

# The Textile Museum Journal

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## New Approaches to Thinking with Carpets

Myriem Naji with Dorothy Armstrong, Jonathan Cleaver, Ludovica Matarozzo, and Anna Portisch

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This volume of *The Textile Museum Journal* has a different geographical and temporal focus from the classical canon of “oriental” carpets that developed in the West from the mid-nineteenth century. That canon tends to focus on carpets from Anatolia, Iran, Central Asia, and India and is particularly interested in early modern production. Instead, our contributors examine less-studied sites of carpet weaving. These include twentieth- and twenty-first-century village production in Morocco, industrial production in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Punjab and Glasgow, and production for the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century global art market in South Asia and the Caucasus.

Furthermore, many of the articles in this edition arise from an ongoing interdisciplinary conversation conducted by the Under the Carpet Collective of anthropologists, art and design historians, weavers, and artists, some of whose members are represented in these pages.<sup>1</sup> The articles reflect a diversity and fusion of analytical methods, including immersive fieldwork and apprenticeship with weavers, invocation of the impact of technologies of carpet design and replication, the reading of global history through objects, and the investigation of contemporary art weaving and its impresarios. The articles also, importantly, include writing by creative artists who are at the same time both scholars and weavers.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, it maintains a steady focus on ideas about makers and making. The contributors to this volume explore notions such as tradition, authorship, and individual artistic contribution. They evaluate the unequal power relations embedded in the terms craftsperson, artist, and designer—constructs that are not neutral but have geographical, socioeconomic, political, historical, and gendered

roots. The authors seek to retrieve the often neglected experiences of poorly paid, invisible, and unheard physical makers.

The articles address specific questions that underlie this overall effort. What cognitive challenges do weavers experience when managing the twin tasks of design and the creation of a stable textile? How do art carpet producers—contemporary artists—interact with indigenous or traditional production and the weavers who practice it? What is the relationship between carpets, architecture, and the notion of dwelling and how is it differently expressed in aesthetic theory and weaving practice? What are the opportunities and constraints in using carpets as a filter to write revisionist history? How does the maker, designer, or artist interact with the mother lode of recorded historical patterns and motifs? Pictorial archives, carpet-weaving languages, cartoons, and knot plans have a constitutive role in creating carpets and are in themselves significant objects with their own biographies and specific materiality.

As they seek to respond to these questions, the contributors to this volume situate carpets as active participants in their vibrant ongoing biographies of making, trade, use, collection, and display. Carpets and their makers are shown to interact with the geopolitics, socioeconomics, culture, and spirituality of the times and geographies they inhabit and to participate in diverse and continuous weaving practices through to the present day. These carpet stories are multidirectional, showing what carpets bring to such interactions, alongside what the interactions bring to carpets. They explore the importance of mobility among peoples, carpets, and ideas. They consider the impact on makers and carpets of participation in an increasingly global and capitalist market. They

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.underthecarpet.org/>, for an extensive bibliography of readings relevant to topics of this volume.

replace the historic model of an economically dominant center and an exploited periphery with a network of microsites in the biographies of these objects.

At the same time, the narratives offered by this volume's contributors extend readings of carpets to include the physical, sensual, intellectual, and emotional experience of makers, designers, artists, and architects. They acknowledge the exceptional cognitive load of integrating the social, material, geometric, engineering, commercial, and aesthetic demands of creating a finished carpet. They reflect on the movement of the human hand and its skills along the chain of work—from the handweaver to the machine worker—and how the value of that work changes as it moves.

Dorothy Armstrong's article "[Reading Networks of Coloniality and Capitalism through 'Oriental' Carpets](#)" applies a global historical approach to an analysis of two Punjabi carpets, interrogating the networks of coloniality and capitalism in which they participate. Both carpets were made in the final decades of the nineteenth century but in two distinct environments of production: one an independent commercial factory in Amritsar, the other under coercion in the British Central Jail at Lahore. The article explores the carpets' existence as material objects bearing the traces of their makers; as maps of transgeographical interactions at a point of exceptional intellectual, geopolitical, and geo-economic change in the later nineteenth century; and as manifestations of profoundly different relationships between production and hegemonic power. Its primary objective is to uncover the contentious and entangled landscape of carpet production in nineteenth-century Punjab. In parallel, however, it reflects on the opportunities and difficulties in applying a global historical approach to carpet making, carpet markets, and weavers, exploring the specifics of sources, pre-existing intellectual agendas, and methodologies.

Jonathan Cleaver's article "[The Contestable Pleasures of Industrial Carpet-Making Archives](#)" offers an original approach to both the subject matter and methods of carpet studies. As a weaver and textile historian, Cleaver has produced two handwoven

textiles and a contextual essay responding to his experience researching the design archives of former Scottish industrial carpet manufacturer James Templeton and Company, Glasgow (1839–1980). He pays self-reflexive attention to the emotional experience of viewing pattern drawings to interrogate how the visual pleasures of archival encounters re-enact the historical British carpet industry's Orientalist attitudes to Persian design. In this way, sixteenth-century Persian artefacts, twentieth-century Scottish industrial design, and contemporary art weaving are entangled in ways that query the division of carpet studies into distinct areas of scholarship. Cleaver introduces handweaving and reflective commentary as qualitative approaches that expand on traditional methods in historical research. He draws attention to visual, tactile, and material qualities that are inherent in textiles, and which can complement textual methods of engaging with historical sources.

Ludovica Matarozzo's article "[Unraveling the Threads: An Exploration of Hidden Aspects in the Carpet Productions of Faig Ahmed and Alighiero Boetti](#)" casts light on the creative output of two artistic practices which have not previously been compared: the carpets of Alighiero Boetti (Italy, 1940–1994) and those of Faig Ahmed (Azerbaijan, b. 1982). Neither artist wove carpets himself but relied on the work of textile artists, almost always women. Although the two artists' use of the carpet as a medium gives completely different results, several affinities can be seen in the relationships they established with the textile artists. Using archival documents, interviews, and a close comparison between the two artistic practices, the article delves into the dynamics of these productions and confrontations. It will reveal the Orientalism inherent in their work and the gender issues surrounding the relationship between the artists and the textile artists.

Farniyaz Zaker's article "[Between Ornament and Structure: Carpets in Modern Art and Architecture](#)" follows Gottfried Semper's notion of the origins of architecture in textiles, investigating how modern architecture and art have used textiles, in particular carpets, to manipulate our perception of space

by evoking a sense of enclosure and tactility. It examines the carpet-inspired gardens created by Gabriel Guevrekian in 1920s France, the textile art of Anni Albers, the author's own art practice, the architecture of Belsize Park house—built by Georgie Wolton in 1976 to house her kilim collection—and a partially carpet-based art installation at Berlin's Neue Nationalgalerie created by Rudolf Stingel in 2010. Through this rich range of examples, the article explores how textiles inform architectural practice, alter our spatial perception through our sense of vision and touch, and function in different contexts as both ornament and structure.

Myriem Naji's article "Designing without Design? Embodied and Situated Carpet Designing in the Sirwa, Southern Morocco" offers an ethnography of carpet designing among Amazigh weavers in the Sirwa. Through an embodied and material approach that privileges creativity and embodied cognition-in-the-making, it challenges the idea that designing necessarily implies the use of representational devices such as knot plans, *talim*, or cartoons. By focusing on the interplay of the weaver's body and materiality in the designing of carpets in the Sirwa, the article diversifies and broadens our understanding of cognition and design. It shows the value of resituating design and making practices in specific social, cultural, emotional, economic, and historical contexts.

