

GALLERIES

Previews and reviews of exhibitions and other events staged by carpet and textile dealers around the world.



A SILKEN DOWRY

'SUZANI FROM THE EMIRATES OF BUKHARA AND KOKAND'

The Textile Gallery, London, at Rudolph Mangisch Gallery, Mühle Tiefenbrunnen, Seefeldstrasse 233, Zurich, Switzerland. 28 June – 20 July 1991

These days it is rare for Michael and Jacqueline Franes to be associated with a thematic exhibition outside the context of an international fair such as Maasticht or Grosvenor House, so The Textile Gallery's display

of Central Asian dowry embroideries (suzanis) at Rudi Mangisch's gallery in Zurich is special on several counts.

Top suzanis are rare, but here one can almost take for granted the high quality of the examples on display. Michael Franes has been a forceful pioneer in the promotion of appreciation of the finest Central Asian and Turkish textiles. One remembers with pleasure his magnificent ikat show at The Textile Gallery's first premises in Cork Street as long ago as 1974, as well as splendid

Pskent suzani, Kokand Emirate, 19th century. 2.29 × 2.69m (7'6" × 8'10"). Silk embroidery on cotton. There is a marked contrast between the suzanis of the Kokand and Bukhara Emirates.

The small town of Pskent lies southeast of Tashkent and northeast of the Syr Darya River. Pskent suzanis initially appear similar to dowry embroideries from nearby Tashkent in both colour and style, but the cotton ground is completely covered with embroidery. Tashkent suzanis still leave some tiny areas uncovered. Pskent embroideries also tend to be more coarsely woven than those from Tashkent, although there are some exceptions. The use of a heavy dark golden-brown line for a stem or outline, as well as a yellow colour that leans towards ochre are other distinctive features. As with the earliest Tashkent suzani, madder-dyed red wool is used extensively to accentuate certain elements, whereas all the other reds are woven in silk dyed with cochineal. The silk reflects light and the wool absorbs it, giving an added visual texture to the embroidery.

The earliest Tashkent suzani appear to pre-date the earliest Pskent examples, which can tentatively be assigned to the mid 19th century.

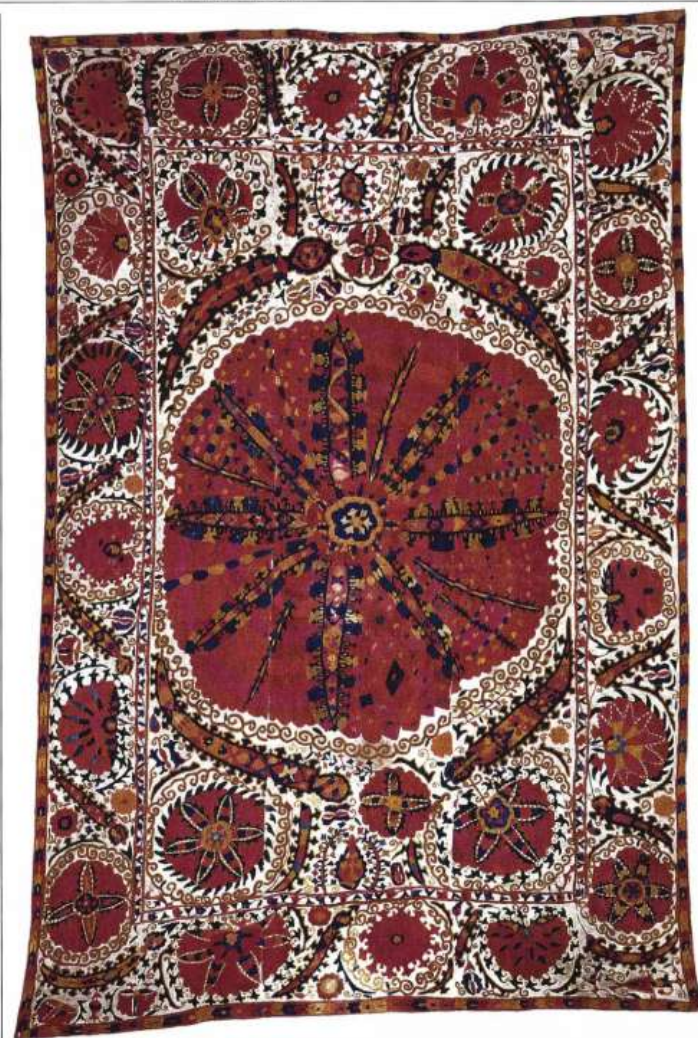
Pskent suzanis have a variety of quite extraordinary designs. Among them are floral designs combined with astrological symbols and depictions of the sky at night with stars radiating from dark red moons of various sizes. The variety of field designs seems almost endless, but Pskent embroiderers paid relatively little attention to decorating the single narrow border that contains the field. The leaf-meander patterns of these borders vary little from one example to the next.



Ottoman textiles exhibited in association with Elio Cittone in Milan and previous suzani exhibitions held at Galerie Triff in Paris.

The Textile Gallery was a penultimate source of the six superlative suzanis (one 'large medallion' and five Shakhriyabz examples)

Large medallion suzani, Bukhara Emirate, early 19th century. 1.35 × 2.35m (5'1" × 7'9"). Silk embroidery on cotton. Suzanis of the so-called 'large medallion' group are the best documented of all these dowry embroideries. In 1978, when Michael Franes & Robert Pinner's article 'Large Medallion Suzani from South-West Uzbekistan' (HALI 1/2, pp. 125-133) was published, only eight examples of this rare and most beautiful group were known. During the past thirteen years a further fifteen examples have surfaced. These suzanis, which were made in or around the Central Asian oasis town of Bukhara, form a homogenous group and may well represent the work of one particular village. Their archaic design suggests that they are among the oldest suzanis extant, probably dating from the third quarter of the 18th century, a time when silk embroidery in the Bukhara Emirate was given added impetus by the Emir's acquisition of the closely guarded secrets of sericulture from China. In consequence, the fertile lands of the Zarafshan valley were planted with mulberry bushes, and silk became plentiful in the region. Not all the 'large medallion' group are from this early period, and the corpus of surviving works must span several decades. Their main distinguishing feature is the large primitively drawn red-ground central medallion which occupies most of the field. Numerous other features also give this group its cohesion. Like other suzani woven in and around Bukhara, the laid and couched basma stitch is used, with outlines in the double button-hole or ilmok stitch. The silk used is often coarsely spun, adding to the rustic quality of the suzani. The minor borders or guard stripes are generally fully embroidered, a feature unique in this southwestern region to the 'large medallion' group. Small birds are often depicted on large medallion suzanis and four examples have embroidered birds in the corners of the field. Large animals appear on a 'large medallion' suzani in the Museum of Ethnography in Leningrad. Two stylised human figures are depicted on this extraordinary work of art.



purchased by Caroline and H. McCoy Jones and given to the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (HALI 30, pp. 44-51). Many readers will have been able to judge the sheer quality of these for themselves during last November's ICOC.

With Robert Pinner, Franes is one of the few experts outside the Soviet Union to have made a significant published contribution to the study of these powerful silk embroideries, in particular those of the rare 'large medallion' group (HALI 1/2). Just 23 are currently

known to survive, including the example illustrated here.

It is fair to say that in an area where professional scholars are all too often light years behind the top flight dealers in genuine hands-on expertise, the comprehensive texts which Michael Franes has prepared for this exhibition, and upon which the captions printed here are loosely based, represent one of the very few significant additions to our knowledge of these textiles for several years. More please! **Daniel Shaffer**