The Rugs of War

TIM BONYHADY & NIGEL LENDON

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THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

The Rugs of War **is an event of Fusion: a year of activities at the Australian National University exploring the merging of creative practices and intellectual currents. This book is published in conjunction with the exhibition** ***The Rugs of War*** **held at the ANU School of Art Gallery 2–15 June 2003.**

Fusion is coordinated by the National Institute of the Arts
(02) 6125 5703
http://www.anu.edu.au/ITA/
in association with the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research
(02) 6125 2434
http://www.anu.edu.au/culture/

This publication is supported by
NECG: Network Economics Consulting Group
Peter Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
Colin & Liz Laverty
Goanna Print

Fusion events and publications are also supported by
ANUIIA, the ANU Institute for Indigenous Australia
HRC, Humanities Research Centre
NIH, the National Institute of the Humanities
NIAP, the National Institute for Asia and the Pacific
The Ian Potter Foundation

The Rugs of War is a publication of the Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200.

Designed and typeset by Caren Florance, Letter Press, Canberra (02 62425948; letpress@webone.com.au). Printed by Goanna Print, Canberra (02 62391208). Photography by Neal McCracken and Stuart Hay, ANU Photography. Fine art separation: www.RLDI.com.au

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication data

The rugs of war

Bibliography.

ISBN 0 7315 3030 6 (Vol.).

ISBN 0 7315 3027 6 (set).

1. Rugs – Afghanistan. 2. Art and war. 3. Rugs – Afghanistan – Private collections – Australia. I. Bonyhady, Tim, 1957– . II. Nigel Lendon, 1944– . III. Australian National University. School of Art . (Series: Fusion (Canberra)).

746.7581

GOANNA PRINT

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Tim Bonyhady & Nigel Lendon
with an essay by Jasleen Dhamija

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY

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Introduction

MANY COUNTRIES HAVE EXPERIENCED WARS OVER THE LAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS but probably none has suffered so much warfare as Afghanistan or produced so much art depicting it. Afghan rug-makers began incorporating the implements of war into their designs almost immediately the Soviet Union invaded their country in 1979. They continue to do so today in the wake of September 11 and the start of America's War on Terrorism which ousted the Taliban government of Mullah Omar yet left a country in which local warlords still fight each other, the Taliban are again increasingly active and Kabul itself is subject to occasional attack.

The rugs produced in response to these events constitute the world's richest tradition of war art of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries — a remarkable product of at least hundreds if not thousands of anonymous weavers. The number of different basic designs which they have created is vast, the variations on these designs are prodigious. Their rugs range from small mats to huge carpets. Many are steeped in the traditions of Afghan carpet-making, but others are almost devoid of reference to these traditions. Some carry crude political messages. The meaning of others, at least from a distance, is difficult if not impossible to interpret.

This exhibition, although small, illustrates the range and complexity of these rugs — something rarely done before either in other conventional publications or in the virtual 'exhibitions' and typologies found, for example, at junkbiz.com on the internet. The earliest works in this exhibition date from the 1980s, the most recent were produced since September 11. There are map rugs and cityscapes, rugs dominated by guns, tanks and aircraft and others in which the weaponry is hard to discover. In order to show how some types of war rug have been produced in many variations, the exhibition includes three different versions of one of the most powerful designs — depicting Mohammad Najibullah, whom Moscow made President of Afghanistan in 1986 and the mujahideen ousted in 1992.

This catalogue is an initial attempt to explain these rugs which, like most oriental carpets, have generally been discussed from afar — by dealers and collectors in Europe and the United States typically aware only of what they have seen and heard about in their own country. This catalogue presents a much richer international picture. Tim Bonyhady provides the first extended account of the circulation and reception of war rugs around the world. Jasleen Dhamija is the first textile authority from the Indian sub-continent to explore the meaning of these carpets. Nigel Lendon considers the meaning of these carpets from the stance of an outsider astonished by their imagery yet, inevitably, not always sure of their meaning.

Both exhibition and catalogue are part of Fusion — a series of exhibitions, publications, musical performances, symposia and workshops at the Australian National University in 2003 coordinated by the National Institute of the Arts and the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research. A common assumption is that the forms of artistic expression can and should be pure — that it is both possible and preferable to maintain boundaries between different spheres of cultural practice. The premise of *Fusion* is that the interaction between different artistic traditions, musical styles and literary genres is not only inevitable but also often extraordinarily enriching. The war rugs of Afghanistan are a remarkable manifestation of this process.

Acknowledgements

The publication of this catalogue would not have been possible without the generosity of NECG: Network Economics Consulting Group, Peter Bellas, Colin and Liz Laverty. We are very grateful to them.

We would also like to thank Sabur Fahiz who has given his time and expertise in assisting us with the identification and cataloguing of the rugs in this exhibition and catalogue.

We are also indebted to Peter Bellas, Jane Bruce, Alison Carroll, Himman Dhamija, Richard Elliott, Ray Hughes, Colin and Liz Laverty and Mandy Thomas for allowing rugs in their collections to be reproduced here and shown in *The Rugs of War* at the School of Art at the Australian National University.

Plate 1

Out of Afghanistan

Tim Bonyhady

INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IN AFGHANISTAN WAS INTENSE IN THE LATE 1980S. While the political and military implications of the mujahideen's defeat of the Soviet Union commanded most attention, the cultural consequences of the war also attracted an international audience. An exhibition of eighty 'Russian-Afghan War Carpets' staged by an Italian rug dealer, Luca Brancati, was pivotal. After opening in Turin in May 1988 as the first Soviet troops were preparing to quit Kabul, these rugs went on tour to other Italian cities as the Soviet withdrawal gathered pace, and then travelled to the United States as the last Soviet soldiers quit Afghanistan in February 1989.

Brancati's exhibition succeeded not only because of this timing but also because the works in it were treated as contemporary art or, at least, as objects of immediate interest to art collectors and curators, so often quick to embrace new 'tribal art'. An article featuring two of these rugs appeared in New York's *Arts Magazine* alongside essays about the oil paintings of Gerhard Richter, the watercolours of John Cage and the kitsch of Jeff Koons. An advertisement for war rugs appeared beneath an advertisement for an exhibition staged by Leo Castelli, the New York art dealer renowned for showing the work of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichstenstein and Jasper Johns.

The characterization of these rugs as both tribal and contemporary art has been vital to their western reception. Yet the international circulation, sale, reproduction and discussion of these rugs have not depended solely on these classifications. They have also been lauded as women's work and as children's art, promoted as social and historical documents and marketed as a form of militaria in which particular weaponry may sometimes be identified. Some have been dubbed protest rugs, others have been called victory rugs. Although generally known as war rugs, they also have been interpreted as anti-war rugs.

The most influential early attempt to explain their origins appeared in 1989 in the *Oriental Rug Review*. Its author, Tatiana Divens, was a collector of Baluchi rugs who had spent ten years as an officer in the United States army specializing in conventional ammunition and so had a professional interest in the equipment that war rugs depicted. Divens suggested that the earliest of these rugs 'were developed in response to the demands of a new consumer group — the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan'. Since most of the 700,000 Soviet conscripts who served in the war were unlikely to have been able to afford to buy rugs, Divens proposed that they were bought by Soviet officers and officials.

This speculation probably had some basis even though Divens presented no evidence to support it. As Svetlana Alexievich recorded in *Zinky Boys*, her book about Soviet veterans of the war, many officers and officials returned home with souvenirs from Kabul and other Afghan cities. While some bought precious stones, jewellery and porcelain, others preferred carpets. The majority probably were traditional designs, but some are likely to have been war rugs. The presence of writing resembling Cyrillic script on a number of early war rugs suggests their makers expected a Russian audience.

This market was probably always small. When Ron O'Callaghan, one of the most prominent American dealers in war rugs, tried to test Divens' hypothesis in the late 1990s, he failed to trace any war rugs in the former Soviet Union. Several groups of Soviet veterans of the war whom O'Callaghan asked about these rugs had neither seen nor heard of them. As the war rapidly turned bad for Moscow, the men left to fight it probably had little appetite for mementos which would remind them so directly of their defeat by the mujahideen.

