brilliant abstract embroidered patterns and a su costume for the Nú theater audience. The bark cloth is like a Koran reading.

Daniel Walker was appointed director of The Textile Museum in May 2005. Prior to that he was the Pati Cadby Birch Curator in Charge, Department of Islamic Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, a position he held for more than 17 years. He has published and lectured extensively on diverse topics related to Islamic art, particularly carpets and textiles. At The Metropolitan Museum of Art Mr. Walker curated the landmark exhibition Flowers Underfoot: Indian Carpets of the Mughal Era, which is accompanied by a book of the same title.

Castles of the Crusades Exhibit at National Geographic

Visitors to the National Geographic Museum at Explorer Hall will catch a glimpse of life in the Middle Ages when two large, intricately detailed models of a Crusader castle and a bustling medieval bazaar go on display on May 12. The Castles of the Crusades: A View in Miniature exhibit runs through Sept. 4.

A model of the Crac des Chevaliers (Castle of Knights), the largest and best-preserved Crusader castle ever built in the Middle East, located in what is now Syria, shows the castle in 1271 as it is being besieged by the Turkish sultan, Baybars. The 1:25-scale model covers about 20 x 20 feet and contains some 2,000 hand-decorated figurines depicting scenes of military and civilian life, including Christian and Muslim fighters and pilgrims and peasants with their cattle, including cows and sheep, and the buying public. Also depicted are goods such as wool and textiles, furniture, meat and fish, incense, spices, vegetables, fruit, and cattle.

Caravans are included, along with snake charmers, storytellers, musicians, belly-dancers, and a group of people in front of the mosque listening to a Koran reading.

Additional information on Crusader castles, medieval bazaars, knights and rulers of that era will be provided on a CD, which includes information on Crusades of the Crusades exhibit at the National Geographic Society, based in Aachen, Germany. They worked from maps, drawings, and diagrams, as well as videos and recent on-site measurements.

Siepen and his team also constructed the model of the Bazaar of Aleppo, which presents the color and bustle of market life. The model was built by German architect Richard Siepen and a team from the International Castle Society, based in Aachen, Germany.