

Turn Left at the Camel: A Curator's Tale of Uzbekistan, October 20, 2006-February 11, 2007

Khiva, Uzbekistan, April 30, 2006 - A small, straggling group of jet-lagged but excited Americans follows a young Norwegian woman out the door of a small inn and through a sand-colored-stucco and mud-brick townscape. They pass the high battlements of the Khan's Palace museum, cross a wide town square, and climb a short flight of steps to a dusty street lined with sand pits and scrawny trees on one side and small shops filled with items for the tourist trade on the other. Rounding the first sand pit, one of the visitors calls out - "Hey, a landmark! We turn left at the camel." Katya, as the camel was called, became the focal point for all directions given over the next week.

The members of this group were six textile specialists visiting Uzbekistan for two weeks, hosted by the Institute for Training and Development (Amherst, Massachusetts) and funded by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The participants spent a week in the historic old city of Khiva - a World Heritage Site - working with, assisting, and learning from the artisans employed by two textile studios, the Silk Carpet Workshop and the Suzanni (embroidery) Center. These establishments are being developed by UNESCO and a Swedish organization, Operation Mercy, as sustainable craft businesses. The six visitors then passed a second week traveling from Khiva to Tashkent, capital of Uzbekistan, via the oasis towns of Bukhara and Samarkand along the fabled Silk Road, for millennia the main overland trade route between the Mediterranean and China.

Thanks to funds voted by The RISD Museum's Fine Arts Committee, Curator Madelyn Shaw used this opportunity to acquire a number of contemporary textiles created in traditional *suzanni* and *ikat* (tiedyed threads) techniques for the Museum's collection. This exhibition presents a "snapshot" of just a few of today's Uzbek textile arts, enhanced by photographs taken by the group members to document their encounters with the Khiva workshops and with the art and architecture of the Silk Road.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Uzbek

Suzanni (embroidered wall hanging), April 2006

Cotton plain-weave ground embroidered with indigo-dyed silk in satin and couching stitches

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.53

The *suzanni* in this case is executed in the Auz Khona design. The central motif is taken from ceramic tile on a courtyard wall in the Khan's Palace, and the floral border was derived from another set of tiles.



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Uzbek

Suzanni (embroidery), ca. 2000

Silk warp and cotton weft plain-weave ground with silk embroidery in satin, couching, and chain stitches

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.54.1

Mr. Akbar is a dedicated collector of *suzanni* embroideries, old *ikats*, and traditional garments. Excited by the chance to show his collection to textile enthusiasts, Mr. Akbar had soon strewn the floor of his reception room with dozens of his favorite *suzannis*, taken from stacks of textiles stored in and on antique trunks. The nomadic peoples of Uzbekistan used colorful textiles to enliven tents and define living spaces, and the tradition expanded within the oasis cities. This design, with its central medallion, large flowers, and bright colors, is of a style traditional to the region around Nurata, a town to the northeast of Bukhara, about halfway to Tashkent. Notice the slight differences in color and stitching on each side of the central seam. The two halves of this *suzanni* were probably embroidered by different women in the same household or workshop.



Uzbek

Suzanni (embroidery), ca. 2005

Silk warp and cotton weft plain-weave ground with silk embroidery in satin, couching, and chain stitches

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.54.2

Curator Madelyn Shaw and dye-plant specialist Elizabeth Merrill discuss the embroidery in this case while seated on the floor in Akhbar House. Although made in Nurata, this example is very different from the piece in the case to the left. The colors are lighter than in more traditional *suzannis*, a palette adopted in response to international trade. These particular colors sell well to Japanese tourists. The extraordinarily rich design vocabulary in this *suzanni* employs traditional motifs – , such as the medallions around the border and the paisley (known in Uzbekistan as an almond or chili pepper) with internal geometric patterning found in the central field – in a new layout. Tiny figures of humans and chickens have also been added in two places.



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Nodira, Subkhanova, Uzbek
Nadi Subkhan, Uzbek
Evening dress, 2006
Silk satin-weave warp ikat (tie-dyed thread)
Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.55

The 2006 Bukhara Silk & Spice Festival fashion show was held on this stage set. The work of six Uzbek designers was highlighted hereat the fashion show, one of the focal points of the Festival. This evening gown is from designer Nodira Subkhanova's "Bukhara Colour" collection. It stood out as an example of using a textile technique with a long national history – warp *ikat* – in a modern palette and pattern for a dress design meant to appeal to the country's urban professionals. The garment was purchased for the Museum via the good offices of the Swiss Director of Bukhara Tourism, Andrea Leuenberger, who cajoled it from the arms of its designer the very next morning.