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Divens' own evidence suggests another very different market for these rugs which was probably always at least as important. The earliest war rug that she succeeded in locating had been bought not by a Soviet officer but by an American diplomat. The place was Peshawar, the capital of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province, near the foot of the Kyhber Pass. The date was June 1980, just six months after the Soviet Union started its invasion of Afghanistan by airlifting its troops into Kabul. If this rug was bought then, few carpets could have been made for Soviet consumption any earlier given the time required to make a rug, particularly one of any size. Yet even if this date is inaccurate, war rugs were soon for sale in Peshawar. When Peter Elliott, an Australian doctor with the Asian Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetricians, went there in 1983, he saw them in the bazaar — one of the earliest recorded sightings of them in Peshawar.

This rapid emergence of rugs depicting the Soviet invasion is hardly surprising given the rich tradition of pictorial rug-making by Baluchi people, who seem to have been responsible for most of the first war rugs. Long before the 1980s, Baluchi pictorial rugs not only depicted local plants, animals and people but also exotic animals such as Irish elk and new technology including aircraft. One rug made in 1934, most likely as a gift for Japanese Royalty, was dominated by three groups of geishas but also had an aircraft in each of its corners. The weavers who worked in this tradition had also shown themselves quick to adapt to new markets — rapidly developing particular designs in response to the preferences of Peace Corps volunteers and travellers on the hippie trail in the 1960s and 1970s.

Peshawar was the main city in Pakistan where war rugs were sold through the 1980s. It had already been an important centre for the sale of Afghan rugs before the Soviet invasion because it was much more accessible than any Afghan city. But when dozens of Afghan dealers fled there after the war started, its rug trade grew rapidly so that it soon eclipsed Kabul. While many of the first war rugs sold in Peshawar were made within Afghanistan and then carried over the border on horses or donkeys, many others were made within Pakistan by Afghan refugees who ranged from experienced, accomplished weavers to novices who turned to rug-making because they could find no other work.

The market for war rugs in Peshawar was particularly great because it was the base of the Afghan resistance to the Soviets, a key point on the arms pipeline to the mujahideen which the CIA fuelled with over US$500 million each year, and the location of many international aid agencies such as the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights and Médecins sans Frontièrs. If the western agents, military advisers, arms merchants, journalists and aid workers who visited or lived there wanted mementos, they could, as Doris Lessing observed when she visited Peshawar in 1986, choose from a wealth of Afghan goods. They could also buy the fur hats, caps, belts and Red star badges of dead Soviet soldiers. They could also buy war rugs and many of them appear to have done so.

War rugs also began to spread more or less accidentally in consignments sent to other countries by rug agents in Peshawar and Kabul and wholesalers in Hamburg. Sometimes dealers who ordered rugs by simply specifying their price, quantity, sizes and tribal styles would discover war rugs in shipments that they expected would contain only traditional carpets. Sometimes dealers who selected their own consignments without careful looking would later discover the weaponry of war within what they had thought were traditional rugs. Sometimes dealers would buy war rugs without seeing any particular interest in their novel imagery.

Yet gradually the shipment of these rugs became more deliberate and the dealers in other countries who received these rugs began to treat them as something special. Jacobsen Oriental Rugs, one of America's biggest and oldest carpet dealers, was quick to do so. When Tatiana Divens visited its premises in Syracuse, New York, early in 1987, it had three large war rugs hung on its walls, while its stock included at least another fifteen war rugs which had been selected by one

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of its staff in Pakistan. An English art dealer, Nigel London, did even more to promote these rugs by assembling the first big collection to rival Brancati's exhibition.

Individual collectors were often also influential. When the leading Sydney rug merchant, Cadry's, received a consignment of about 100 Baluchi rugs in 1988 including several depicting small tanks and grenades, it paid little attention to them. But when Cadry's took some to Canberra for one of its regular rug sales in the city's Albert Hall, they were seen by James Mollison, the Director of the National Gallery of Australia, who regularly visited these sales. As recalled by Robert Cadry, Mollison was his first customer to be excited by these rugs. Mollison's standing as Australia's most renowned museum director, his enthusiasm for this new form of rug and purchase of some for himself, persuaded Cadry's to take them more seriously.

As this demand grew, so that new war rugs even began to be sold by international auction houses led by Christie's of London, the production of these rugs intensified. When Chris Walter, an American rug-dealer from Cambridge, Massachusetts, visited the Faisal refugee camp in north-western Pakistan early in 1989, he found that almost the only employment for its Turkmen inhabitants was in the rug trade, whether dying wool, weaving carpets, shearing or selling them. Where once the weaving had been the work of woman and girls, it had also become the work of boys and young men. War rugs were 'being knocked off the looms in prodigious numbers'.

Yet these rugs were not always very visible or easy to find in Pakistan. Saul Barodofsky, another American rug-dealer from Charlottesville, Virginia, who also visited the North-West Frontier early in 1989, reported that he saw very few war rugs. Two American collectors, Eric and Kim Miller, who visited this area around the same time and were excited to learn that aid agencies had established a program to teach the children of Uzbek and Turkmen refugees how to make war rugs, found that this program was winding down. The Millers were only able to secure examples of the children's work because local rug dealers 'scoured' the camps for them.

By then, the range of war rugs was very diverse. Some included just a few weapons within traditional botanical, zoological and geometric forms. Others juxtaposed one or more tanks with water ewers and vases — traditional symbols of the household, hospitality and domestic order. A third type showed cities filled with the weapons of war. A fourth type was dominated by Kalashnikov rifles which were used by both the Soviet troops and the Afghan resistance but became the prime symbol of the mujahideen. A fifth type was dominated by larger Soviet weaponry, especially armoured personnel carriers, tanks and helicopters, which generally were depicted in neat rows and columns.

Perhaps the earliest recorded Afghan assessment of these rugs came from Sayed Ahmad Gailani, the leader of the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, a mujahideen group based in Peshawar. For Gailani, these rugs exemplified how Afghanistan had been transformed by war. In an interview in 1988, he reflected: 'You must understand that a terrible violation of my country has taken place. A whole generation grew up knowing nothing besides the war. All they know how to do is fight. Think of the beautiful Afghan rugs for which my country is famous. Even as recently as ten years ago, people embroidered them with pyramids and camels. But today there are only tanks, military planes, and bombers.'

Westerners often dismissed these rugs for different reasons and even hoped that their production would soon stop. Their standard criticism — expressed by Chris Walter in his report from the Faisal Camp — was that war rugs were 'very much a commercial enterprise' directed simply at meeting western demand. Yet since most Afghan rugs were commercial products made for export — and no-one questioned or belittled their makers' eye on a foreign market — this argument was unconvincing. Instead it seems that Walter objected to the war rugs because he thought their novel imagery meant they were not authentic. In his view, the refugees should have been using traditional designs and vegetable dyes that would preserve 'an invaluable part of the cultural heritage of Afghanistan' — something he soon was actively encouraging as co-ordinator of a

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rug-making project sponsored by the human rights group Cultural Survival. Rather than responding to new circumstances, Walter wanted Afghan rug makers to return to their past.

Other collectors and dealers admired these rugs because of their innovation and sophistication. Joyce C. Ware, a contributor to a special issue of the American journal *Fiberarts* devoted to 'Political Fiber', observed: 'The war rugs . . . excited my interest . . . because there are so few tribal rugs being woven today that reflect contemporary experiences.' She was particularly impressed by the complexity and the variety of designs and colours of the rugs that she first encountered in New York in 1989. In the course of eight months she saw over two hundred rugs and bought fifty — all, she emphasized, unique pieces. Far from seeing their new imagery as a corruption of tradition, she lauded these rugs as authentic responses to recent events.

The way in which the weavers depicted war excited more discussion. Thomas Bayrle, a German artist who wrote about these rugs in the Swiss art magazine *Parkett*, saw them as just one of many demonstrations of their weavers' great capacity for 'ornamental assimilation of new subject matter'. Eva Linhart, a German art historian, was troubled by how the rugs turned something evil into decoration but concluded that, far from being merely decorative, they told stories of the war. Ewa Kuryluk argued in New York's *Arts Magazine* that, by maintaining an old, familiar set of colours and balanced, well-structured designs, the weavers had avoided the uncontrolled emotion that so often characterized war art and resulted in either propaganda or kitsch. The result, she suggested, was works of art which conveyed the weavers' stoicism and vitality — presenting the banality of evil in the right proportions by treating it as a fact of life.

The production of these rugs by children — usually a ground for concern because of the fear of exploitation and abuse — was sometimes also part of their appeal. The key for Eric and Kim Miller was that the rugs which they acquired from the refugee camps outside Peshawar had been made under better conditions as part of an aid program. Eric Miller was attracted by how the small mats made by the children combined the military and the domestic — their 'vibrant depictions of Kalashnikov rifles, tanks, helicopters, land mines and bombs' with 'an occasional flower pot and tea service thrown in for added decoration'. Even though these mats would have been designed by adults, Miller looked on their imagery as an expression of 'the children's direct experience with war'.

