

TRAVELS and TREASURES



Treasures of the Turcomans
THE GASTRELL COLLECTION

The Divine Inspirations of
KATHARINE MALTWOOD



Maltwood Art Museum & Gallery
October 4, 2009- January 30, 2010

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

These exhibitions sharing the title, *Travels and Treasures*, remind us how fundamental the idea of the journey is to the history of civilization. From epic literature to the museum storehouses the documentation of travels, real or imaginary, lies at the core of our cultural heritage. "*The Divine Inspirations of Katharine Maltwood*" curated by Marnie Mandel explores the early 20th century pilgrimages of John and Katharine Maltwood in search of "truth" and "enlightenment". The souvenirs from their discoveries as they made their way around the world, along with Katharine's own art inspired by her real and spiritual journey, constitute the foundational collection of this museum. "*Treasures of the Turcomans: the Gastrell Collection*" curated by Bryn Dharmaratne documents a very different kind of odyssey, a personal but practical journey which retraced old steps in family history. The acquisitions along their route through Iran and Baluchistan during the 1930s and 40s mark a series of encounters with Turcoman people and for us prompt insights into their culture and life ways. We are grateful for the generous loan of real "treasures" from this marvelous collection.

Congratulations to our two student curators, Bryn and Marnie, for bringing these journeys to life in the Maltwood Gallery.

Martin Segger, Director

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

This show is a joint exhibition curated by two graduate students in the History in Art department, Bryn Dharmaratne and Marnie Mandel. An aspect of the Maltwood Art Museum and Gallery's mission is to provide practical experience for students at the University. Bryn was given the opportunity to collaborate with a private lender from the Victoria community and construct an exhibition based on her family's unique collection. Marnie is writing her Research Paper on Katharine Maltwood's esoteric interests. This exhibit is a glimpse into her research.

Bryn Dharmaratne and Marnie Malinda Mandel, 2009



above: *Travels and Treasures* installation image

next: *Photograph of home and gallery of John and Katharine Maltwood, "The Thatch,"* bromide print, 1940-50, Victoria, BC, on loan from University of Victoria Special Collections.

DIVINE INSPIRATIONS

focuses on artist
Katharine Maltwood
and her travels to
Egypt and Japan
in the early
20th century.

Katharine and her husband's travels were in many ways pilgrimages to locations that New Age Spiritualists believed to be full of knowledge due to their history and religious customs.



The interest in learning about multiple religions can be attributed to Theosophy, which proposes that its members fulfill, "a serious study of the ancient world-religions for purposes of comparison and the selection there of universal ethics." The reasoning behind this principle is simple; it allows for each individual to find their own "Way to Truth, Supreme Wisdom, or Enlightenment."

Travel can inspire, it can fulfill dreams and it can also make us learn a lot about ourselves. This is in essence truth--coming to terms with who we are is an important aspect of enlightenment. One can view the collection of John and Katharine Maltwood not simply as keepsakes and reminders of other cultures' religious faiths but also as spirituals objects which aided them in their ability find meaning in their own lives.



above: *Travel and Treasures* installation image



above: *Priest of Buddha* (photograph of), Katharine Maltwood, bromide photograph, 1922, Britain, University of Victoria Special Collections

EGYPT



Egypt had become a popular and accessible travel destination for Westerners by the early 20th century. Thomas Cook, the famous tour group company, included Egypt on his World Tours from 1870. When news broke of the discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen (1922) Egypt attracted tourists wanting to be a part of the excitement.

The couple visited the country on three separate occasions (1919, 1921, and 1923-1934) On their last adventure they spent over two and a half months residing in Luxor and making day trips to Egyptian sites.

It is clear from their multiple visits that the Maltwoods believed that Egypt was an important place to visit. But why? Freemasons, Theosophists, Rosicrucians and other occult societies believe they are descendents of the Ancient Egyptian. As a result they incorporate aspects of Egyptian religion, Hermetic Traditions, and the Rituals of Isis into their circles, customs, and faith.

Many pieces in this exhibit prove Katharine's involvement and enthusiasm for Freemasonry. Although Freemason lodges generally only accept males; there were groups that invited women. It is not a coincidence that a large number of the women who chose to become Freemasons were also interested in Theosophy such as Madame H.P. Blavatsky, the originator of the Theosophical movement.



above: *Standing Buddha in Shrine*, lacquered and carved wood, 19th century Japan, University of Victoria Art Collections

JAPAN

When Japan reopened its port to the West in 1854, a rush of tourists traveled there. As a result there was profound and immeasurable cultural exchange between Japan, Europe, and North America.

Katharine Maltwood's first exposure to eastern religions and aesthetics had taken place in the early 1890s, at the progressive Moira House School for Girls. During this time the Arts and Crafts Movement was *en vogue* -- having begun in the 1860s and reaching its peak appeal in the 1890s.



Artists such as William Morris were interested in Japanese art, particularly the simplicity, fluidity of space, and interconnectedness with nature in Japanese interior design as well as its use of line and form in graphic design.

