

Minasian Rug Company,
1244 Chicago Avenue,
Evanston, Illinois, USA.
1 August – 15 November 1999

The Minasians' current exhibition in suburban Evanston features 19 superb flatweaves, all but one being from the Fell Collection.

Joe Fell, a founding member and past president of the Chicago Rug Society, has long been known as a dealer in fine collectable and decorative rugs. Upon his retirement last year, the Minasians acquired most of his remaining stock (HALI 101, p.131). His activities as a collector, however, are less well known and the flatweaves exhibited, several of which at one time belonged to other Midwestern rug luminaries such as Ralph S. Yohe and Dave Chapman, are culled from his private holdings. Many were acquired twenty or more years ago and have only now reappeared on the market.

The six large Anatolian kilims, primarily from the latter part of the 19th century, were collected by their various owners well before the 1980s craze for unrestored fragments with 'mother goddess' motifs. One finds here (by my attributions) a classic horizontally banded Malatya kilim, a Kurdish Rashwani weaving, and a 'Yürük' (probably from Niğde) with an overall gül design (no.28 in Yohe's 1978 *Yoruk*

Well appreciated flatweaves in the Minasians' Evanston gallery.



Kurdish *zili* (detail), east Anatolia, late 19th century.
1.80 x 1.83m (5'11" x 6'0").

The current exhibition at the Minasian Rug Company in Evanston, Illinois is the third in an ongoing series based on the collection of the former Chicago dealer and collector Joseph W. Fell. 'The Underappreciated Flatweave' revives a tradition of thematic shows begun by the Minasians in the 1980s, after they acquired the Nahigian Gallery in downtown Chicago. These exhibitions offer great opportunities to ambitious collectors and are a welcome addition to the local rug scene. Jerome Franke reports.

exhibition catalogue). From the Chapman Collection is a tile pattern *cicim* (fig.24 in the 1973 catalogue *Near Eastern Art From Midwest Collections*) with subtle colouring and serene design not unlike that of an Amish quilt. My personal favour-

ite is a former Nahigian piece, a small east Anatolian animal cover (*zili*) with a brocaded concentric diamond design on a black plait-weave ground (HALI 36, p.99).

The three Caucasian weavings include a brightly coloured natur-

ally dyed classic three-medallion *sumakh*. In pristine condition, it left its country of origin, where such pieces are not used on the floor, only after the break-up of the Soviet Union. An interesting 'Kuba'-type kilim was sold to its previous owners, in the 1950s, as a Navajo rug!

Included in the selection of Persian flatweaves are two Qashqa'i kilims. One has an austere, almost *gabbeh*-like, design of improvised diamonds on a mustard-yellow ground. In addition there are an intricate yet pleasingly irregular *boteh* design Sehna horse cover, a 'Shirvan'-like Shuhsavan kilim, and a very long (almost 15feet/4.5metres) kilim from the Varamin area.

The kilims and covers are effectively displayed in a spacious yet intimate setting, successfully removed from the more commercial parts of the gallery. The installation is visually rewarding and is accompanied by a concise yet informative wall text with comments on design, structure, function and provenance. Most of the attributions are cautious, avoiding specifics in favour of general geographic areas or broad tribal groupings.

My involvement in various aspects of the rug world over the years has offered many rewards. Among the greatest is the chance to see once again some of the many 'old friends' that I have encountered as a curator, writer, collector and rug nut.