Finally, this volume offers three varied short essays. In her Research Note, Rachel Pollack examines seventeenth-century embroideries held in the Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection, focusing on the ways in which imagery from classical mythology was used and reflected the familial ties and personal lives of the Stuart Dynasty. Two emerging scholars focus on the importance of instrumental analysis in textile studies. Callista Jerman describes the initial steps in a larger research project that seeks to trace the origins of Anatolian kilims through a study of wool, dyes, motifs, and weaving techniques. Joshua Sanchez-Genao looks at how information gathered using reflectance can add to visitors' and researchers' understanding and experience of textiles.









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# Between Ornament and Structure: Carpets in Modern Art and Architecture

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**Farniyaz Zaker**

*About the Author / Farniyaz Zaker is an artist and lecturer in Persian Studies at Oxford University's Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. Zaker's research and practice deal with the history and theory of architecture and textiles with regard to bodily, societal, spatial, and linguistic practices. In 2015 Farniyaz completed her DPhil in Fine Art at the University of Oxford with the support of St. John's College's Lamb and Flag Graduate Scholarship. She has been a visiting Research Fellow at UCL's Institute of Advanced Studies and a Junior Teaching Fellow at the Ashmolean Museum's Karsis Fellowship Programme.*

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**Abstract** | Following Gottfried Semper's notion of the origins of architecture in textiles, this article investigates how modern architecture and art have used textiles, in particular carpets, to manipulate our perception of space by evoking a sense of enclosure and tactility. It examines the carpet-inspired gardens created by Gabriel Guevrekian in 1920s France; the architecture of Belsize Park house, which Georgie Wolton built in 1976 to house her kilim collection; the textile art of Anni Albers; and the author's own art practice as well as a partially carpet-based art installation at Berlin's *Neue Nationalgalerie* created by Rudolf Stingel in 2010.

The theory about the origins of architecture in textiles put forth by the renowned art historian and architect Gottfried Semper has resonated profoundly with modern architecture and art as well as with the author's own art practice.<sup>1</sup> This is how his 1851 *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings* discusses the history and origins of architecture:

*Hanging carpets remained the true walls, the visible boundaries of space. The often solid walls behind them were necessary for reasons that had nothing to do with the creation of space; they were needed for security, for supporting a load, for their permanence, and so on. Wherever the need for these secondary functions did not arise, the carpets remained the original means for separating space. Even where building solid walls became necessary, the latter were only the inner, invisible structure hidden behind the true and legitimate representatives of the wall, the colorful woven carpets.*<sup>2</sup>

Here was a proposal for a new reading of the built environment; one that placed textiles at the heart and beginning of architecture rather than delegating them to a mere ornamental function.<sup>3</sup> The notion of the origin of building in weaving was central to Semper's argument. In addition to archaeological evidence, he drew inspiration from the etymological

connections between the words *Wand* (wall) and *Gewand* (dress/textiles) in Germanic languages to further solidify his argument—connections that also hold true for some other languages, including Azeri Turkic, where the verb *تیکمک/tikmək* translates as erecting, building, and sewing.

Semper fundamentally changed the account of architecture by challenging the superiority of structure over ornament. He argued that "[...] weaving [...]"—as a means to make the 'home,' the *inner life* separated from the *outer life*, and as the formal creation of the idea of space—undoubtedly preceded the wall.<sup>4</sup> The seminal Austrian modernist architect and publicist Adolf Loos, for example, built on Semper's theories and helped popularize them amongst practitioners and theorists of modernist architecture. "In the beginning there was dress (or cladding, *Bekleidung* in German)," he stated in his *The Principle of Cladding* (1898), arguing that humanity had dressed before it built and that architects should proceed in the same sequence:<sup>5</sup>

*The architect has the task of producing a warm, inhabitable room. Carpets are warm and inhabitable. So he decides to spread one of those on the floor and to hang up four carpets, which are to form the four walls. But you can't build a house from carpets. Both*

<sup>1</sup> While eschewing a precise definition of modernism as a movement in art and architecture, this article regards it as a loose collection of ideas and practices that arose during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and which continues to shape contemporary art and architecture. Especially important for the purposes of this article are modernism's suspicion of ornament, its embrace of abstraction, and its belief in the unity of the arts, which have led artists and architects, such as Anni Albers and Gabriel Guevrekian, to treat textiles not as "unmodern" objects of decoration but as vital elements and vehicles of modern art and architecture.

<sup>2</sup> Semper 1989, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> Semper (1989) was adamant that "it remains certain that the beginning of building coincides with the beginning of textiles." p. 254.

<sup>4</sup> Semper 1989, p. 254.

<sup>5</sup> *Bekleidung* in German means both "dress" and "cladding;" see Loos 2019, pp. 127–8.

*the carpet on the floor and the tapestries on the walls demand a structural scaffolding that anchors them in the correct place. The invention of that scaffolding is only the architect's second task.*<sup>6</sup>

Loos wanted architects to be “prompted by both the material and by the form.”<sup>7</sup> He believed that textiles, in particular carpets, were the basic space-making material and that architects concerned with creating inhabitable spaces (rather than mere walls) were well advised to put textiles at the beginning of a building process. Those who failed to proceed in this manner ended up creating “not rooms, but wall sections.”<sup>8</sup>

In four parts, this article explores the question of how textiles, in particular carpets, are capable of manipulating our perception of architectural space. The first part deals with the carpet-inspired garden designs of the Iranian-Armenian architect Gabriel Guevrekian and the sense of touch and enclosure they produced. The second part expands this subject to discuss the work of the textile artist Anni Albers as well as the author's art practice, both of which explore how textiles alter our spatial perception through our senses of vision and touch and how textiles can be at once ornament and structure. The third part of this article analyzes the case of Belsize Park house, which the British architect Georgie Wolton built to house her kilim collection, and which is therefore very much a house built with textiles in mind. The final part addresses the tension between textiles, especially carpets, and glass as building materials in modern architecture. An art installation at Berlin's *Neue Nationalgalerie* by Rudolf Stingel and a video work by the author serve to shed light on the relationship, at times contradictory and sometimes complimentary, between glass and textiles in modern architecture.

## The Carpet Garden

The Iranian-Armenian modernist architect Gabriel Guevrekian (1900–1970) might have made less use of carpets in his interior designs than his Austrian colleague, contemporary, and acquaintance Adolf Loos. But he, too, drew inspiration for his work from the space-making qualities of carpets. Guevrekian left Tehran for Vienna in 1910, where he studied architecture at the city's *Kunstgewerbeschule* (school of arts and crafts).<sup>9</sup> He joined Robert Mallet-Stevens's office in 1922 and would go on to become one of the pioneers of the modernist movement in Europe, collaborating with many renowned architects and artists, including Oskar Strand, Josef Hoffman, Adolf Loos, and Le Corbusier.<sup>10</sup> In 1925, Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier, the French landscape architect and chief designer of the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* (the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts) in Paris, invited Guevrekian to design a “garden conceived in a modern spirit with elements of Persian decor.”<sup>11</sup> In the following years, Guevrekian designed two more gardens: the Villa Noailles at Hyères (1926–1927) and the terraced gardens of the Villa Heim (Neuilly, 1928).

The distinctive geometry of pools, fountains, water channels, and flower beds of Guevrekian's gardens has led scholars to perceive them as cubist reinterpretations of the Persian Paradise Garden.<sup>12</sup> George Dodds, for example, has described them as an attempt “to reinvent the Persian Paradise Garden in the crucible of Parisian *avant-garde*,” even though he cautioned against overemphasizing the influence of cubism.<sup>13</sup> Commenting on Guevrekian's axonometric drawing of the garden for the 1925 Paris exhibition (fig. 1), Dodds writes that it “directly relates to the formal and conceptual programs of a Paradise Garden” as an idealized, walled enclave, divided into four equal precincts

<sup>6</sup> Loos 2019, p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> Loos 2019, p. 129.

<sup>8</sup> Loos 2019, p. 128.

<sup>9</sup> Khosravi 2020, pp. 9–15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Forestier 1925, p. 526.