As westerners responded to war rugs in these ways, refugees in Pakistan not only continued producing their established designs but also developed new imagery in response to the Soviet withdrawal. The most popular type of new rug celebrated Moscow's defeat. While some showed Soviet tanks leaving along two roads coming out of the north of a map of Afghanistan, most showed one road, identifiable as the Salang highway, which was the Soviets' main route of retreat. These rugs were the first to include extensive, usually misspelled English text — a clear indication of their expected market. A typical text ran 'Russian Aggressors Final Defeat'; another was 'Afghanistan Mudjahideen Long Life'.

The market for these rugs — and their promotion by rug dealers in both Europe and the United States — remained strong through 1990. One London dealer took out a full-page advertisement in the glossy international rug journal, *Hali*, to promote his stock of war rugs. A Californian dealer similarly used the *Oriental Rug Review* to announce that he had received 'a shipment of these highly popular rugs'. In Connecticut Joyce Ware was frustrated to find that the quality of the rugs accessible to her in the eastern United States had fallen so that she primarily saw either poorly constructed mats from the refugee camps or rugs with such similar designs that it looked as if they came from an assembly line. Since Ware could not find enough rugs that she thought worth stocking, she had 'a waiting list of disappointed buyers'.

War rugs were so chic in this period that they were even taken up by Liberty, the fashionable retailer on London's Regent Street that promoted itself as being at the forefront of contemporary design. As part of a double-page spread in *Good Housekeeping* in May 1990, Liberty

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made much of how its rug-buyers did not simply frequent air-conditioned dealing rooms in Hong Kong or importers' warehouses in England but sought out 'the rare, the eccentric, the authentic'. These rugs included a 'collection of carpets from the battle-scarred Afghan hills incorporating typical local sights — Russian tanks and helicopters'. One accompanying illustration showed mujahideen with their guns. The other was a war rug. Although the advertisement did not say so explicitly, the mujahideen's triumph over the Soviets and their characterization by President Reagen as 'freedom fighters' made these carpets ideal 'Liberty Rugs'.

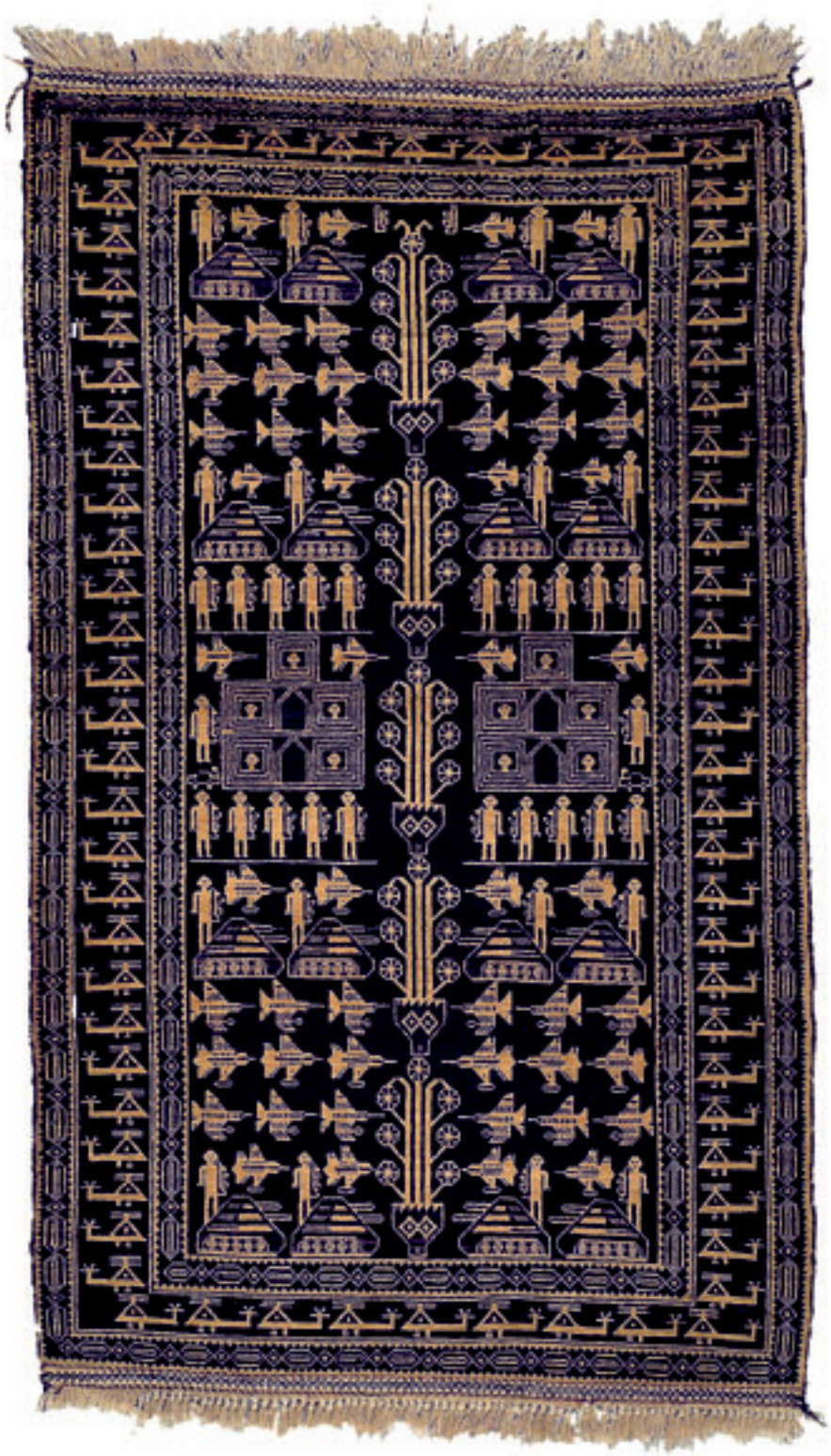
Woven History, an exhibition at the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney in 1990, was probably the first in any country to place a small selection of these rugs within the long tradition of carpets that depict great historical figures and events. The State Librarian, Alison Crook, initiated this exhibition after she visited Cadry's one day to buy a kilim and noticed a rug containing a double portrait of Vladimir Lenin and Nariman Narimanov, a Bolshevik leader in Azerbaijan. When Crook discovered that Jacques Cadry had a collection of pictorial rugs dating mostly from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which had never been exhibited together, she arranged for the Library to show this collection and Cadry's included six war rugs as the latest manifestation of this pictorial tradition. One of them, a Kalashnikov mat, achieved unprecedented prominence when the monthly *Sydney Review* put it on its cover.

Yet within two or three years this interest had plummeted in most countries. While some war rugs continued to be made in Pakistan by refugees — increasingly, it seems, by men rather than by women — it soon became a commonplace that weavers who had made them were returning to traditional designs. Most rug dealers, whether in Pakistan, Europe, the United States or Australia, came to regard war rugs not so much as novelties but as oddities which at best might be a peripheral part of their business. As a result, many dealers did not bother to stock these rugs, while others kept a few but made little of them. Art dealers and collectors generally ignored them. The few articles about them in English were often negative. One contributor to the *Oriental Rug Review* dismissed them as a 'degenerative design export product'.

This loss of interest was just part of the broader neglect of Afghanistan — especially by the United States. The turning-point was the fall of Mohammad Najibullah, the president of Afghanistan installed by Moscow in 1986 who defied all expectations by remaining in power well after the Soviets withdrew. Once the mujahideen finally ousted Najibullah in 1992, the United States abandoned Afghanistan and stopped its aid. As Robert Oakley, a former American ambassador to Pakistan observed in 1994, the political future of Afghanistan was 'no longer of interest to the United States'. The international media typically ignored Afghanistan until 1998 when Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda group attacked the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the Clinton administration responded by attacking al-Qaeda's camps in Afghanistan with cruise missiles.