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Uzbek

Textile length, ca. 2005

Cotton plain weave, warp ikat (tie-dyed thread)

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Umida, the young entrepreneur who owns this shop near Lyaby Hauz Square in Bukhara, also works with a small group of seamstresses to create the garments she and her assistant are wearing in this photograph. The green-and-white cotton *ikat* seen in this case came from Umida's shop. It points to a contemporary trend of making pure cotton ikats that will sell well to tourists and upscale Uzbeks looking for fabrics to be used for warm-weather clothing.



RISD MUSEUM

Uzbek

Textile length, 2005-2006

Silk satin weave, warp ikat (tie-dyed thread)

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.57.1

Contemporary Uzbek women often choose new *ikat* designs in making their traditional clothing. This textile with *ikat* stripes and geometric patterning in bright colors on a white ground is used to make very popular garments for women and children.



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Uzbek

Textile length, 2005-2006

Silk warp and cotton weft warp-faced plain weave, warp ikat (tie-dyed thread) with a moiré finish

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.57.2



RISD MUSEUM

Uzbek

Textile length, 2005-2006

Silk satin weave, warp ikat (tie-dyed thread)

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.57.3



RISD MUSEUM

Uzbek

Textile Length, 2005-2006

Silk warp and cotton weft warp-faced plain weave, warp ikat (tie-dyed thread)

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.58

In the enormous central market in Tashkent, bigger even than New York City's Macy's department store, everything you might need or want is for sale in some nook or corner. Our group spent two hours touring the market on our second day in Uzbekistan and managed to slip in a few minutes of shopping. That stop, in a small silk shop, resulted in the length of silk-and-cotton ikat seen in this case.



RISD MUSEUM

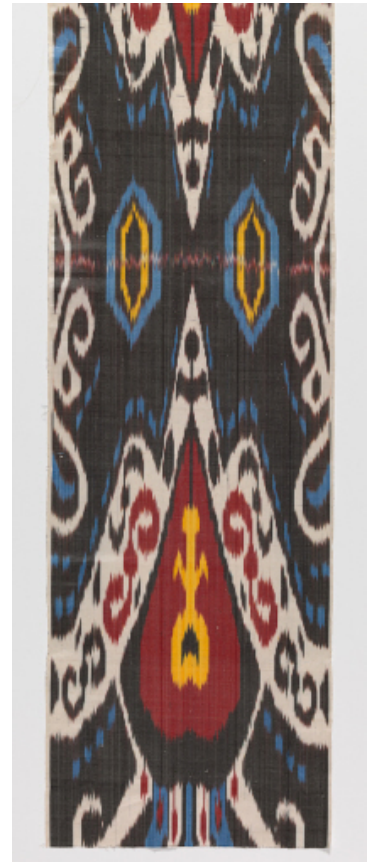
Uzbek

Textile length, 2005-2006

Silk and cotton plain weave, ikat dyed

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.59

The weaver of the textile in this case, originally from the Fergana Valley, has moved to Bukhara to practice his trade in a new crafts gallery, housed in a renovated *madrassah* (Islamic school building) sponsored by US-AID.



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Uzbek

Textile length, 2005-2006

Silk plain weave, warp ikat (tie-dyed thread)

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.60.2



RISD MUSEUM

Uzbek

Textile length, 2005-2006

Silk plain weave, warp ikat (tie-dyed thread)

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.60.3

The father and son dyer/weaver team whose work is seen in this case and the case at right came to Bukhara for the Silk & Spice Festival from the town of Andijan, in the Fergana Valley in eastern Uzbekistan.

In addition to their solid color and iridescent silk textiles, they have also experimented with new patterning for their *ikat*-dyed fabrics. These four lengths were designed, dyed, and woven by this family workshop in Fergana.



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Uzbek

Textile length, 2005-2006

Silk plain weave, warp ikat (tie-dyed thread)

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.60.4