<sup>12</sup> Wesley (1981, pp. 16–24) was one of the first to offer a cubist reading of Guevrekian's gardens in 1981. See Wesley 1981, pp. 16–24. Dorothee Imbert also offered a cubist analysis of Guevrekian's garden, see Imbert quoted in Soltani 2015, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Instead, Dodds (2002, pp. 191 and 198) stressed the gardens' indebtedness to the *simultanéisme* of Robert and Sonia Delaunay as well as to purism and surrealism.



FIG. 1  
Gabriel Guevrekian, the conceptual painting of *Jardin d'Eau et de Lumière* [*The Garden of Water and Light*], 1925. From 1925 *Jardins de Marrast* (pl. 15, Editions d'art Charles Moreau, Paris, 1926). Courtesy of Gabriel Guevrekian Foundation.



FIG. 2  
Gabriel Guevrekian, *Jardin d'Eau et de Lumière* [*The Garden of Water and Light*], *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* (the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts), Paris, 1925. Courtesy of Gabriel Guevrekian Foundation and the University of Illinois Archives, 0012201, Record Series 12/2/26, Box 2, Page 16. © The Regents of the University of California, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license. Photography by Thérèse Bonney.

by water representing the four rivers of paradise.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Zohreh Soltani speaks of Guevrekian's gardens as a cubist approach to "a modern interpretation of the Persian garden" known as a *Chāhār Bāgh* (Four Gardens)—a space of enclosure that is walled, quadripartite, and symmetrical on one axis.<sup>15</sup>

And yet, not the Persian Paradise Garden but the Persian garden carpet was arguably the most immediate and direct source of inspiration for the gardens Guevrekian designed between 1925 and 1928. In terms of their distinctive geometry, colors, imagery, and almost 2-D flatness, his gardens bear a greater resemblance to the abstract image of the Paradise Garden found on Persian garden carpets than to the actual Paradise Garden itself. And while this resemblance is particularly visible on certain drawings and photographs, such as figure 1, Guevrekian's gardens clearly had a strong pictorial presence and were designed to be looked at from some distance, whether at the exhibition or from inside a house.<sup>16</sup> Commenting on the garden for the Villa Noailles, Soltani writes that it "clearly called for a visual and pictorial experience rather than a physical one."<sup>17</sup> Even Dodds, who cautions against overemphasizing the pictorial quality—rather than physical experience—of Guevrekian's gardens

describes the Paris exhibition garden as "a tableau that one looked at, but did not enter."<sup>18</sup> And although Dodds does not make the connection to carpets, his description of the 1925 Paris garden as an "idealized plane of reflection of a virtual garden" could also serve as a description of a Persian garden carpet.<sup>19</sup> Soltani explicitly draws a parallel between Guevrekian's gardens and Persian *Chāhār Bāgh* (Four Gardens) carpets, noting that if one sees the former as "a cubist, modern representation of Persian gardens, it is useful to refer to [Persian carpets as] another two-dimensional form of representation [of Persian Paradise Gardens], combining the top-plan and elevation of a garden simultaneously."<sup>20</sup> While following Soltani's analysis, this article would go further and argue that one can see not mere parallels between the design of Persian carpets and that of Guevrekian's gardens but a clear influence of the former on the latter. His gardens were reinventions of not only the Persian Paradise Garden but the Persian garden carpet. Moreover, the sense of enclosure, interiority, and tactility they evoke, in particular when seen from inside a house, are directly related to the suggestive power of carpets.

The influence of Persian carpet design is particularly visible in Guevrekian's project for the *Exposition*

<sup>14</sup> Dodds 2002, p. 191.

<sup>15</sup> Soltani 2015, pp. 27 and 35.

<sup>16</sup> Dodds 2002, p. 184.

<sup>17</sup> Soltani 2015, p. 32.

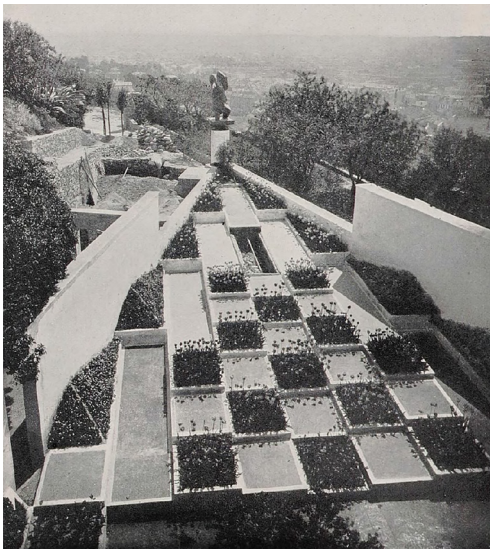
<sup>18</sup> Dodds 2002, p. 185.

<sup>19</sup> Dodds 2002, p. 192.

<sup>20</sup> Soltani 2015, pp. 27–8.



*des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, which was titled *Jardin d'Eau et de Lumière* or *The Garden of Water and Light* (figs. 1 and 2). It featured a distinct triangular shape that was enclosed from two sides by a colorful triangular fence and comprised tiered triangular pools and planting beds tilted at various angles. Soon after the 1925 Paris exhibition, the patrons of the arts Charles and Marie-Laure Noailles commissioned Guevrekian to create a garden for their villa, which Mallet-Stevens was building at the time at Hyères.<sup>21</sup> For this project, Guevrekian further developed his distinctive style, departing from conventional garden design and borrowing from the design of garden carpets, this time realizing his vision in the more permanent setting of the Villa Noailles. Like his previous project, this garden had a distinct enclosed and isosceles triangular shape; was divided into geometrical colorful surfaces; and featured a central fountain, checkerboard planting beds in the middle, and pyramidal plant beds on the sides. The apex of the garden was crowned with a rotating bronze sculpture by the cubist sculptor Jacques Lipchitz (fig. 3).<sup>22</sup> Just like Guevrekian's gardens for the Paris exhibition and for the Villa Noailles, his next project, too, built on the idea of an enclosed garden space and borrowed elements from the design of garden



carpets. In 1928, the fashion designer Jacques Heim commissioned Guevrekian to build a villa, complete with a terraced garden, in Neuilly (fig. 4). The garden of the Villa Heim had a rectangular shape, was organized into a series of distinct platforms at varying heights, and featured a fountain at the center of one of the platforms. Vegetation was again used sparingly.

Forestier praised Guevrekian's garden for the 1925 Paris exhibition as original and ingenious, commenting that its designer "having referred to his memories of Persia, freely abandoned them."<sup>23</sup> However, considering how much Guevrekian's own design drew on that of carpets, it becomes apparent that he did not really abandon his memories of Persia. The garden he created was—like that of many Persian carpets—what Edward Casey would refer to as a "liminal space" (i.e., something between "the completely constructed and the frankly wild").<sup>24</sup> Guevrekian's own drawing for the *Jardin d'Eau et de Lumière* (fig. 1) makes a good illustration of the extent to which he relied on carpet design in the project. Its colors, geometric shapes, and flattened axonometric view all bear a striking resemblance to carpets such as those depicted in figures 5A, 5B, and 6.