The one country to continue to take war rugs seriously after Najibullah fell was Germany, the main European centre of the Afghan rug trade. While exhibitions of war rugs elsewhere dwindled, the first museum exhibitions devoted to war rugs were staged in Germany accompanied by the first catalogues about them. In 1993 the Heidelberg Ethnographic Museum showed the collection of Saladin, a rug dealer in the neighbouring small town of Wiesloch. In 1994 the Ethnographic Museum in Freiburg in Breisgau exhibited the collection of another dealer, Masoud Farhatyar. In 2000 the Ethnographic Museum in Munich showed a private collection assembled by Hans Werner Mohm. In 2001 this exhibition travelled to the Linden Ethnographic Museum in Stuttgart.

Yet war rugs retained the capacity to excite new audiences in other countries as the art dealer, Ray Hughes, demonstrated in Sydney. His enthusiasm for these rugs was part of a taste for tribal art, which started in the 1960s when he saw New Guinea masks and tapa cloths in Brisbane, but only became substantial in 1992 when he went to west Africa for the first time. Hughes' main acquisitions on this trip were medicine and barber shop signs from the Ivory Coast which he



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exhibited in his gallery after returning to Australia early in 1993, but he also returned with a small number of embroidered hats commemorating the first Gulf War from Kana in northern Nigeria which he kept for himself.

Hughes' opportunity to secure war rugs came almost immediately through Richard Elliott, whose father Peter had already seen war rugs in the bazaar at Peshawar in 1983 and then bought several on another visit. When Richard Elliott decided to visit Pakistan in 1993, he talked to Hughes who had already read about war rugs in a Trans-World Airlines in-flight magazine and seen them at Cadry's exhibition at the State Library in Sydney. While Elliott bought a few rugs in Islamabad, he acquired most in Peshawar, where several dealers in the bazaar had war rugs though many had none. Much like Joyce Ware in 1989, Elliott was struck by their variety. In all, he probably looked at two hundred war rugs ranging from small mats to large carpets, saw at most three or four versions of any one design and returned to Sydney with thirty-six rugs.

When Hughes exhibited these rugs at his gallery in mid-1993 — at the same time as a show of the work of the contemporary New Zealand artist, Jeff Thomson — every rug sold to a typical mix of the collectors, artists, art historians and curators who frequented Hughes' shows. Many would-be collectors were also disappointed to discover these rugs too late. So Elliott made another trip to Pakistan later in the year only to find that war rugs were much scarcer in Peshawar as part of the larger decline in their production. In all he probably saw only about one hundred rugs and bought about fifty — some of which he sold himself, while Hughes sold the rest without bothering to mount a formal exhibition as demand for them was so great.

The juxtaposition of war rugs with contemporary western art started in Europe a few years later. The key figure was Michael Aubry, a French artist whose own work has often concerned military clothing and camouflage. In 1997 he collaborated with the anthropologist Remo Guidieri, on *Symétrie de guerre* — a book that combined war rugs with Aubry's own art. In 2000 the Biennale of Contemporary Art in Lyon included some of these rugs and one of Aubry's own animations in *Sharing Exoticisms,* an examination of the relationship of non-western and western contemporary art. In 2001 the Beyeler Foundation in Basel similarly included war rugs in *Ornament and Abstraction* which explored the relationship between oriental ornamentation and western abstraction.

The events of 11 September 2001 and their aftermath have transformed war rugs yet again not only because of the ousting of the Taliban but also because Afghanistan has returned, however temporarily, as a focus of global attention. The greatest demand for these rugs, probably for the first time, is in Kabul. The American soldiers and members of the International Security and Assistance Force, journalists and aid workers now in the city are a much richer market than Soviet soldiers ever were.

Yet demand for these rugs is far from confined to Afghanistan. It also has been stimulated and met by exhibitions staged by dealers and collectors in Europe, the United States and Australia and by the internet which has allowed dealers to reach audiences that would never come into their shops and collectors to see rugs that they never could find where they live. While many dealers include war rugs on their own sites, the greatest range of rugs is available on eBay where the vendors come from Pakistan, the United States, England and Germany and the carpets range from 'semi-antiques' from the 1980s to new rugs.

These new rugs are not only being made in Pakistan but also in Afghanistan — especially in towns to the north. Whereas some rugs from the 1980s and 1990s carried writing which identified them as being made in refugee camps in Pakistan, the text of some of the new rugs identifies them as coming from Shiberghan, the provincial capital of Jawjan, while others announce that they are made by Turkmen. Although still hand made, the workmanship and materials of many of these rugs are poor and they are also more than ever the stuff of mass production, so that the same designs are being produced in great numbers with only minor variations.

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Many of these new rugs made since 2001 show the attacks on the World Trade Center. Some simply depict the Twin Towers — the American Airlines flight striking Tower One and the United Airlines flight striking Tower Two, the consequent fires and people jumping or falling to their deaths. Yet most of these rugs also depict the response of the United States by showing an American aircraft carrier sending a warplane and a missile into Afghanistan, which is characteristically represented as a map. These rugs also suggest that the United States has brought peace to Afghanistan by showing the American and Afghan flags linked by a dove.

Another type of rug is headed 'War against Terror'. These rugs refer to September 11 only through acronymns — 'WTC' for World Trade Center, 'NYPD' for New York Police Department and 'FDNY' for Fire Department of New York. They also include a map in which Tora Bora — the mountain range near Jelalebad that has become a metaphor for America's hunt for al-Qaeda — is prominent. But they are primarily devoted to weaponry. Whereas earlier war rugs were filled with Soviet tanks and helicopters, these rugs celebrate America's wealth of materiel ranging from spy planes to M16 rifles. These rugs also display little of the traditional symmetry and balance — the ordered rows and columns — which characterised the first designs.

The viewpoint of most of these rugs is equally novel. Instead of expressing their makers' sentiments in the manner of the rugs celebrating the mujahideen's victory of the Soviets, these rugs express the views of their expected American purchasers. So these rugs do not say 'Afghans liberated from Taliban' — a sentiment many of the carpet-makers may hold — but 'Afghans liberated from Terrorists'. In similar fashion, they celebrate not the 'Rout of the Taliban with the Help of American and Britain' but the 'Rout of Terrorism with Help of America and Britain'. Far from wishing long life to members of the Northern Alliance, they exclaim 'Long Live US Soldiers'.

The dealers who sell these rugs in Kabul appear, at best, to have very mixed regard for them. In early 2003 when a journalist with Agence France-Presse visited Chicken Street — the city's main tourist strip, where one can buy Coca-Cola and Club sandwiches between looking at rugs and antiques — the most enthusiastic dealer maintained, 'These carpets don't glorify war, they reflect an end to it.' Another dealer declared dismissively, 'Afghans don't buy this stuff. Mainly the military guys do'. A third reflected, 'It's the idea of war and weapons, things to kill Afghans. You can't feel good with all these symbols of death here, I don't like any of it.'

The response of Americans has been much more enthusiastic as they have recognized the politics of these rugs as their own. According to a soldier on the staff of General Tommy Franks, the American commander bought one hundred 'War against Terror' rugs when he visited Afghanistan and Pakistan in mid-2002. Franks gave several of these rugs to his fellow generals on the CENTCOM battle staff. He allowed members of his personal staff to buy some of these rugs — an opportunity this soldier used to turn a quick profit by buying three which he promptly sold on eBay. Franks kept the remainder for use as official gifts.

Yet not all the new rugs have satisfied the American market. When the American dealer, Ron O'Callaghan, first received a pair of World Trade Center rugs in 2002 — the first showing the American Airlines flight approaching Tower One; the second showing the immediate aftermath of its impact — he rejected them. The reason, it seems, was that these rugs showed the destruction of the World Trade Centre unlike most American memorabilia which shows the Twin Towers intact. As O'Callaghan explained it, these rugs 'brought it all back and it was just too much'. O'Callaghan told his supplier that he 'didn't want to see any more like those'.

The text on some of the new mats being produced in northern Afghanistan is also written as if these rugs were intended for a local, as well as a foreign audience. While these rugs celebrate the American role in the war, they also recognize that the Northern Alliance was a key actor in it. Underneath the flags of the United States and Afghanistan and the dove of peace, they explain:

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'For Bringing Peace in Afghanistan Your Local Leaders Became Union with the American Army'. The first '2002' mat sold on the internet was even more exceptional in its politics. It did not side with either the Americans or al-Qaeda, the Northern Alliance or the Taliban, and contained nothing about terrorism, liberation or freedom. Instead it expressed a universal sentiment. It was dominated by a single word, 'Scared'.

