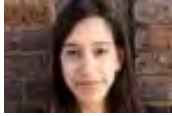


## 'Flying Carpet' Artist Inspired by a Half-Century of Chelsea Life



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| August 4, 2016 1:55pm  
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**CHELSEA** — In a small old-law tenement on West 15th Street, Stanley Bulbach sits at his loom and weaves flying carpets.

Ever since taking a trip to Morocco in the late 1970s, Bulbach, 69, has spent years crafting the Near Eastern-style carpets — spinning his own yarn, boiling dyes in his kitchen and weaving on a loom in the one-bedroom apartment he has lived in for nearly five decades.

“That kind of carpet, of course, doesn’t exist in reality,” he said of the moniker. “But it’s part of the tradition, the ‘flying carpet,’ so I make them, too.”

“Flying carpets” are distinguished by designs that lack a fixed viewing point and lend the viewer “a sense of moving, of twisting, of soaring,” Bulbach explained.

The carpet that first inspired him — a flat-woven one with an intricate, repetitive design — was hanging out to dry when he passed it on his travels through the Atlas Mountains.



**“The Hudson,”** a prayer carpet designed and created specifically for the Hudson Guild exhibit.



**Stanley Bulbach** next to his prayer carpet “Ferns” at the Jason McCoy Gallery.

“It was love at first sight,” recalled the artist, who jumped out of his car to snap a photo. “I was completely bowled over by the musicality of the design, by the abstract nature of the design.”

Seven of his pieces are currently on display at the Hudson Guild’s Fulton Center, in an exhibit called “The Interweave of the Near East and Chelsea.”

After he left Morocco, Bulbach turned to textile-centric groups like the Handweavers Guild of America to learn the art of weaving.

Working toward a master's degree and doctorate at NYU's Center for Near Eastern Studies also informed his craft, he said.

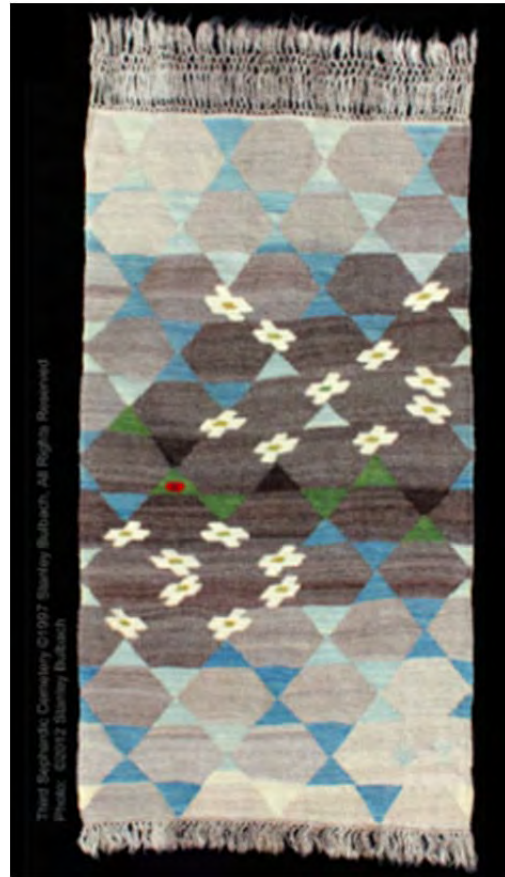
"I was fascinated with the idea that these carpets were so important in the lives of people in the Near East — not only in the economy, but also in how people used them in their daily lives," explained Bulbach, who also weaves traditional prayer carpets and carpet beds.

"These pieces could be, really, very powerful statements of their beliefs, their aspirations, their traditional designs, their ideas."

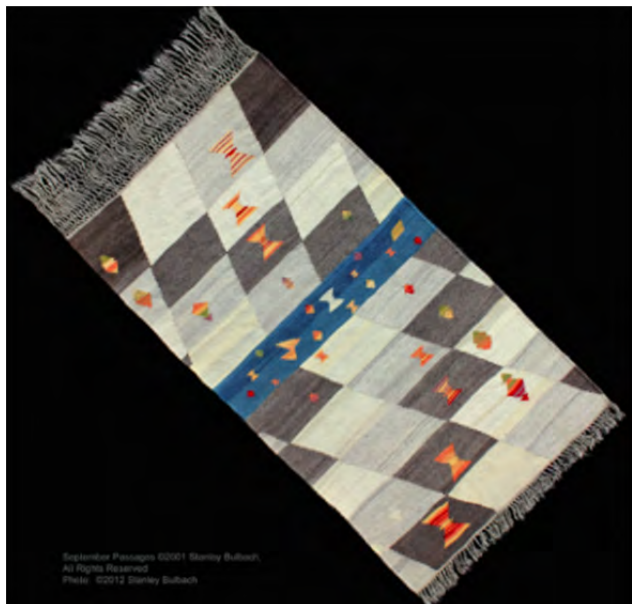
When he first moved to the city from New Jersey to earn a bachelor's degree in religious history from NYU, the textile and fabric trade was booming in Chelsea, he recalled.

"You couldn't walk down a block in Chelsea without running into a sewing machine repair shop," he said. "And that ain't no more — they're all Starbucks."

Many of the families living in his current building were from Middle Eastern countries like Lebanon and Syria, and neighbors who saw his work were reminded of pieces they'd brought with them from home or inherited from relatives.



**"Third Sephardic Cemetery," a carpet bed inspired by Chelsea's historic cemetery on West 21st Street.**



**"September Passages," a flying carpet created in 2001, depicting the immigration of Monarch butterflies through the city.**

Some of his carpets were inspired by those families, who have since moved out of Chelsea as rents and the cost of living have soared.

Others were inspired by sights around the city, like the annual migration of Monarch butterflies and the Third Sephardic Cemetery on West 21st Street.

"Chelsea is no longer what it used to be. Like so much else of New York, it's wealthier, but it's not richer," Bulbach said. "I want people to realize... this [work] reflects, in some way, shape or form, what this neighborhood used to be like."

Bulbach, who also heads the West 15th Street 100 and 200 Block Association, supported himself by teaching and lecturing about weaving until the 1990s, when he began supplementing his income working with computers.

“There is really no developed market for fiber art in this country,” he said. “It’s really very interesting and exciting, [but] it’s just relatively arcane and unknown.”

As for the carpet that caught his eye in Morocco, its bemused owners offered to sell it to him when they caught him admiring it.

He took them up on their offer.

“They thought I was a bit crazy,” he said. “But I think it was a knockout.”

*“The Interweave of the Near East and Chelsea: Contemporary Fiber Art of Stanley Bulbach” is on display at the Guild Gallery II at the Hudson Guild Fulton Center at 119 Ninth Ave., between West 17th and 18th streets, Wednesdays through Fridays from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. through Sept. 9, and from 4 p.m. to 7 pm. on Aug. 13, Aug. 20 and Aug. 27.*

[DNAInfo/chelsea/flying-carpet-artist-inspired-by-half-century-of-chelsea-life](http://DNAInfo/chelsea/flying-carpet-artist-inspired-by-half-century-of-chelsea-life)

For more information, please visit: [www.bulbach.com](http://www.bulbach.com)



**Stanley Bulbach, 69, harvesting goldenrod flowers to make dyes for yarn in a field in Vermont.**