The similarities between the design of carpets and that of Guevrekian's gardens were also noticed

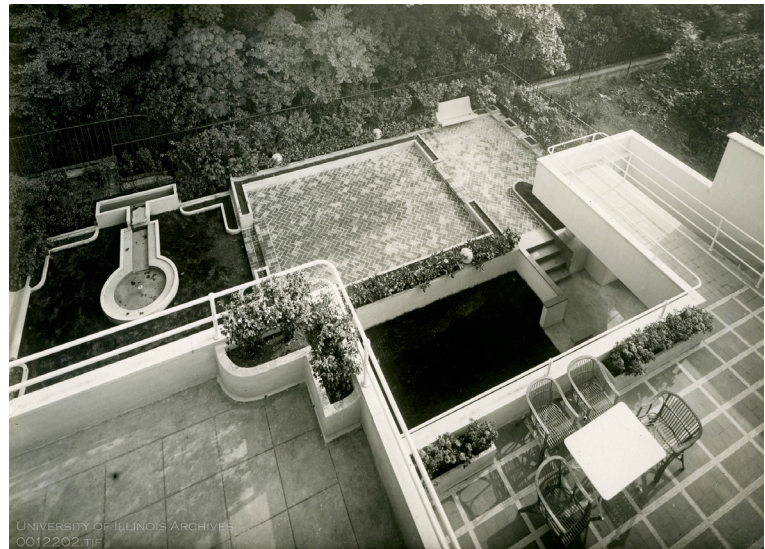


FIG. 3

Gabriel Guevrekian, the garden of the Villa Noailles, 1926–1927. Leopold Zahn and Gabriel Guevrekian, *Ein geometrischer Garten an der Riviera* [A Geometrical Garden on the Riviera]. From *Gartenschönheit: eine Zeitschrift mit Bildern*, no. 10, June 1929, p. 223. Courtesy of Gabriel Guevrekian Foundation.

FIG. 4

Gabriel Guevrekian, the Garden of the Villa Heim, 1927. Courtesy of Gabriel Guevrekian Foundation and the University of Illinois Archives, 0012202, Record Series 12/2/26, Box 2, Page 47. © The Regents of the University of California, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license. Photography by Thérèse Bonney.

<sup>21</sup> Dodds 2002, p. 187.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Forestier 1925, pp. 526–7.

<sup>24</sup> Casey 2009, pp. 154–5.

FIGS. 5A AND 5B  
Garden Carpet (A) and detail  
from its corner (B) Kurdistan,  
Iran, second half of the 18th  
century. The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art 22.100.128, The  
James F. Ballard Collection,  
gift of James F. Ballard, 1922.

FIG. 6 (bottom right)  
Fragment of a Garden  
Carpet, Northwestern Iran or  
Kurdistan, Iran, 18th century.  
The Metropolitan Museum  
of Art 30.95.150, Theodore M.  
Davis Collection, bequest of  
Theodore M. Davis, 1915.



by contemporaries, such as the Austrian art historian Leopold Zahn, whose review of the garden at the Villa Noailles described it as a synthesis between “Eastern” and “Western” style: “A checkered interplay of colors, inspired by ‘oriental’ carpets, is crossed with a geometry that satisfies the French need for order and clarity.”<sup>25</sup> Comparing Guevrekian’s garden with a carpet, Zahn contrasts it with nature: “In an emphatic contrast to the surrounding landscape, which unfolds widely and freely, the garden separates itself off: A creation by human hand, artificial and exquisite as jewelry, and colorful and abstract like a Persian carpet.”<sup>26</sup> Zahn’s analogy between Guevrekian’s garden and a carpet does indeed capture something that is crucial to both: a sense of nature tamed and made abstract.

Carpets offer an abstract, perennial image of a lush garden to be enjoyed in all seasons. Arguably, their bird’s-eye perspective distills visual elements

that symbolize nature, thereby appealing to the desire to enjoy but also control the natural world. Carpet imagery goes beyond a mere imitation of that world. It reconstructs and rearranges, abstracts and tames the natural world without aiming for realism or depth. In doing so, it evokes a sense of order and control, which adds to a feeling of protection and safety. In that sense, the carpet is the creation of a space that reinvents the experience of nature in a more secure, protected, and tactile built environment. This nature-like and yet artificial quality inherent in both the design of carpets and in Guevrekian’s gardens was also remarked upon by contemporaries, such as the American landscape architect Fletcher Steele, who helped introduce the modernist gardens of the 1925 Paris Exposition to the United States. In his 1930 article “New Pioneering in Garden Design,” Steele praised Guevrekian’s innovative approach to space and his experimental use of materials, forms, and

<sup>25</sup> Zahn and Guevrekian 1929, p. 222.

<sup>26</sup> Zahn and Guevrekian 1929, p. 223.



colors.<sup>27</sup> Steele saw plants as a medium of artistic expression, as vehicles for form and color.<sup>28</sup> According to him, "horticulture as such is important, not for the love of plants, but for what one can do with them."<sup>29</sup>

The floral patterns and stylized gardens of carpets are precisely such a form of artistic expression, and so was Guevrekian's reintroduction, so to speak, of real plants into his gardens, which were like stylized carpets. In a way, his use of plants in his gardens reversed nature's previous abstraction in carpet design in order to achieve a more abstract landscape design.

Guevrekian's projects for the 1925 Paris exhibition and the Villa Noailles (1926–1927) achieved this carpet effect by keeping colorful geometric surfaces and planting beds flat and devoid of tall vegetation and by avoiding native flora, thereby increasing the contrast to the surrounding landscape and the sense of artificiality in his gardens. This juxtaposition was certainly deliberate. Guevrekian himself wrote about the garden of the Villa Noailles: "It was planned so as to achieve a deliberate contrast with the lush Mediterranean vegetation. [...] [I]t is bounded by walls and closed off in order to create the impression of a courtyard."<sup>30</sup> However, that Guevrekian had carpets in mind when designing the garden remains uncertain. His limited written output and the fact that he rarely explored the concepts underlying his work further complicates the matter. But it is telling that Guevrekian did not disapprove of having Zahn's above-mentioned comments about the carpet-like quality of his work published alongside his own short text about the garden of the Villa Noailles.<sup>31</sup> This suggests a possible resonance between Guevrekian's artistic intentions and Zahn's interpretation of his work. Guevrekian was certainly no stranger to making references to the world of textiles when discussing his own work. In the same year that his comments

on the garden of the Villa Noailles were published, he compared his approach to planning a house to that of a tailor designing a custom-made suit for his customer.<sup>32</sup>

Whatever Guevrekian's intentions were, his walled-off and geometrical gardens of flattened flowerbeds and his use of color and non-native vegetation created not only a sense of seclusion, protectedness, and interiority but also a carpet effect that further reinforced this impression. While critics like Steele, who had a preference for walled gardens, valued this courtyard quality, others, such as Zahn, duly noticed the indebtedness to carpet design.<sup>33</sup>

## Tactile Space

Man Ray's 1929 film *Les Mystères du Château de Dé* (*The Mysteries of the Chateau of Dice*) features a pair of travelers departing a Paris café for the Villa Noailles in Hyères, where they explore both the villa and its surroundings, including the adjacent garden designed by Guevrekian. The camera work is telling. Prior to entering the villa, it captures close-ups of the walls of the garden. Only then does the camera show the interior of the house, followed by long shots of the garden from inside the villa (fig. 7). In doing so, it manages to evoke the illusion of a haptic experience of the garden. Juhani Pallasmaa has described this phenomenon in "An Architecture of the Seven Senses," in which he emphasizes the importance of touch rather than vision and argues that the eye can touch by establishing a connection with an object through what he calls "unconscious bodily mimesis."<sup>34</sup> He writes: "Our gaze strokes distant surfaces, contours and edges, and the unconscious tactile sensation determines the agreeableness or unpleasantness of the experience."<sup>35</sup> By allowing the viewer's eyes to wander alongside the walls of

<sup>27</sup> Steele 1930, pp. 166–7.

<sup>28</sup> Ponte 2014, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Steele 1930, p. 166.

<sup>30</sup> Zahn and Guevrekian 1929, pp. 222–23.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> "Not a man in a house," but a "house around the man" is how Guevrekian put it. See Guevrekian 1929a, p. 297ff.

<sup>33</sup> Steele had a preference for backyards and enclosed gardens, and he defended the use of walls and fences to ensure privacy.

See Ponte 2014, p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> Pallasmaa 2006, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> Pallasmaa 2006, p. 34.

