

## Teacher Exhibition Notes

# NOMADIC LEGACY

Tent & Textiles from Central Asia & Iran

October 14, 2008 – June 30, 2009



*Reed Screen for a Yurt, Kyrgyzstan, 1996.*

### EXHIBITION INTRODUCTION

For millennia, nomads have wandered seasonally across the mountains, steppes and valleys of Eurasia in search of pasture for their herds. Throughout history, these peripatetic Iranian, Turkic and Mongol travelers were active intermediaries along the famed “Silk Road” and other important caravan trade routes. NOMADIC LEGACY — Tent & Textiles from Central Asia & Iran, features artistic expressions created in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the geographical heart of the great Eurasian nomadic lands. It provides a glimpse into the rich and ancient traditions of these ancient

peoples. The exhibition explores the domestic environs of a nomadic encampment along with embellishment and elements of dress and personal adornment.

## THEMES



### Dwellings

Prominently featured is the Museum's magnificent Kyrgyz yurt made in the trellis-tent tradition that may have developed as early as the first millennium BCE. Portable domestic dwellings have been essential to nomads who depend on seasonal availability of pastures to feed their herds. One distinctive type is the trellis tent or yurt.

The Turkic word for this nomadic house is *uy*; the term "yurt" actually means "homeland" or "dwelling place." Three basic elements are common to these collapsible wood and felt structures: a domed cap (*tunduk* or *shanyrak*) that allows for air circulation and cooking smoke to escape; two or more trellis-like wings (*qanat*) that unfold to form a circular wall; and long poles (*uuk*) that connect the *tunduk* to the *qanats*. Boldly patterned *chiy* or wool-wrapped reed screens, cover walls and act as moveable dividers for the delineation of domestic space. *Yurt*, Kyrgyzstan, 1996.

### Portable Textiles

Functional, portable and aesthetically pleasing, textiles have always been indispensable to the nomadic peoples of Eurasia who continue the centuries-old tradition of producing textiles. Flat, woven and pile textiles are used as tent bands, animal packs and trappings, storage sacks, bedding bags, floor covers and as sleeping and prayer rugs. Often horse or camel pack bags are woven using a mixed technique: the front or "face" is a pile textile; the backside is a flat weave. In this exhibition a mosaic-like expanse of pile and flat-weave storage bags provides a feast for the eyes that demonstrates the excellent textile skills of the Qashqai, Afshar, Kurd and other pastoral nomads living in Iran.



*Saddlebag*, Iran, late 19<sup>th</sup> c.

## Personal Adornment



Eurasian nomads have contributed greatly to the history of costume, providing some of our fundamental elements of clothing — trousers, tunics and robes. In antiquity, Turkic nomads wore garments that easily distinguished them from sedentary peoples including stitched tunic-like upper garments that could be worn in layers and trousers tucked into boots. Highly stylized ancient animal and vegetal symbols alluding to abundance and well-being were used to adorn textiles.

A visually dazzling display of embroidered and ikat-dyed robes worn by the Turkmen, Uzbek and Kazakh peoples includes an Uzbek robe from the Museum's permanent collection that prominently bears one of these motifs in the form of scrolling ram's horns. Central Asian headgear appears in many shapes, of differing fabrics and adorned with distinctive designs. Among the most interesting are women's head coverings — caps, shawls, scarves, turbans and mantles — that can indicate the wearer's married status and age. Also featured in the exhibition is beautifully crafted silver and silver-gilt jewelry, including *Dagdan*, talismanic ornaments with antler-like appendages worn by young married Turkmen women and their children. *Women's Robe*, Uzbekistan, late 19<sup>th</sup> c.



## CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

### KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 2

- Locate Central Asia on a map and discuss the natural environment. Have students explore the lifestyles of its people based on the geography.
- Consider how the nomadic lifestyle has changed or remained the same over the years.
- Have students be “nomads for a day” in the classroom with 5-6 activity stations set up. Each time students move from one activity to the next, have them cart all of their belongings with them.
- Read *The legend of the Persian carpet / retold by Tomie dePaola* ; illustrated by Claire Ewart and *Tales Told in Tents : Stories from Central Asia / written by Sally Pomme Clayton ; illustrated by Sophie Herxheimer*. (both available in SD County Library)

### GRADES 3-5

- Learn about nomads and compare and contrast aspects of Central Asian nomadic cultures to Native American nomadic cultures (dwellings, lifestyles, animals, clothing, adornment, etc...)
- Have students imagine that they are nomads and ask them to write a diary entry from a first person perspective in which they consider what it would be like to pick up and move every few months.

### GRADES 6-8

- Explore the exchanges of ideas and material culture along the Silk Road over hundreds of years. Have students consider the role of the nomad in these exchanges.
- Compare attributes of nomadic cultures with agrarian cultures. Have students write an essay in which they argue in favor of one lifestyle over the other.
- Host a Silk Road week in the classroom in which each day is devoted to learning about a particular culture and it's long-lasting contributions to world civilizations. Explore language, art, religion, culinary traditions, costumes, economics and other developments.

