

Exploring the magic of Chinese carpets

By Corinne Abett
staff writer

When most people think of Chinese rugs, blue comes to mind, maybe with a flower design, a dragon or two and a geometric border.

Well that's just one small thread in the warp and weft history of the Chinese carpet.

For not only have the Chinese been weaving rugs since before the time of Christ, they have woven the story of their culture into this art form using a myriad of colors and patterns.

But, the literature on these has been sketchy and scarce — until now. Most writers paid considerably more attention to the Islamic rugs — until now.

"Carpets of China and Its Border Regions" by Virginia Dulany Hyman of Birmingham and William C.C. Hu of Ann Arbor, published by Arts Ceramics Ltd. (\$95), is just off the press and already winging its way to many parts of the globe including Australia and China.

It was the tribal people who initiated rug making, beginning with felt and later using wool pile. The rugs were made to be used for "only special occasions" such as weddings, the birthday of a grandfather or the birth of a baby. The rest of the time they were kept, rolled up, ideally, in a camphor chest.

need to study at the Palace Museum (Peking)."

THE COVER photo, a section of a scroll belonging to the museum, but unavailable to the public, was loaned by the Palace Museum.

It is a Ch'en-lung scroll showing Mongolian wrestlers performing on a Chinese carpet. On the back is pictured a high ranking official seated in the center of his soldiers and workers, his chair resting on a Chinese carpet.

It was pictures such as this along with literature, journals, historical works and poetry that aided the authors in their documentation and their argument in favor of the importance of carpets in Chinese life and culture.

"Only the magistrates and officials had these rugs, even into the 19th century," said Hyman.

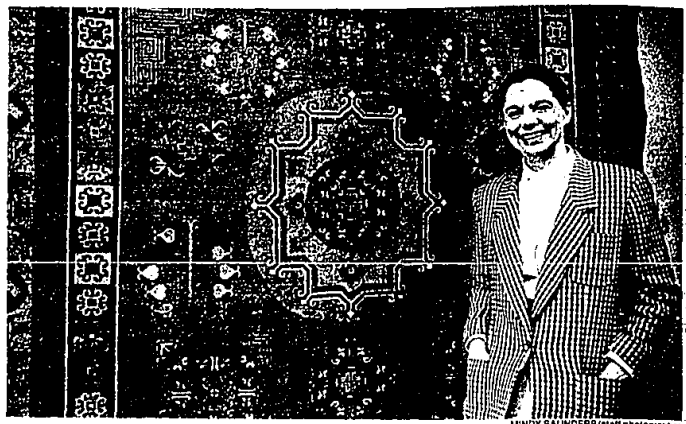
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Some of the most beautiful of the small carpets were made and used as saddle blankets and saddle bags. These are mirror pieces, sewn together in the middle where they would meet over the horse's backbone. The nap of the pile runs toward the ground so it sheds dust, dirt and rain. There are slits, reinforced with leather for the saddle and stirrup straps. Other small rugs were contoured to be chair seats or to hang over the back of a chair.

SOME OF the most important Chinese rugs had religious significance.

One color plate in the book shows the sutra-chanting hall of a temple in Ching-hai province. Carpets cover the 168 supporting pillars, each made so the design is continuous without an apparent break where the ends meet. The meditation rugs, shown in the picture are equally interesting. One suspects they served the same purpose as a rosary to help keep track of a progression of prayers. Prayer rugs have very obvious square designs, so one could move from one to the next easily.

Hyman said that to understand the rugs, one must be aware of the cultural and geographical history of this country.



Virginia Dulany Hyman, co-author of a new book on soft blue, sea green and other colors, was made in Sinkiang province.

Consequently, the book quickly became more than a rug or carpet book, for almost every bit of information on rug and carpet making and use must be put into a historical frame of reference, including social customs and household furnishings. The history of the dynasties, alone, is a complicated subject.

Since the authors were acutely aware they could easily discourage their readers if they let the work become overly scholarly to the detriment

of easy reading, they were intent upon maintaining a conversational tone. And, indeed, it is pleasant reading, as Hyman says, "more like a novel."

The history of China is a vast subject, too much for many an average person to handle. The undertaking to write such a document is a most ambitious project. The writers may have already decided to do another. Surely, the book will reopen the doors to a subject that has been neglected. Surely, they will begin to receive correspondence

from many parts of the world.

Hyman and Hu, so to speak, have put out the welcome carpet, they've reopened the doors to an interesting subject. She plans to have an exhibit of Chinese carpets in her gallery later this year. Many of those pictured in the book will be in that show.

The book is available through Dulany's Gallery, 183 Oakland, Birmingham. It is also listed on the computer, so it can be ordered through most area bookstores.

Author Irving Stone presents arts awards

By Corinne Abett
staff writer

"Imagine what this world would be without music, without painting and sculpture, without poetry," author Irving Stone asked the gathering for the presentation of the Michigan Arts Awards.

Briefly Stone recounted his personal struggle to find a publisher for the story of painter Vincent Van Gogh, "Lust for Life," rejected many times before it was finally accepted. It has since been published in some 80 languages and continues to bring in an income for Stone.

The excuse given him by those who rejected it was, "How do you expect to sell a book about an unknown Dutch painter in the middle of the Depression?"

Stone said, "Van Gogh had a view (that everything is) . . . all part, inseparably a part, of the universality of nature."

Stone's message was about the immortality of art.

"The only thing left from a civilization, any civilization, is its art."

He said he knew of no such group as Michigan Foundation for the Arts in California, but promised to take the idea of such an independent, non-

profit organization, devoted to encouraging the arts, back to his home state.

He told the audience before introducing the award winners that he is currently working on a book on the lives of the Impressionists, 1850-1900. He said his process begins as he reads diaries, journals, letters of his subjects and continues when he goes to live in the subject's home area for maybe two years.

"I involve myself in their thought process. . . . I become that person."

The third phase is the actual writing, which is done over several years at his home in California.

Saying "The creation of art is the sin-

gle greatest contribution we can make," Stone introduced the five winners of the \$2,500 awards. They are John Hegarty, painter, Conrad Hilberry, poet, Glen Michaels, sculptor, Von H. Washington, actor, writer, theatrical director, and the New World String Quartet.

Dr. G. Stuart Hodge, trustee of Michigan Foundation for the Arts, presented the patron award to Peggy de Salle, owner of Little Gallery of Birmingham, and former Gov. William Milliken, who wasn't present.

A reception and dinner followed the ceremony, which was held at Detroit Institute of Arts.

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