FIG. 7  
 Man Ray, film still from  
 the movie *Les Mystères  
 du Château de Dé*, 1929.  
 © Man Ray 2015 Trust /  
 ADAGP-DACS-2024. Image:  
 Telimage, Paris.



Guevrekian's garden, Man Ray's film captures its enclosure both visually and haptically. Long shots of the garden as seen from within the house only contribute to this tactile experience of the space and to the impression that it has been carved out of the surrounding natural world and become part of the interior of the house. Man Ray's documentary accentuates an emphasis on enclosure, interiority, and tactility that was inherent in Guevrekian's walled and carpet-like gardens. But it also reflects a current in modern architecture that can be traced back to the ideas of Semper, Loos, and also Frank Lloyd Wright. The latter's conviction that "interior space is the reality of the building" and that architecture ought to be "conceived as space enclosed," for example, was clearly indebted to Semper's and Loos's ideas on the origins and correct sequence of building, according to which textiles came before bricks and the interior before the exterior.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, Guevrekian's privileging of enclosure, interiority, and tactility can be seen as part of what Pallasmaa has called a reaction by cubist

artists and modern architects against "the hegemony of the perspectival eye."<sup>37</sup> Both the geometry and the flatness of Guevrekian's gardens chimed with the cubist attempt to stress tactility and immediacy by abandoning the single focal point and eschewing the illusion of depth in their practice. In that sense, a cubist reading of Guevrekian's Villa Noailles garden does contribute to our understanding of its impact on the viewer. In order to elucidate the cubist ambition to create tactile space, Robert McCarter, the architect and author of *The Space Within: Interior Experience as the Origin of Architecture*, provides the following quote from the French painter Georges Braque: "Impelled by the desire to go further in the manifestation of space ... I wanted to make touch a form of matter."<sup>38</sup> Towards this aim, Braque skimmed over, brushed, and patted the canvas, left parts of it bare, or created heaps of paint on it.<sup>39</sup> In other words, he foregrounded the texture of the paint and canvas in order to appeal to the viewer's sense of touch. In a similar vein, Guevrekian's garden designs also appeal to our sense of touch, interiority, and

<sup>36</sup> Wright 1955, p. 217.

<sup>37</sup> Pallasmaa 2012, p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> McCarter 2017, p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> Fauchereau 1987, p. 30.

seclusion through their evocation of the texture and tactility of carpets.

Engagement with textiles and their relation to touch and space is also central to the work of Anni Albers (1899–1994), a German textile artist and contemporary of Guevrekian (fig. 8). Drawing inspiration from Semper's theories on the origins of architecture, Albers positioned her artistic practice at the crossroads of art and architecture, bridging the two realms.<sup>40</sup> Her work explored the physicality and tactility of weaving—as a process in which the loom engages the body and sense of touch—as well as the space-making, architectural qualities of woven textiles.<sup>41</sup> Albers shared Guevrekian's, and the wider modernist movement's, rejection of excessive ornamentation, which might seem somewhat paradoxical given that textiles, and especially carpets, are often seen as primarily ornamental elements.<sup>42</sup> However, both Guevrekian and Albers were influenced by the notion, perhaps most prominently promoted by Loos, that superior architecture stemmed from the symbiosis between material and form, and that carpets—as primal walls—represented this symbiosis. Both artists were likewise interested in exploring the structural aspects of textiles. Albers sought to distance weaving from its traditional association with “mere” ornamentation and redefine it as a medium of modern art.<sup>43</sup> As she made clear in her 1957 article “The Pliable Plane: Textiles in Architecture,” she believed that there were “essentially structural principles that relate the work of building and weaving.”<sup>44</sup> Following this idea of a symbiotic interplay between form and material, she believed that the loom's inherent structural qualities made weaving a formidable medium of modern art and abstraction.<sup>45</sup>

Albers's work remains an important point of reference for artists and architects interested in the interplay between architecture, textiles, and tactility. This also applies to this author's art practice,



much of which explores the interrelationship between body, space, and textiles, often questioning what is ornament and what is structure by using carpets or textiles or themes derived from them. The *Khataee* series (2018–2019), for example, are floral patterns-made-sculpture (figs. 9A and 9B). By elevating the *Shāh Abbāsi* design—a popular motif of many carpets—from flat, two-dimensional decorative motifs into three-dimensional sculptures, the work turns ornament into high-rises (fig. 10). Many of the floral patterns remain hidden behind white casings, further turning what tend to be

FIG. 8  
Anni Albers, *Vicara Rug I*,  
1959. Wool and cotton, 153 ×  
101.6 cm (60¼ × 40 in).  
Neues Museum Nürnberg.  
© The Josef and Anni  
Albers Foundation / Artists  
Rights Society (ARS), New  
York and DACS, London  
2024. Photography by  
Annette Kradisch.

<sup>40</sup> Albers 1957.

<sup>41</sup> Fer in Coxon, Fer, and Müller-Schareck eds. 2018, pp. 26–27.

<sup>42</sup> In 1929, Guevrekian wrote that “decoration and art are contradictory concepts” and that while the latter serves as a vehicle for expressing ideas, the former primarily adorns functional objects. See Guevrekian 1929b, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Fer 2018, pp. 26–7 and 38.

<sup>44</sup> Albers 1957, pp. 37 and 40.

<sup>45</sup> Fer 2018, pp. 26–7 and 38.





FIGS. 9A AND 9B

A) Farniyaz Zaker, *Khataee*. 2018–2019. Wood and glue, each 36 × 12 × 10 cm (14 1/8 × 4 3/4 × 4 in). © Farniyaz Zaker. Photography by Amir Hossein Shahnazi. B) Detail from *Khataee*.

FIG. 10 (bottom right) *Shāh Abbāsī* motif in a contemporary Kurdistan carpet. © Farniyaz Zaker. Photography by the author.

highly visible elements of decoration into the usually more inconspicuous structural columns of a building. A similar reversal of the roles of ornament and structure is taking place in the author's work *Primeval Relationship I* (figs. 11A and 11B). The installation covers parts of the gallery's walls and floor with four handwoven white carpets whose distinguishing traits are their unusually elongated fringes. As a result, this underlying structural element, which is part of the carpet's warp and the first thing that appears on the loom, takes on the main decorative function of the otherwise unadorned carpets. This effect, together with the fact that the carpets imitate the white walls and grey floor of the gallery space, foregrounds the architectural rather than ornamental quality—and, arguably, *primaeva* origins—of carpets.

The materiality of the *Khataee* series, especially its intriguing layered wooden disks, as well as the fringes and thick, soft pile of *Primeval Relationship I* all appeal to our sense of touch. Moreover, the latter work in particular allowed the author to partially experience the tactility of hand weaving. The touch of the cotton and wool and the vibration of the loom all turned touch into matter and created four “carpet walls” whose malleability and mobility is reminiscent of the human body that created them.

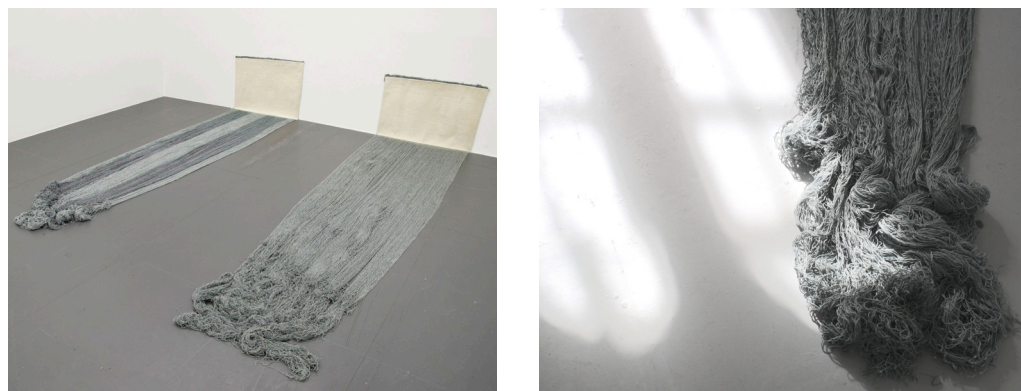
## The Carpet House

A strong critic of imitation and forgery in architecture, Adolf Loos argued that form followed material: “Every material has its own [inimitable] formal language,” as he put it.<sup>46</sup> With regard to the origins and correct

<sup>46</sup> Loos 2019, p. 97.