Plate 9

This Space is Mine

Jasleen Dhamija

THE FIRST TIME I CAME ACROSS A WAR RUG WAS IN THE LATE 1980S IN NEW DELHI. It was just by chance that I saw a carpet of an indigo blue background with a beautifully worked traditional border of curling stems and fine guard borders on each side. The two ends carried the traditional *gelim* weave with geometric patterns, a signature of the Baluchi women weavers. But, in the main body there was a strange repeat of a pattern dominated by yellow flowers, oddly placed and distributed all over. At first glance it looked like a typical Baluchi rug with rather odd shaped geometric patterns. It was only when I looked at it again that strange, heavy ominous forms emerged. They were rows and rows of battle tanks, their turrets well defined and raised guns, and signs of engaging in a battle. The yellow flowers were bursting shells, the flower of death. I shivered and something within me froze.

This was not the usual carpet woven by the Afghan women on their horizontal *ruh-zamini kargah*, parallel to the earth looms, which could be stretched out in any open space. These are the looms on which the nomads wove carpets for themselves and the surplus for sale, for the extra income for their household. These carpets were also not the commercial carpets meant only for the bazaar. They were the very personal carpets that they wove for themselves, for the near and dear ones, to be gifted to the extended family according to the norms of gift exchange prescribed by their tribal and family tradition, or to be sold to a known clientele. I always felt that the women weavers were closer to earth and drew inspiration, from it. For them the earth was animate, it smelt, it spoke to them and gave their creative selves sustenance. This was not the commercial carpet woven on the vertical loom by professional carpet weavers. The women had not woven the mythical *pai phil*, the imprint of the elephant or the enclosed garden with a tree and a bird that they had woven for centuries. It was a cry of anguish. It was that ominous death machine, which dominated their life. Women have always believed that by weaving the feared form they could capture it and take away the powerful evil. Were they like Clytemnestra, who through the nimble knots of her woven rug captured Agamemnon and then annihilated him? Was this the exorcism of the evil demonic character of the remorseless, relentless machine, which crushed their homes, their people, their arduously planted gardens?

The next war rug I saw was a prayer rug, brought to me by a Kashmiri carpet seller. The *Mehrab* was clearly defined in black on a maroon background and the whole surface covered with multitudes of tiny planes worked in a black outline and filled with a strange lilac pink, the colour of the setting sun. It was as though their entire sky was dominated by these planes and they saw the light reflected only on their wings. There was a claustrophobic presence of the war planes that blocked their horizon. Recreating it on the prayer rug was calling out to God to protect them — *Oh Khudaiya man khafe shudam*, Oh God! I am suffocated! — a common cry of a woman in adversity.

I began to look out for these innovations. The weavers were hiding their intent by making a repeat of their new motifs so that at first glance they looked like the conventional carpet, yet in the powerful repeat they were like non-verbal incantations to subdue the enemy.

Suddenly, I saw a change. The women became bolder, the multiple instruments of war became more dominant. However, they still continued to organise the spaces symmetrically. The first departure into another landscape I encountered was *City with Airport* (*Plate 4*). It has a double zigzag guard border enclosing the main border of stylized trees of life. The zigzag denotes flowing waves of water, which is their sustenance, while the trees denote life eternal. The airport dominates the right

Plate 10

side, surrounded by a densely populated townscape, with standing houses, some of them burning, while the flat squares are those flattened by the war, where only the outline of the space remains. In the lower half, below the airport, hope is reiterated, but tentatively. A stylized peacock with its open tail feathers stands between a clutch of bird heads. A gun points to a drooping tree, as though struggling to remain erect, perhaps representing the weaver struggling to stay alive. All around instruments of war — helicopters, aeroplanes, armoured cars — hover over the space. Traditional motifs appear suddenly, but their meaning has changed. The *gul*, flower, is no longer the flower of hope, the burgeoning of *bahar*, spring, when sap stirs in the earth, but the bursting of mortars. The S pattern is no longer the benign powerful dragon of the sky, but destruction that rains down. It is a landscape of devastation with an arsenal of death and subjugation. Yet hope springs eternal as the devout would say, *al-ham-dulallah*, thanks be to God, for in the midst of devastation, the tree of life, in between the houses, raises its flowering branches, reaching out to the sky. The One who gives succor will make the earth green once again and salvage the devastated human landscape.

The weavers appear to have discovered a new form of expression. These extraordinary rugs discard all conventions. In *Plate 6*, the dominant border is of helicopters with their rotors whirring. Down the centre runs the tree of life. The enemies are poised for battle, tanks shooting shells, foot soldiers with guns. Is this the mujahideen attacking the Russians, or some other tribal conflict? In the centre stand two *havelies*, ancient homes, with archway and faces looking out from their windows. The two armies are fighting their battles, while the people helplessly watch their environment, their lives being devastated.

In another rug (*Plate 11*), tanks, hand-grenades and guns dominate the surface and multiple S dragon forms and bursting shells fill in the space. Three women covered from head to toe, stand with outstretched arms protecting their homestead, represented by four hens, while a stylized Allah written in Arabic on either side of them, gives them strength, gives them protection. Are they the hidden anonymous creators of these rugs? Are they stretching their arms out to each other to create a circle of power, of protection?

The rug on the cover of the catalogue shows Afghanistan devastated by the demoniac form of the puppet dictator controlled by a monstrous hand bearing the hammer and sickle. The surround of the border is created with multi-coloured bombs. The map also shows Pakistan where life goes on calmly. The caravan of the Kuchi (the nomadic people of the area) is led by an unveiled woman, with men and children seated at their ease on camels proceeding towards Iran. Antelope and deer appear at peace in their environment. These shy denizens of the forest are unafraid, for there is no threat of violence. By contrast, the scene in the space demarcated as Afganistan is full of violence, which echoes the cries of its people violated.

The Jahan Bahksh story (*Plate 1*) appears to be a transformation of the legends of the Shahnameh, where the Deeva Safeed, the white supernatural being is embroiled with the red devil. The rather crude drawing is powerful and appears to be the work of a folk artist. Headless men, armless riders on strange tank like forms, look on helplessly, while local guerillas use their traditional weapons to destroy their enemies.

It is as though the women have taken on the battle in their own way. Their sheep provide the wool, their hands clean and spin it. Nature provides the dyes and their skill, their burning desire to protect their people, their humanscape, drives them to weave these magical totemic rugs, which would defeat the apparently invincible army. Their fears are controlled, their creativity gathers the uncertainty, the impenetrable to conjure the strength for a battle with the enemy. Thus the simple rug is transformed into an expression of faith in their ability to hone from irrational, petrified anachronistic images a world of their own. These rugs are a creative expression, which transgress the conventional boundaries of art history and cultural critique.

Plate 11

Near and Far

Nigel Lendon

BRIAN SPOONER'S ESSAY 'WEAVERS AND DEALERS: THE AUTHENTICITY OF AN ORIENTAL CARPET' of 1986 perceptively explores the relationship between cultural distance and the desire for authenticity, seen through the critiques of primitivism and orientalism. In the case of the rugs of the Turkmen, he explores the crucial nexus between the makers of 'tribal' carpets and the influence of markets and their network of dealers on the perceptions of both makers and audiences. Since then a highly innovative genre of rugs/carpets known as 'war rugs' has emerged, largely at the hands of the Baluchi peoples, neighbours of the Turkmen, who have endured two decades of conflict and dislocation. In disentangling the complexity of the knowledge of such traditions in the world outside Central Asia, Spooner argues that the West's quest for authenticity is enhanced by cultural distance from the source of these artefacts. He suggest that such claims to 'authenticity' are informed not by ethnographic knowledge, but by the 'lore of the dealer . . . generated by the history of the trade and of Western interest, rather than by the conditions of production.' He is equally persuasive when he concludes 'whichever way we turn in an attempt to explain our interest in oriental carpets, we run sooner or later into mystification.'

So I should not be surprised that my attempts to understand these works in this genre seem utterly distorted by my distance from the reality of the world of their makers. And yet as I search among their forms and images for clues to their meanings and values I find myself astonished by their diversity, resilience and capacity for innovation. And I am moved by what I read as a desperate and sombre appeal for the negation of what they depict — that is, to interpret these works as essentially anti-war sentiments.

These makers, the artists of this exhibition, have been subjected to the gross generalisations of American/European media representations of race, identity and religion, when their country of origin was twice on the global stage in little more than a decade. The pursuit of al-Qaeda and the overthrow of the Taliban refocussed world attention on Afghanistan in the year following the September 11 attack on New York's World Trade Center, and subsequently the second Iraq War has again brought the Central Asian region back to the immediacy of the daily news.