### GRADES 9-12

- Facilitate a comparative study of nomadic cultures across time and place.
- Then ask students to reflect on the mobile lifestyles of contemporary American cultures by creating a poem (individually) or a poster (in groups).
- Learn about the origins of Central Asian and Iranian design motifs.

### Art Project Suggestions that Can be Adapted for Each Grade Level:

Paint or draw in the style of Persian miniatures, incorporating Persian calligraphy.

Use Central Asian and/or Iranian design motifs in a work of art.

Design a Persian Rug.

Make a felt ball or felt swatch. <http://gfwsheep.com/felting/felt.html>

Weave on a hand held loom.

Create a yurt model. [http://www.humis.utah.edu/humis/docs/organization\\_948\\_1213888703.pdf](http://www.humis.utah.edu/humis/docs/organization_948_1213888703.pdf)

## MAKE A SUZANI!

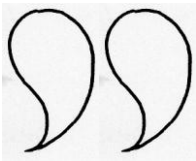
The birthplace of the **Suzani**, an embroidered textile that is not only functional but beautiful, is Uzbekistan. To make a replica **Suzani**, study some of the traditional Central Asian design motifs (see attached sheet).

1.) Choose a few design motifs and practice drawing them.

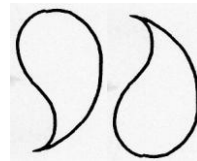
2.) Next, develop a **template** for a pattern in which you can arrange your design motifs. Some examples are a grid of 4-6 perpendicular lines, crossed diagonal lines, 3 rows of pentagons, 2 diamonds within a larger diamond, triangular rows and a gridded parallelogram. Take a moment to sketch your template on paper. This template will be used for the body of your design.

3.) Select a form of symmetry to apply to your design motif.

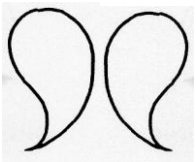
Translation



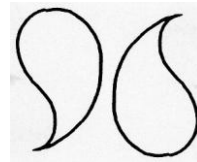
Glide Reflection



Reflection



Rotation



4.) Develop a **border** pattern using one or two motifs, applying a different type of symmetry.

5.) Choose a color scheme that includes:

- 2 or 3 analogous colors (usually warm colors)
- 1 color opposite these colors on the color wheel (usually cool)
- A dark and a light color for contrast.

6.) Using markers or colored pencils, apply your pattern template, colors and symmetrical designs for the body and the border to create your own **Suzani** on a rectangular or square piece of paper!

**EXTENSIONS:**

**Language Arts:** Explore literature from Iran and Central Asia.

<http://www.aaronsherp.com/stories/039.html>

[http://www.storiestogrowby.com/stories/magic\\_horse\\_persian.html](http://www.storiestogrowby.com/stories/magic_horse_persian.html)

[http://www.learn.columbia.edu/nehasian/html/neh\\_geo\\_con\\_iran.html](http://www.learn.columbia.edu/nehasian/html/neh_geo_con_iran.html)

**Science:** Build a model yurt and learn about how the materials help moderate temperature inside the yurt. Learn about various natural dyes and their origins.

[http://www.humis.utah.edu/humis/docs/organization\\_948\\_1213888703.pdf](http://www.humis.utah.edu/humis/docs/organization_948_1213888703.pdf)

**Math:** Host a competition in which students design and build the most stable yurt structures. Explore why rounded buildings might be more durable against winds than buildings with right angles.

[http://www.humis.utah.edu/humis/docs/organization\\_948\\_1213888703.pdf](http://www.humis.utah.edu/humis/docs/organization_948_1213888703.pdf)

**Music:** Learn about Persian instruments. Listen to Central Asian and Persian music.

<http://www.huttar.net/lars-kathy/c-asia-music.html>

**Theater:** Act out a folktale from Central Asia or Iran.

<http://www.aaronsherp.com/stories/039.html>

[http://www.storiestogrowby.com/stories/magic\\_horse\\_persian.html](http://www.storiestogrowby.com/stories/magic_horse_persian.html)

**Dance:** Watch a recording of Persian dance (see YouTube). Learn specific dance moves and rhythms.

**ADDITIONAL WEB RESOURCES:**

<http://www.mingei.org/collections/browse.php?Field=Exhibition&Term=NOMADIC+LEGACY>

<http://www.askasia.org/teachers/lessons/plan.php?no=38&era=&grade=&geo=02>

<http://www.rmanyc.org/education/learningtools.xml?context=education/learning-tools.xml>

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** (Available through San Diego County and Escondido Public Libraries)

Clayton, Sally Pomme. *Tales Told in Tents: Stories From Central Asia*, Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2004.

dePaola, Tomie. *The Legend of The Persian Carpet*, Putnam Juvenile, 1993  
Mayhew, Bradley, Richard Plunkett, and Simon Richmond.

*Central Asia*, Hawthron, 2000.

Opie, James. *Tribal Rugs: A Complete Guide to Nomadic and Village Carpets*, Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1998.

Abbate, Francesco, ed. *Indian Art and the Art of Ceylon, Central and South-East Asia*, New York, Octopus Books, 1972.