

THE NEW YORK CITY WEAVER

From his Chelsea apartment, New York City-based weaver Stanley Bulbach dreams of ancient Mesopotamia and the links that bond East with West

When I was earning my doctorate at New York University in Assyriology, my travels through Morocco's Atlas Mountains enchanted me with traditional flatwoven carpets designed for life's key experiences—prayer, sleep, birth, death, etc. It was kismet.

In Mesopotamian history, ancient Sumerian Ur III revealed cuneiform accounts of annual wool production around 2,000 tons. Later Assyrian Emperor, Tiglath-Pileser III, conquered, seizing riches: 'gold, silver,...blue-dyed wool, purple dyed wool,...whatever was precious royal treasure.'

Today we have lost much awareness of wool's prized luxurious qualities. Flatweaving requires strong, lustrous wools. For warps and wefts I handspin fleeces from Lincoln Longwool sheep, their yarns glow in low light. These natural platinum, silver, and black wools complement the unique palette of traditional vegetal dyes such as cochineal and indigo.

Unlike the structure of knotted carpets, flatweaving favours designs perpendicular to the warps, and impedes those parallel with the warps. This 'grain' encourages the modern appearing abstractions in traditional flatweaving, perfect for capturing Manhattan's architectural geometry. The impressionistic abash captures my neighboring countryside.

Contemporary weavers working within classic tapestry and carpet traditions are often branded as hobbyists rather than artists. In a small New York apartment I handweave prayer carpets with focal points, carpet beds with supportive designs, and flying carpets with a sense of movement, to be enjoyed as meaningful contemporary art on the wall. They are evocative of our historical connections between East and West, different states of consciousness, and of ancient technologies key to our lives today. I feel that art illustrating the West's connections to the Near and Middle East does not enjoy enough attention here in the US, while there the war continues.

The Hudson is a prayer carpet I created last year for 'The Interweave of the Near East and Chelsea,' my solo exhibition celebrating the significance of the Levantine community in my community, Chelsea. It was recently in a group exhibition of tapestry art at the Fuller Craft Museum in Brockton, Massachusetts. The show entitled 'Gender Bend' featured other male weavers including Jon Eric Riis, Klaus Anselm and Archie Brennan.

www.bulbach.com

01 *The Hudson* flatwoven carpet, Stanley Bulbach