This was also the period when the religious movement of Theosophy led by Madame H.P. Blavatsky was gaining steam. Theosophy began in 1875; it claimed to bind the doctrines of Eastern and Western religions, thus offering its members exposure to the best aspects of all world religions. In addition it promoted equality and fraternity amongst classes and races and an inquisitive attitude towards knowledge --all ideals that members of the Arts and Crafts Movement, like Katharine Maltwood, valued.

Several Theosophical Lodges concentrated on the study of Buddhism, both Theravada and Mahayana. The popularity of Buddhism rose at the turn of the century and steadily gained participants in the West. This was due to many factors: scandals associated with Theosophy, increase in the number of Japanese religious philosophers travelling to the West and teaching forms of Mahayana Buddhism, and the chaos of World War I which was believed to be caused by Christian materialism.

The interpretation of Buddhism brought to the West by the Japanese has been defined as Buddhist Modernism. It was considered a progressive form of Buddhism which aligned with modern western attitudes. Buddhist Modernism believes that enlightenment can be achieved by "awakening to one's own Buddha Nature," rather than long-term study and devotion. Daisetsu Teitar Suzuki was a leading Buddhist philosopher of Buddhist Modernism. He befriended Katharine Maltwood in the 1930s.

THE GASTRELL COLLECTION OF TURCOMAN AND BALUCHI NOMADIC TREASURES

As a British Consul in Iran from the 1920s to late 1940s, Evvie Gastrell and his wife Dishie enjoyed visiting the many towns, villages and nomad camps around the area they were living. They learnt the languages and bought beautiful carpets and clothing from many who became their friends over the years. Their daughter Susan, who now lives in Victoria, inherited this collection and having enjoyed it in her various homes over the years, would like to share it with others. With the great interest that many people now have in Iran, Afghanistan and Baluchistan, she hopes that this exhibit may add to their knowledge and appreciation of the craftsmanship, particularly of the women, in that area.



above: *Travel and Treasures* private reception
right: *Travels and Treasures*, embroidery detail

MODERN MOVEMENTS



“In 1958, following in the footsteps of my parents (who drove from Quetta to London, England in 1938), my husband and I drove from Madras in South India overland to London, England, which took two and a half months in a Landrover. Once through the Khyber Pass in Afghanistan we were virtually following their route. In Iran we were welcomed along the way by Persian friends of my parents, who treated us royally.

This finely woven Turcoman donkey bag was given to us in this way. It was well used but in wonderful condition. Grains were still set into the cloth inside the bags, which would have been slung over the donkey’s back in order to transport wheat to market or to carry food as the group moved on to a new location.

In Bujnurd the same Kurdish friends welcomed us to stay with them and took us to see the carpets the Turcomans were making there. We could not resist this new one which they called ‘modern’ with great pride. We bought it and rolled it up on the roof rack for the long onward journey to our first home.”



above: *Baluchi Women's embroidered long shirt*, embroidered silk, c.1940, Baluchistan, Pakistan, on loan from the Gastrell Collection

right: *Turcoman coat and embroidered shirt*, embroidered textiles, c.1930, Iran, On loan from the Gastrell Collection

NOMADS AND TRAVELERS



“The Baluchi's textiles are exquisite in large part because they are so vibrant. Even children's clothing was finely crafted and adorned. Take for example these tiny clothes, made either for a child or for a child's doll. The silk used in their manufacture comes in a variety of stunning colours, purple, orange, green, and white. The diamond shaped purdah (mask) in this set uses mica to create a mirror effect surrounded by fine red, yellow, and green silk thread designs of circles on black cotton cloth.”



TURCOMAN HANGINGS

“These two magnificent wall hangings were added to this collection in the 1930s as they feature in all the photo albums showing the many homes my parents lived in from that time on.



The flowers on the one grow in the area of the Turcoman camps, and are interestingly bisected to show the petals, sepals, and stamens. The women joined strips of cotton cloth and embroidered their designs in colourful chain stitch. The resulting works of art made a wonderful background in the interior walls of their obahs (dwellings). These round portable dwellings would house a family, and could be packed up and carried on mules or camels as the Turcomans moved on to different pastures.”

VIBRANT WEAVING

“These two antique Turcoman ‘rugs’ or carpets were made by the Turcoman nomads, whose forebears had moved over the ages from Turkey into Iraq, eventually settling in the northeastern part of Iran, in the rolling hills southeast of the Caspian. The carpets, embroideries and clothing shown in this part of the exhibition were made by Turcoman women, who pass down the skills of weaving to their daughters. These textiles are strong in their use of colour and pattern, despite their vibrant appearance, however, they derive from the most basic of materials, such as wool from the sheep, goats, and camels owned by the Turcomans.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DIRECTOR

Martin Segger

CURATOR

Caroline Riedel

EXHIBIT CO -CURATORS

Bryn Dharmaratne & Marnie Malinda Mandel

CURATORIAL TEAM

Cindy Vance, Caitlin Cuthbert, Julia Hulbert,
Heather Stone, Emma Conner, Leah Taylor, Karen Merrifield,
Kate Dahlgren, Dallas Tomniuk, Mark Hovey, Nick Poppell,
Marlaina Buch

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