FIGS. 11A AND 11B

A) Farniyaz Zaker, *Primeval Relationship I*. 2014. The work consists of four hand-woven carpets, wool and cotton, each 70 × 3 × 450 cm (27 1/2 × 1 1/8 × 177 1/8 in). © Farniyaz Zaker. Photography by the author. B) Detail from *Primeval Relationship I*.



sequence of building, he believed that this meant going from textiles to walls, describing the latter as “structural scaffolding” for the former.<sup>47</sup> Loos’s ideas invite the question of what might be the formal language of carpets and woven textiles more generally and how one might design buildings with textiles in mind. Someone who responded to this question in her practice was Georgie Wolton (1934–2021), a British modernist architect, landscape designer, and a founding member of the architectural firm Team 4.<sup>48</sup> Where Guevrekian designed gardens with carpets in mind, Wolton took Loos’s words about creating a structural scaffolding for carpets literally and built a house designed to exhibit her splendid collection of kilims (flat-woven rugs).<sup>49</sup> Wolton’s house in London’s Belsize Park (1976) was a single-story patio house consisting of a series of brick walls creating smaller enclosed gardens within the house, which effectively reinvented the more conventional courtyard house (figs. 12A–12C).

Wolton’s interests in kilims and carpets stemmed from her time as an architecture student in London, where she was deeply influenced by the principles of the Bauhaus movement and the Futurist manifesto, learning about their use of form, color, and texture.<sup>50</sup> Wolton purchased her first kilim in her student years (fig. 13)<sup>51</sup> Much like Anni Albers, who while studying painting with Paul Klee opted for textiles rather than canvas, Wolton derived her primary inspiration from woven textiles rather than paintings. In an interview accompanying the exhibition of her kilims at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1977, Wolton said: “To me, [the] dusty but quietly glowing Caucasian kilim was as stimulating as a Klee and more exciting than a Mondrian.”<sup>52</sup>

While Wolton’s earlier work, Camden Town studio flats (1968–1971), carried echoes of the 1920s and her Fieldhouse house in Surry (1969) drew inspiration from von der Rohe’s Farnsworth House, her Belsize



FIG. 12A–12C  
Georgie Wolton’s house in Belsize Park, London. A) The garden court. B) The bedroom corridor. C) The double-height studio. 1976. © John Donat / RIBA Collections, RIBA Ref No: RIBA73414, RIBA73410, and RIBA73406. Photography by John Donat.

<sup>47</sup> Loos 2019, p. 96.

<sup>48</sup> Members of the group were Wendy Cheesman (Georgie’s sister), Su Brumwell, Richard Rogers, and Norman Foster. Subsequently, Richard Rogers and Su Brumwell married, as did Norman Foster and Wendy Cheesman. Abbott 2023.

<sup>49</sup> Richardson 1977, p. 90.

<sup>50</sup> Moore and Wolton 1977, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



FIG. 13  
A kilim from Georgie Wolton's  
Collection at the Ashmolean  
Museum, possibly from the  
Sivas Region, 145 × 360 cm  
(57 × 141<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in). Reproduced  
with the kind permission  
of the Ashmolean Museum,  
University of Oxford.  
© Callum Teggin Wickerman  
photography. Photography  
by Callum Teggin.





Park house speaks a very different formal language—one that was significantly shaped by the material it was built to house: the kilim collection.<sup>53</sup> Compared to garden carpets, kilims offer even more abstract and distilled images of nature, thereby evoking a greater sense of nature ordered and controlled and hence of seclusion and protection. In this vein, Wolton's Belsize Park house was designed to be secluded and hidden from the street. All that meets the eye at first is a gate, a garage door, and the prominent brick walls. In fact, the house seems to vanish behind these, giving the impression of "a series of brick walled gardens," which are accessible solely from within the residence, further increasing the sense of seclusion and intimacy.<sup>54</sup> A harbinger of the carpet effect to come, the prominence of brick conjures up what Frank Lloyd Wright has called "the imaginative geometrical tracery of the Persian and Moor and the noblest brick buildings man has ever erected [...], [those] of Asia Minor-Persia."<sup>55</sup>

Not unlike Guevrekian's walled gardens, which softened the division into interior and exterior by presenting the garden as part of the former, the courtyard gardens of the Belsize Park house also seem to merge with the garden and labyrinthine motifs of the kilims cladding the long wall sections. The interior of the brick walls, where the collection is hung, finds its counterpart in the exterior, where the gardens are thriving. This merging effect is only increased by—in Wolton's own words—"design[ing] numerous walls with roof lights to enhance the natural colors of the kilims."<sup>56</sup> Explaining how the kilims influenced her design choices, she stressed the importance of considering room height, the quality of light, and the floor texture. Wolton clearly understood how textiles shape our perception and experience of a room, in particular their capacity to shrink space: "I made one room fourteen feet high to take the big

vertical pieces. It is a real challenge hanging your collection."<sup>57</sup> It was a challenge, indeed. But the result was a very original symbiosis between the materials and the forms used in Belsize Park house, especially between the brick, textiles, and plants, on the one hand, and the geometry of the walls, courtyards, and the motifs and dimensions of the kilims on the other.

## Transparency

While textiles and carpets certainly have their place in modernist architecture, that place is not uncontested. And there is a moment in the abovementioned interview with Georgie Wolton that hints at this tension, namely when she is asked whether filling the house with kilims did not risk creating a "heavy atmosphere."<sup>58</sup> Not least because of their connotations with seclusion, textiles and in particular carpets (and curtains) have often been regarded as somewhat old-fashioned, stuffy, and incompatible with modern notions of openness and transparency. In this context, glass, rather than textiles, has been seen as the quintessentially modern building material. And few buildings better exemplify this move towards transparency and the extensive utilization of glass than those by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, whose preference for simplicity, clarity, and openness might be considered inimical to the seclusion and tactility fostered by textiles.

Nevertheless, textiles continued to play a role in modernist architecture during the second half of the twentieth century, leading to collaborations between weavers and textile and fashion designers, on the one hand, and architects on the other. Textile artists, such as Anni Albers, not only linked architecture and textiles conceptually, describing the former as the minimum tent and the latter as a kind of secondary skin, but collaborated with architects.<sup>59</sup> Guevrekian also collaborated with such distinguished textile

<sup>53</sup> Abbott 2023.

<sup>54</sup> Richardson 1977, p. 90.

<sup>55</sup> Wright 1992, p. 286.

