

A STEEP LEARNING CURVE

"Kurdish Weavings: Diversity on Display" is currently showing at Minasian's of Evanston, Illinois. This broadly based Kurdish carpet exhibition prompts **Joseph W. Fell** to reconsider the rationale of uniting such a diverse assortment of rugs and textiles under the umbrella of ethnicity.

An exhibition of Kurdish rugs, united only by their ethnic origin, appears to raise a number of problems. There are too many Kurds, in too many tribes, in too many countries for a clear and cohesive Kurdish weaving tradition to have developed. To make it worse, many Kurds are interspersed with numerous other ethnic groups, between whom designs have flowed.

However the good news is that we're on a steep learning curve where Kurdish weavings are concerned. In the past most Kurdish rugs, particularly tribal pieces, were sold as inexpensive floor coverings, unworthy of serious study or differentiation. Recently, however, interest has grown considerably, and it turns out that this exhibition serves to help us understand a little better the diverse world of Kurdish rugs.

To have been largely ignored for so long provided a protection of sorts against some of the more corrupting influences to which all rugs are susceptible. Thus, there are many Kurdish weavings with a kind of unsophisticated honesty, a primitive vigour that rewards the faithful collector. And even the more commercial urban weavings – notably those of Sehna



Above: Malatya mixed technique flatweave (detail), east Anatolia, 19th century. 1.63 x 3.48m (5'4" x 11'5")

Below: A selection of rural and urban Kurdish rugs, carpets, and bags in Minasian's Evanston gallery

and Bijar – are distinctive and highly regarded, although there is still some question how many of them were actually woven by Kurds.

Minasian's exhibition – the sixth in a series – is one of the largest displays of Kurdish weavings ever staged, with 88 rugs, flatweaves, animal trappings, bags and bag faces from northwest and northeast Persia, Anatolia and Varamin. Nearly all are from private collections, including many from outside the Chicago area. There is a particularly impressive group of so-called 'Yürük' weavings, perhaps due to the largely local dispersal of the Ralph S. Yohe Collection, which represented one of the largest assemblages of Yürüks in private hands.

The cumulative effect of so many Kurdish weavings in one place is a powerful one, impressing on the viewer the scope and appeal of the genre. Beyond this general impression, a smaller number of pieces remain as highlights in the memory. One obvious candidate for this distinction is a well-published northwest Persian sumakh horse cover owned by a local dealer-collector (Peter Stone et.al., *Midwest Meets Midwest*, 1993, pl.19), one of three or so