The false sense of proximity created by globalised media representations sits in marked contrast with the material presence of these artefacts, through which there appears to be a complementary channel of communication, however problematic its reception may be. These works powerfully transmit their meanings against the flow of the dominant discourses through whatever complex modes of marketing and distribution, and subject to whatever influences and distortions of tradition may occur. It is the material presence of these artefacts that conveys a different order of immediacy — reminding us of the virtual presence of the makers themselves. Unlike electronic media, the materiality of the artefact cannot be separated from the hand (the life, the experiences) of its maker. That these images now come to us on the internet is another such illusion of accessibility, despite the fact that the makers and their circumstances remain unknown. Such access, we must remind outselves, depends on access to the technology on which I am writing this text.

Distance and dislocation enter almost every aspect of the consideration of these simultaneously beautiful and horrific artefacts. This is not simply a consequence of the circumstances of their reception by distant viewers in contexts unimaginable by their makers. The effect of distance can be conceived as reciprocal and complementary as both maker and viewer try to imagine each other. The reality of their production is that these carpets are primarily made for

Plate 12

trade to the outside world, as they have always been. Thus with few exceptions, they are made to leave their immediate context of use, and take their seemingly contradictory messages outwards, with little understanding of the potential audiences they reach or the reactions they may engender.

For anyone outside the immediate context of a work's production, understanding the maker's motivation is a fundamentally speculative exercise. Context, in any specific quasi-anthropological sense of attempting to understand the circumstance of a work's production, use and dissemination, is not a knowledge on which the beholder can draw. At best we rely on a mere generalisation of a rug's formal characteristics as the evidence of its origins. The majority of these 'war rugs' are identified as made by the semi-nomadic peoples called Baluchi (at least in their style), whose origins are in the north west of the country. And yet the traditions of carpet making in the northern regions of the country, the patterns of social interaction, and access to materials and markets have been drastically disrupted by two decades of war. Context, whether that of the maker's original location, or in their nomadic passage through familiar territories, or through the makers being internally displaced within Afghanistan through the effects of decades of conflict, or in unfamilar territory as refugees, renders any interpretation based on associations with regional traditions problematic. The most recent carpets, from the mid-nineties, are more likely to reflect the mass exodus to either Iran or Pakistan, as a consequence of the various brutal regimes which swept through the country in that decade. In these different situations, the context of their production may be more or less traditional, made by women and children in relative seclusion, or radically non-traditional, made by men in refugee camps, with no particular rug-making heritage of their own.

Their reception in the outside world is a process of decontextualisation, which now ends with the works hanging on the white walls of contemporary art galleries and museums. This process begins in the traders' markets such as those of Peshawar or Hamburg. There, so-called 'war rugs' are a tiny proportion of contemporary rugs made by Afghans for the various marketplaces through which they pass. Each stage in their trajectory from the inside world of their production to the outside also exercises its own influence on the production of successive generations of rugs — where price, interest, and demand, all feed back secondhand, or more remotely, to the workshops where they are made. Nevertheless, via the many dealers and middlemen, the market for these carpets creates an impression in the minds of their producers of an audience receptive to the rugs' messages and values.

As I will seek to demonstrate in the second part of this essay, it seems inconceivable to me that these works may be accounted for solely as commodities. A recurrent theme in the rhetoric surrounding these works is the inherent opportunism of the chain of dealers, merchants and weavers. I would argue that even the rugs which appear closest to 'airport art', for instance those which take as their subject the WTC attack or the 'War against Terror' (*Plates 13* and *14*) follow traditional forms of practice in responding to the market, much as the carpet trade has always done. These most recent manifestations, rather than transposing traditional forms and patterns with the symbols of war, are better understood as a mirror of the West's own representations of itself.

Our attempts to understand these works proceed despite the fact that what we don't know outweighs what we do know. We don't know, for instance, very much about a given rug's origins, the locality or circumstances of its production, or the identity or even gender of its maker. We don't know the pressures being exercised on the genre that are causing its internal transformation. We do, however, know the stories of our own encounters with these works — which for this writer, began with chance encounters in fellow artists' studios and houses. This was followed by seeing works in small numbers, or in small collections appearing in dealers shops or galleries at the more exotic and outsider end of the contemporary art spectrum. In the first half of the nineties, it was difficult to gain much of an understanding of the scope of the genre. Rug dealers sometimes would have one or two, but a sense of range or complexity and the values of this new genre were not accessible outside of the rug trade until the internet revolution of the late 1990s. Curiously, for a


11
SEPTEMBER
2001
AMERICAN
FIRST
IMPACT
AMERICAN
FLIGHT
SECOND
IMPACT
UNITED
FLIGHT
AFGHANISTAN
USA
MSILE

Plate 13

trade oriented to a global market for hundreds of years, once again we see the creation of a new audience for these works within the context of contemporary art. It is contemporary artists and art theorists who have the interest and critical framework for appreciating an artform which challenges or disrupts the conventions from which it is derived, and who place a particular value on the tension between innovation and tradition.

Tradition is a problematic concept to apply to such diverse, innovative, and contradictory works. It is well recognised that Baluchi rugmakers are historically renowned for their capacity for innovation. Thus their complex associations with 'traditional' precedents are evident in as many different forms as there are types of war carpets. In the 1980s some carpets appear which barely admit the evidence of the militarisation of Afghan society, where armaments and weapons are almost completely hidden (that is, highly abstracted) in the interstices of traditional structure, pattern and ornament (*Plate 8*). At the other end of the spectrum, rugs are clearly made opportunistically, in response to world events like S11, using forms and imagery derived more from CNN montage techniques than any sense of tradition or origin. However some newer rugs (for example *Plates 9* and *15*) seem to be in the process of re-integrating once explicit militaristic forms into pattern and ornament.

The most compelling of these carpets produce an intensely ambiguous, even contradictory, play between our understanding of tradition and value. It is tempting to speculate that those which show the most subtle variations to an established convention of carpet-making mark the beginning of the genre. The evidence seems to suggest this is the case. Yet the time-scale between the earliest of these, made perhaps in the mid-1980s, and those of the early 1990s which show an almost complete transformation of form, cartographic space, and political narrative, is less than a decade. Given the social and political complexity of these years, we remain wary of too-prescriptive an account of this innovative elaboration of the genre in all its variant connections with the conventions from which they originate.

Likewise our understanding of value and intentionality can only be deduced from our assumptions of the similarity and difference between these 'war' carpets and their closest precedents. In the latter, value is ascribed precisely to the viruoso repetition of conventional designs, with all their internal semiotics of pattern, ornament and structure. Yet if the world in which these traditions are located is disrupted, symbolic and representational pictorial modes are mixed, and the potential for the carpet to speak politically is allowed, then the conditions are ripe for a highly innovative new genre to emerge.

In this context, a concept of value attributed to evidence of a residue of former referents may almost be lost within the architectonics of new forms and subjects. For example, the map of Afghanistan features strongly in such imagery, with or without armaments or other associative elements — such as the poppy borders and plants depicted in *Plate 2*. These map carpets depict and identify the shape of Afghanistan and its (many) composite provinces, as if to affirm the country's forever threatened sovereign integrity (see the front cover, and *Plates 2*, *3*, *13*, *14*, and *15*). The profile of the nation appears in these examples to link both the specific and generalised political subjects within an overall idealisation of national identity and independence. It also provides a framing device for political narratives, such as the rugs which depict the mujahideen's challenge to Najibullah and his subsequent gruesome demise (*front cover* and *Plate 3*).

In a remarkable application of rug-making to politics, a rug made in the early 1990s (*Plate 3*) predicts the Soviet puppet dictator's death by hanging, watched by his opponents including Ahmad Shah Massoud, and by then, the ex-President Rabbani. As has been suggested, this particular rug may have fulfilled the function of an effigy, a chilling premonition of events that finally took place at the hands of the Taliban in 1996. The other Najibullah rugs have the same historical and stylistic origins. The images of cityscapes and specific topographies are similarly


WAR AGAINST TERROR
F16
F16
FDNY
NYPD
M16
AK47
WTC
MAZAR
E SHARIF
KUNDUZ
HERAT
KABUL
AFGHANS
LIBERATED
FROM
TERRORISTS
TORABORA
BLACK HAWK
KANDAHAR
LONG LIVE US SOLDIERS
SPY
PLANE
MADE IN NORTHERN AFGHANISTAN
BY TURKMEN ORIENTAL CARPET

Plate 14

complex in their references to historical time. As well as representations of the actual theatres of war (*Plate 5*), they also encompass depictions of both idealisations of pre-war memories and desires of a different future.