<sup>56</sup> Moore and Wolton 1977, p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Albers 1957, p.40.

artists and fashion designers as Sonia Delaunay and Jacques Heim.<sup>60</sup> In fact, during the 1920s Mies van der Rohe himself partnered with Lilly Reich—a textile artist, designer, and previous member of the *Wiener Werkstätte*—to design the exhibition stand *Café Samt & Seide (Velvet and Silk Café)* in Berlin in 1927, the Barcelona Pavilion in 1929, and several other projects, all of which made use of textiles both as curtains and as structural elements in the form of space dividers.<sup>61</sup>

Setting aside collaborations between textile artists/designers and modernist architects, as well as the sporadic use of textiles in the architecture of glass and steel, a question remains as to what role, if any, textiles might have played in the genesis of this kind of building. It would clearly be a stretch to characterize the kind of glass boxes favored by Mies van der Rohe and others as having been designed with textiles in mind. Clearly, the main attributes of glass, exposure and transparency, contrast with the sense of seclusion that Loos described as the inherent quality of a room designed in accordance with the principle of cladding and the qualities of carpets. Take the example of Mies van der Rohe's *Neue Nationalgalerie* in Berlin. Its preponderance of glass surfaces and lack of adequate wall space for hanging art works has stirred controversy since its inauguration in 1968.<sup>62</sup> Its lack of seclusion can be interpreted as an expression of West Berlin's role as a showcase for openness and transparency during the Cold War.<sup>63</sup> The building certainly meets Loos's demand for authenticity (i.e., for materials that do not pretend to be something they are not). But it is hard to see a principle of cladding at work where there is no cladding or even naked walls in the conventional sense, but only glass.

It is therefore all the more astonishing that an art installation involving a massive carpet covering the main hall of the *Neue Nationalgalerie* managed

to create within it a sense of enclosure, albeit a very peculiar, expansive, and rather public one. Entitled *LIVE* and realized in 2010 by Rudolf Stingel (b. 1956), the installation hung a chandelier from the ceiling of the gallery's vast main hall and entirely covered its floor with a greyscale Agra carpet (fig. 14). The chandelier's multiple reflections in the gallery's glass walls and especially the carpet created an atmosphere of privacy and enclosure, which reached as far as the eye could see, encompassing the cityscape outside the gallery. In *The Space Within*, McCarter argues that an all-glass building can really only provide privacy when it is surrounded by a private landscape that forms a whole with its interior.<sup>64</sup> And although Berlin's cityscape as seen from inside the *Neue Nationalgalerie* is not a private landscape, Stingel's installation managed to transform it into something like that: a space that appeared to seamlessly merge with the interior space of the exhibition hall. Just as Guevrekian and Wolton, who put gardens and carpets (and their motifs) in dialogue in order to create spaces characterized not only by a sense of enclosure, but also by a blurring of the border between the inside and the outside, so too Stingel utilized the materiality and associative power of carpets to convert the *Neue Nationalgalerie* into a space evoking a particularly extensive sense of enclosure and intimacy that encompassed the outside of the gallery.

Stingel's site-specific installation at the *Neue Nationalgalerie* worked so well because of its clever use of glass and textiles. While the carpet lent a sense of enclosure and domesticity to the gallery, the surrounding glass walls crucially modified this perception of space. By mirroring the chandelier inside the gallery while also revealing the city outside, glass enabled a merging of the two spheres. This capacity to bring the exterior in and the interior out has led Beatrice Colomina to argue that "glass unambiguously represents the act of communication" and

<sup>60</sup> Hammen 2022, pp. 27ff. and 33ff.

<sup>61</sup> Wigley 2001, p. 151.

<sup>62</sup> Mies van der Rohe acknowledged the challenges of displaying art in buildings like his *Neue Nationalgalerie*, but preferred to stress their "potential" nonetheless. See Whittaker and Landrum 2012, pp. 6–7.

<sup>63</sup> Whittaker and Landrum 2012, p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> McCarter 2017, p. 113.



FIG. 14  
Rudolf Stingel, *LIVE*. A site-specific installation for the Neue Nationalgalerie. 2010, mixed media. © DACS 2024 and David von Becker. Photography by David von Becker.

that it is key to “the ambition of modern architecture to dissolve the line between inside and outside.”<sup>65</sup> By the same token, glass is at the core of what Colomina calls the architecture of surveillance.<sup>66</sup> It is inextricably linked to what Fer has described as “the utopian vision of pure transparency [that] has been seen to barely veil an optical regime of surveillance.”<sup>67</sup> At the time the *Neue Nationalgalerie* was built, glass might have made it a West Berlin landmark and symbol of transparency, trust, and openness in the eyes of some. But others will have seen it as a manifestation of the sort of glass box architecture that symbolized surveillance at a time when, as Joan Ockman has argued, the Cold War was transforming “the earlier faith in radiant openness into fears of Big Brother’s intrusive panopticism.”<sup>68</sup>

In her art practice, the author has reflected on the use of glass in architecture and its potential to foster a regime of transparency and trust as well as one of surveillance and suspicion. She has also interrogated the ways in which textiles modify and interact with glass

in buildings, especially in her hometown Tehran, where the realities of urban habitation tend to diverge from the declared ideals of the privacy and seclusion of the family home. In Tehran, “urban gaze” means visual and verbal accessibility facilitated by thin walls, the close proximity of buildings and, of course, glass.<sup>69</sup> Here, the architecture of transparency easily becomes an architecture of surveillance, in which neighborly conflict can escalate into a climate of fear of denunciation and supervision. In such a climate, the nagging question of whether one is being observed can become a constant presence, in particular in liminal spaces, such as balconies or staircases, where the lines between inside and outside, private and public are especially blurred.

This blurring of the boundary between the seclusion of the interior and the scrutiny of the exterior is the subject of the author’s 2013 single channel color video *jenseits (beyond)*. At the same time, the work explores the role and interaction of glass and textiles in this process of boundary blurring. It hints at the potential of these two materials to mediate our experience and

<sup>65</sup> Colomina 2009, p. 78.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Fer 2018, p. 37.

<sup>68</sup> Ockman 2009, p. 51.

<sup>69</sup> Sharon Marcus describes how during the 1830s Paris apartments were sometimes represented as an “ideal framework for visual observation” of the city and of other houses (and their interiors) and as a continuum of the Parisian landscape. In this view, apartments were not opaque objects but transparent spaces and subjects of the urban gaze. See Marcus in Lane 2007, pp. 124–5.



FIG. 15A AND 15B  
Farniyaz Zaker, *jenseits*  
(beyond), 2013. Stills  
from video installation.  
© Farniyaz Zaker.

use of space, enabling communication and connection as well as surveillance and suspicion, privacy and seclusion as well as isolation and disconnection. The video (figs. 15A and 15B) shows a view onto a balcony and into a garden and street through a glass door, which is intermittently obscured by a curtain. As the wind gently sways the curtain, it creates a rhythm of opening and closing, a play of revealing and concealment, which recurrently extends the balcony's liminality to the entire room and further dissolves the boundary between exterior and interior.

## Conclusion

"Anni Albers Review—Ravishing Textiles That Beg to be Touched" is the title of a review of the first major exhibition of Albers's work in the UK at Tate Modern in 2018.<sup>70</sup> The tactility of textiles (i.e., their appeal to our sense of touch) is indeed a large part

of the appeal of Albers's textile art. As was shown in this article, tactility not only also plays a role in the author's art practice but is key to understanding the way textiles affect our sense of space. Some textiles do indeed beg to be touched, as the review's author, Adrian Searle, aptly puts it. What is more, textiles, perhaps by activating our tactile memory, are capable of evoking a sense of touch for those merely *looking* at them and not actually touching them. This is why Searle can write that Albers's textiles give "pleasure to eye and to the mind and to the touch," even though one is actually not allowed to touch them.<sup>71</sup> He points out that by being optical, tactile, and spatial, Albers's textile art "gives pleasure to a room, to a wall, a bed, a floor, to the spaces in between."<sup>72</sup>

Albers made ingenious use of the potential of textiles to transform our spatial perception by appealing to our sense of touch via our vision. As was shown in the article, that potential is inherent in textiles. Carpets especially are capable of imbuing spaces with a sense of enclosure and interiority, as was the case in both Georgie Wolton's Belsize Park house and in Rudolf Stingel's installation at Berlin's *Neue Nationalgalerie*. Moreover, even carpet motifs and design can produce a similar effect by association, as we have seen in the case of the carpet-inspired gardens designed by Gabriel Guevrekian, where this effect was partially captured in Man Ray's 1929 film *Les Mystères du Château de Dé*. The architectural work of Guevrekian and Wolton as well the art of Albers, Stingel, and the author's practice all exploit the space-making and space-modifying qualities of carpets and textiles. Whether consciously or not, we all seem to have taken to heart the Semperian notion that "carpets remain[ ] the true walls" as well as Loos's advice that architects interested in producing warm and inhabitable spaces ought to start designing with carpets in mind.

Apart from this almost structural potential of textiles and carpets (i.e., their capacity to produce enclosure and interiority), this article has explored a

<sup>70</sup> Searle 2018.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



question that also interested Albers: the intertwined ornamental and structural (architectural) nature of textiles. The author's art practice also explores the dual nature of textiles as both structure and ornament. The *Khataee* series (2018–2019) reverses the role of ornament and structure, turning decorative motifs popular on carpets into high-rise like sculptures. Similarly, the work *Primeval Relationship I* accomplishes a reversal of the roles of ornament and structure by turning the underlying structural elements (the fringes) of four unadorned carpets into these carpets' sole decorative feature.

A related subject addressed by this article is the way in which the ornamental elements of carpets, above all garden motifs, can open up our perception of architectural space to encompass adjacent garden spaces. Guevrekian's garden design for the Villa Noailles (1926–1927) achieved this by visually connecting his "carpet garden" to the interior of the house, making the former appear as an extension of the latter. In Wolton's Belsize Park House, too, the garden motifs depicted on the carpets adorning the walls communicated with the garden spaces outside these walls. And although in both cases windows helped in putting gardens and carpets into dialogue, the associative power of the nature-inspired imagery of carpets enabled this dialogue to take place on a mental level, even without the need for windows.

Stingel's installation at the *Neue Nationalgalerie*, by contrast, only managed to open up the sense of enclosure it created with the help of a carpet within the gallery by combining the materiality and associative power of that carpet with the transparency of the gallery's glass walls. This interplay of the seclusive quality of textiles and the exposure enabled by glass, which Stingel exploited for his installation, is also touched upon in the author's work *jenseits* (2013). With the video's main protagonist a curtain swaying in the wind and intermittently letting the outside in and the inside out, it represents the effect of contemporary Tehran's inadvertent architecture of surveillance, which is enabled by glass and modified by curtains.

Anni Albers has argued: "If the nature of architecture is the grounded, the fixed, the permanent, then textiles are its very antithesis."<sup>73</sup> Still, she has pointed to the important similarities between the processes of building and weaving.<sup>74</sup> Following in Albers's footsteps, both in her art and in her writing, the author has highlighted and examined the great space-making and space-altering potential inherent in textiles and, especially, carpets.

<sup>73</sup> Albers 1957, p. 36.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

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## Recommendations from the Library

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Compiled by **Tracy Meserve**

DOI: 10.1353/TMJ.00010

*Otti Berger: Weaving for Modernist Architecture.*  
Raum, Judith.

2024, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

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Textile artist Otti Berger started studying at the Bauhaus in 1927 and served as the head of the Bauhaus weaving department from 1931–1932. Her work has historically been overshadowed by that of her contemporaries, Anni Albers and Gunta Stölzl, most likely because her archives were widely dispersed following her murder at Auschwitz in 1944. Editor Judith Raum extensively researched Berger's archives at various institutions around the world to create the first book devoted to Berger's oeuvre. Berger was an innovator who patented several textile materials to be used in interior architecture and believed in prioritizing form over function in industrial design. The Cotsen Textile Traces Study Center holds two fragments created by Otti Berger in its collection.

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*Dressing a la Turque: Ottoman Influence on French Fashion 1670–1800.* Van Cleave, Kendra.

2023, Kent State University Press.

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Fashion historian (and librarian) Kendra Van Cleave authors this title exploring Ottoman influences on French fashion starting in the late seventeenth century. At this time, French culture was fascinated with *turquerie*, which Van Cleave defines as “Turkish-focused Orientalism.” This led to direct changes in women's French fashion, such as the *robe a la turque*, a dress cut into an overgown effect that revealed a stomacher underneath. In 1785, Marie Antoinette wore a *robe a la turque* in a portrait of her with her two children in the Park of Trianon, demonstrating how Ottoman influence in fashion entered the highest ranks of French society.

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Calico Printers' Association Archive.

Arthur D. Jenkins Library.

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The Myrna and Sam Myers Collection donated this archive to the Arthur D. Jenkins Library in 2023. The Calico Printers' Association, founded in 1899, was a British textile company that was an amalgamation of dozens of printers and merchants from the calico printing industry. The archive contains hand-painted British designs for printed textiles based on Japanese weavings. These drawings, according to notes from the archive, were based on designs created by Kyoto weavers from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries and are indicative of nineteenth-century japonisme. This archive has been rehoused and is available for research visits; a finding aid is available on the library website.



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*Woven Histories: Textiles and Modern Abstractions.* Cooke, Lynne (editor).  
2023, National Gallery of Art.

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Earlier this year, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., exhibited a show completely dedicated to twentieth-century textile art and the accompanying catalog gives an in-depth look into how textiles acted as “a major force in the evolution of modern abstraction.” The catalog traces the evolution of modern design in textiles from early modernists like Anni Albers and Sonia Delaunay to more contemporary artists like Igshaan Adams and Andrea Zittel.

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*Ikat Traditions: The Mexican Jaspe Rebozo.* Steel, Hillary, with Virginia Davis.  
2024.

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The *rebozo*, which authors Hillary Steel and Virginia Davis define as “a traditional Mexican women’s shawl,” was often historically made using a traditional *jaspe*, or resist-dye, technique. However, as *rebozo* production has declined in Mexico, the tradition has become endangered. Steel and Davis studied the practices of master weavers of Tenancingo in south-central Mexico to record through text, photos, and illustrations the steps to make a *jaspe rebozo* on a backstrap loom. The Textile Museum’s current exhibition *Irresistible: The Global Patterns of Ikat* features historic examples of *jaspe rebozo*.

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*Stories of Syria's Textiles: Art and Heritage across Two Millennia.* Fowlkes Child, Blair, Emily Handlin, and Michelle Yun Mapplethorpe.  
2023, Scala Arts Publishers.

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Late last year, the Katonah Museum of Art in New York exhibited this important display of Syrian textiles from antiquity to today. The exhibition aimed to highlight the historical significance of these textiles while also “underscoring the urgency and importance of preserving cultural heritage to benefit our global community” (p. 7). The Textile Museum loaned to the exhibition a seventh-century tunic decoration depicting hunters on horseback, which was most likely made in Syria.

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### Future Volumes

#### *The Textile Museum Journal* Volume 52, 2025 The Textile Museum Centennial Volume

The Textile Museum has built one of the world's most significant collections of handmade textile art, with more than 21,000 objects representing five continents and five millennia. In 2025, The Textile Museum will celebrate its centennial and we are commemorating this occasion by turning the journal's focus solely on The Textile Museum Collection. Articles in this volume will be based on original research of a documentary, analytical, or interpretive nature on objects from The Textile Museum Collection.

#### *The Textile Museum Journal* Volume 53, 2026

This volume will be dedicated to studies of textiles created across the Andes during the period of the Inka empire, Tawantinsuyu, with an emphasis on relationships between textiles created to standards imposed by the state and those in the provinces. Studies of early colonial period textiles may be considered depending on the specific topic. Research from all disciplinary perspectives is welcome. Manuscripts should be based on original documentary, analytical, or interpretive research.

Cover image: Detail from a kilim. Türkiye, c. 1800. Wool, plain weave, tapestry weave, 343 × 148 cm (135<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 62<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in). The Textile Museum Collection 2013.2.72, The Megalli Collection. Photography by Neil Greentree. (See Jerman research note in this volume, pp. 124–133)