In a different and more subtle sense, value may be linked directly to those elements which affirm the identity of the individual makers, within the larger tradition from which they draw their knowledge and expertise. No two rugs of the same subject are ever quite the same. Some are dense with pattern and ornament, providing the space for the rugmaker to innovate and individualise each rug. Even the guard borders suggest a concern for the longevity and hence the utilitarian value of the makers' labours (see *Plates 4*, *5*, *7*, *8*, *9*, *10* and the *back cover*). These dense fields are also rich with historial associations and references, just as they may also incorporate figures with explicit allegorical meanings (see *Plates 1* and *back cover*). And finally we must remember that these objects are occasionally also prayer rugs, in which case they are 'seen' with eyes closed in the act of prayer.

The carpet we have titled 'The Story of Jahan Bahksh' (*Plate 1*) presents a seemingly unresolvable challenge and at the same time an extraordinary potentiality. The viewer sees an image, an object, and a text. As an image it conveys a narrative of passion, horror, sorrow and revenge. It is also an object built from half a million hand knotted pixels, and therefore it also speaks of an extraordinary human labour. And as a text it speaks directly about its makers' origins, and spells out the specifics of the allegory it describes. Thus far, the text is resistant to literal translation. So all I can do is adopt the position of the distant viewer, and ask myself, what do I understand from what I see?

In one sense this is to enter a play of imaginaries, to ask, how is it this image comes to me? I imagine back along a trajectory from Canberra to Canada to Hamburg to Afghanistan. I try to imagine the builders of this extraordinary image/object, and their circumstances, and their motives.

What do I see? I see that it is made by hand, perhaps by many hands, a work carried out over a year or more. It is constructed from bottom to top, so that the main body of the text precedes the building of the lower register of the image. The text appears to be written in a hybrid vernacular form of Farsi that is hard to translate in any literal sense. Many of the characters have been distorted in the translation from a cartoon, a cartoon whose author is lost.

In their rudeness and immediacy its forms are so evocative that it is seems inconceivable that the labour of its production is merely economic. It is a labour of such power, sorrow, and anger that its motivation and significance is more than its monetary value alone. For how much more saleable, valuable and economically comprehensible would a more conventional carpet be, if made under the same conditions, with the same input of labour, to some traditional set of patterns and cartoons, which subsequently finds its way through the same markets? And yet here is an image which cries its message — but to whom?

How do I read the imagery? It is made from the base upwards, yet is read visually from the top down. It is constructed in two registers, separated by passages of text. In the upper register the complex gestures, scenes and narratives show a man in white triumphant astride a red figure (depicted as a devil, with horns), holding the devil's wrist with one hand, about to stab with an orange dagger with the other.

The text above tells us it is a story about a young man, named Jahan Bakhsh, apparently killed in war. The imagery appears to be the story of retribution. In the lower register an orange mustachioed horseman rides triumphant over an armoured or camouflaged, kneeling, antenna'd 'crusader' figure (the word is derived from contemporary political discourse). So how might any specific figure or symbol be read?

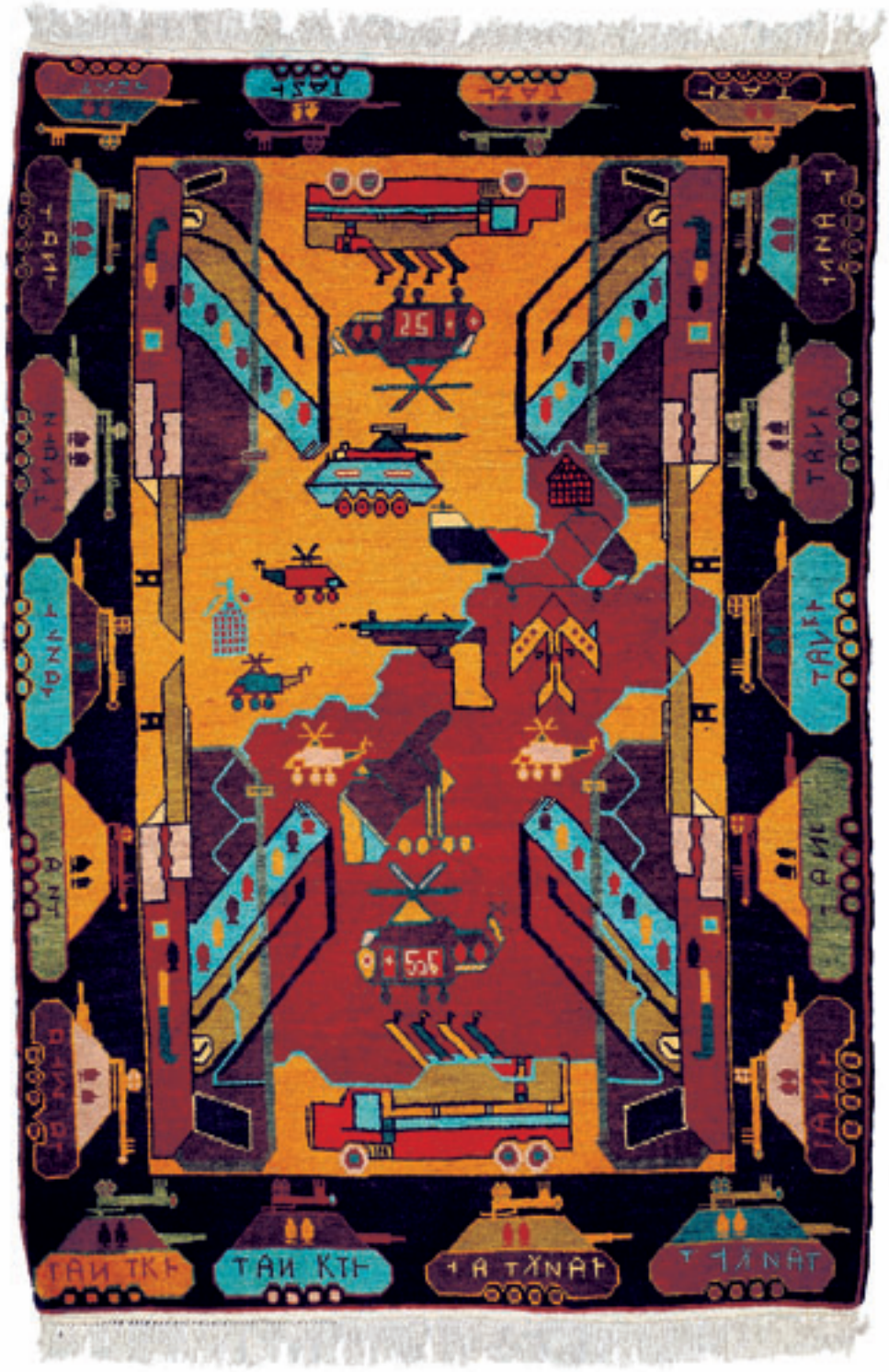

Plate 15

Surrounding these protagonists are animals, warplanes, helicopters, and machine guns, which are all relatively explicit, and serve to bring the allegory into the present. Likewise secondary figures, observers, are represented as figures in contemporary time, with modern weaponry. The victims of war are shown beheaded, legs and hands cut off, blood on the ground at their feet — or, if they are lucky, supported by a walking stick.

These figures are monstrously distorted, some wearing uniforms and headdresses, bearded, heads and feet enlarged, or shrunken, thus distorted in the artist's seemingly impassioned quest for the potency of the image. Animals (perhaps jaguars, perhaps scavenging dogs) are eating bones in some nightmarish allegory of death, while other elements (the inverted vessel) defy interpretation.

How to account for such a multiplicity of interpretations is itself characteristic of this tradition's challenge. Some informants say the rug is from Herat, yet the text is written in a hybrid vernacular form of several languages. They tell me it apparently describes a folk tale, or a song, the story of Jahan Bakhsh, the origins of which is yet to be discovered.

Other informants suggests the language of the text (with its many errors) is from northern Afghanistan. One informant from Herat suggests such carpets were sometimes a gift from the mujahideen to commanders who aligned themselves with Massoud in the war to overthrough the Soviet puppet dictator Najibullah. If this is the case the rug shows no wear, suggesting it never reached its intended destination, and was somehow highjacked (by economic necessity perhaps) into the chain of dealers, and ultimately the internet auction system.

From our distant vantage points we attempt to understand the complex meanings this tradition engenders. The complexity of its imagery, for an outsider, is enhanced by our speculation on the way these carpets are valued. From the outside, these rugs transport the viewer back to the values of their origins — even though the origins of their artisans and artists seem irredeemably lost through decades of upheaval and devastation. In another sense, the outside world finds the evaluation of these works intensely problematic — neither fine art, nor decorative, nor craft — an 'art' apparently without an authorial voice.

Outsiders read the ambiguities of these works with difficulty. Our interpretation is reaching towards an understanding of the tradition's various categories. Within the typology outlined here, propaganda, historical opportunism and didactic forms contrast with works that can only be seen as lamentations of loss and a plea for the removal of the need to speak about war. Perhaps they should all be re-categorised as 'peace rugs'.

Cross-culturally, we valorise such objects by calling them art, and we intuit meanings and values our culture expects of high art. It is no contradiction to expect this art to reveal such realities as the horrors of war, and by implication, to argue for its elimination.

List of Illustrations

(*front cover*) *Najibullah as Soviet puppet*, Baluchi style, probably first made in Pakistan refugee camps, late 1980s or early 1990s: knotted woollen carpet, wool on cotton warp, private collection, Canberra, size 930 x 1900 mm

1. *The Story of Jahan Bahksh*, Baluchi style, *c.*1990s: knotted woollen carpet, woollen warp, collection Peter Bellas, Brisbane, size 2070 x 2820 mm

2. *The exodus of the Soviet forces*, Baluchi style, Pakistan refugee camp, 1990s: knotted woollen carpet, wool on silk warp, private collection, Canberra, size 810 x 1220 mm

3. *The hanging of Najibullah*, Baluchi style, early1990s: knotted woollen carpet, woollen warp, collection Ray Hughes, Sydney, size 1615 x 955 mm

4. *City with airport*, Baluchi style, 1980s, knotted woollen carpet, woollen warp, private collection, Sydney, size 940 x 1540 mm

5. *Prayer rug depicting a ruined city with UN planes*, Baluchi style, early 1990s, knotted woollen carpet, woollen warp, private collection, Canberra, size 875 x 1365 mm

6. *Tree of life, houses, warplanes, tanks, and soldiers with helicopter border*, Baluchi style, late 1980s, knotted woollen carpet, woollen warp, private collection, Canberra, size 1100 x 1985 mm

7. *Armaments and soldiers in battle*, Baluchi style, *c.* 1990: knotted woollen carpet, woollen warp, Laverty collection, Sydney, size 990 x 1690 mm

8. *Armaments in a garden, depicting warplanes, Kalashnikovs and butterflies within a lozenge format with square central panels*, Baluchi style, late 1980s: knotted woollen carpet, woollen warp, collection Peter Bellas, Brisbane, size 1130 x 2220 mm

9. *Tanks, machine guns, Kalashnikovs within a Persian influenced floral border*, Baluchi style, late1990s: knotted woollen carpet, woollen warp, collection Peter Bellas, Brisbane, size 1180 x 1985 mm

10. *Water ewers with armaments*, Baluchi style, *c.* 2000: knotted woollen carpet, woollen warp, private collection, Canberra, size 1140 x 2015 mm

11. *Armaments with three women wearing the burqua*, Baluchi style, *c.* 2000: knotted woollen carpet, woollen warp, private collection, Canberra, size 1235 x 2000 mm

12. *If you see one mine there will always be many others*, Baluchi style, possibly Pakistan refugee camp, early 1990s: knotted woollen carpet, raw silk warp, private collection, Sydney, size 1090 x 2120 mm

13. *World Trade Centre, September 11, 2002,* Afghanistan, 2002: knotted woollen carpet, cotton warp, collection Peter Bellas, Brisbane, size 610 x 810 mm

14. *War Against Terror 2002,* Turkmen, 2002: knotted woollen carpet, cotton warp, private collection, Canberra, size 610 x 915 mm

15. *Map of Afghanistan with armaments framed by four Kalashnikovs*, Pakistan, 2002: knotted woollen carpet, cotton warp, private collection, Canberra, size 1140 x 1715 mm

(*back cover*) *Figure of a horseman wielding a sword, surrounded by armaments, figures firing machine guns, and framed by four Kalashnikovs*, Baluchi style, early 1990s: knotted woollen carpet, woollen warp, private collection, Sydney, size 970 x 1635 mm

Biographies

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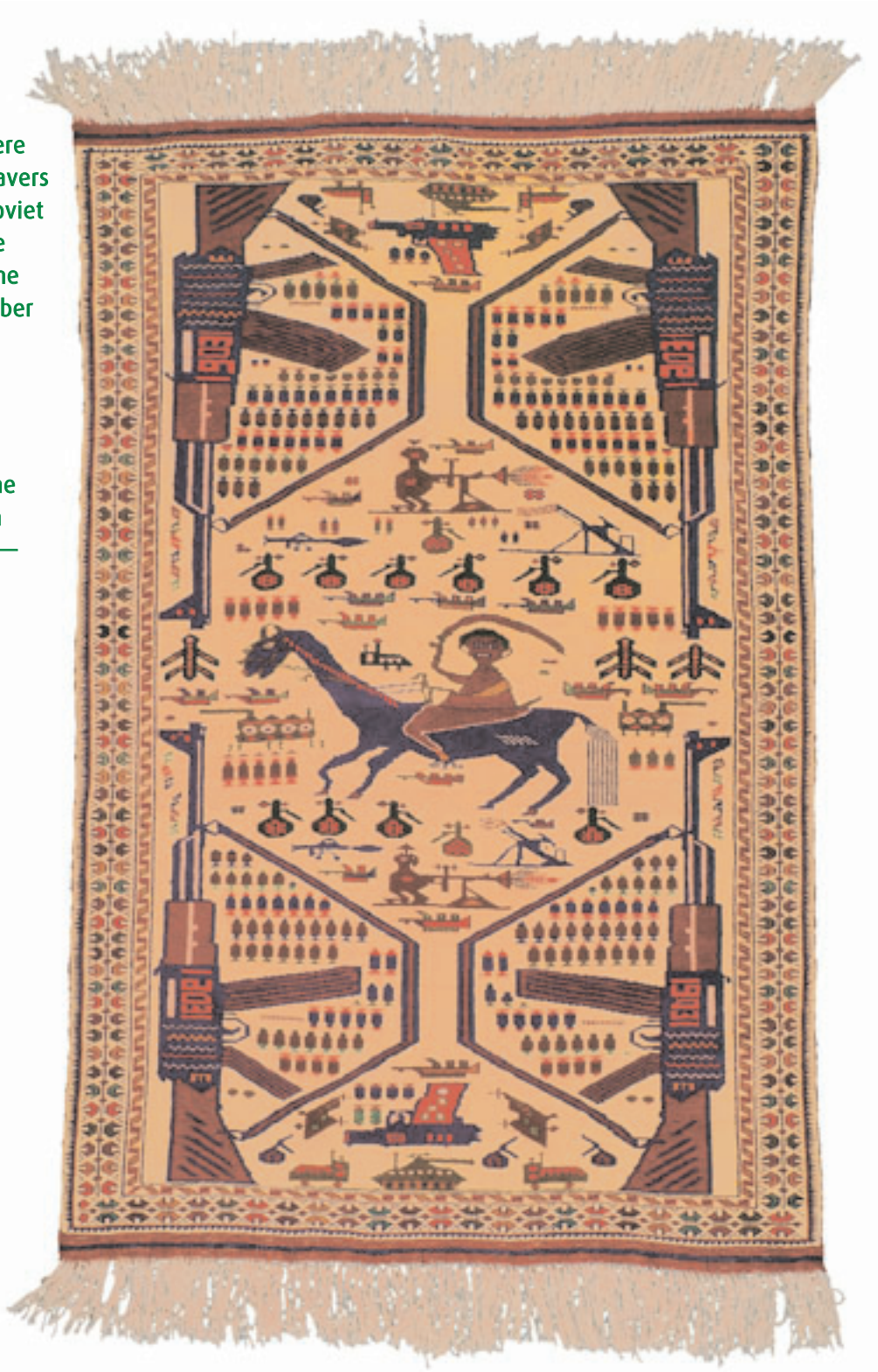

ISBN 0 7315 3030 6 (vol)
ISBN 0 7315 3027 6 (Fusion set)