

Eastern Carpets in David Chalmers Alesworth's Art

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Abstract:

In today's art, every kind of material can be transformed into a works of art. In some works, it is seen that the expression forms of traditional and contemporary art are melted in the same pot. David Chalmers Alesworth draws attention as an artist who deals with traditional carpet art in a contemporary style. From the year 2010, we see that David Chalmers has made "textile interventions" on his eastern carpets in his works. The artist, who usually manipulates the city plans, maps and various symbols of carpets he bought from Persia and Pakistan and examines the cultural degenerations in the society. In his works, he gives his messages to the audience indirectly, not directly. In his art, the carpet is both vehicle and purpose. David Chalmers is aiming to investigate the traces of eastern carpets in Alesworth's works and to introduce artists who produce works combining traditional carpet art and contemporary art. It is understood that David Chalmers Alesworth's works are similar to the Persian and Pakistani but it has been revealed that the carpets he used have also similarities with Turkish and Baluchi carpets as well.

Keywords: Carpet Art, Contemporary Art, David Chalmers Alesworth

1. Introduction

The carpet inspires contemporary art. It is known that each motif in the carpet that witnesses a rooted culture expresses certain meanings. The artists have put out different artistic products by changing the form of the carpet, by making processes on it. The fact that postmodern art concept covers all kinds of artistic practice presents an unlimited space for artists. In addition, the concept of combining tradition and new art is embodied by works of art. Many different artists have created artefacts in different periods using orientalism. In this context, it is seen that orientalism is referenced in the works of artists such as Faig Ahmed, Şakir Gökçebağ, Rubi Lebovitch, Alighiero Boetti, Christian Jankowski, Ken Lum, Alan Belcher, Joseph Kosuth, Wim Delvoye.

David Chalmers Alesworth too, uses carpet as a ready-made tool. The artist was born in London in 1957 and he still lives in England. He has stayed in Lahore and Karachi cities in Pakistan for more than twenty years. He graduated from the Sculpture Department of the Wimbledon School of Fine Arts in 1980. In 2010, he completed his master's degree in New Media department in Kingston University. He is also a landscape consultant, garden history researcher, artist and art educator (Stanley, 2016: 138).

However, when we look at his works, we can see that carpets with Turkish, Baluchi, Iranian or Pakistani origin. The results of interest in landscaping consultation and gardening can be seen in works of artefacts of Eastern and Western cultures. He also used garden plans, logos and images of the cultures of various countries in his works.

It can be argued that the Alesworth works, which call themselves British and Pakistani, conceptually overlap with postmodernist ideas. He has been teaching arts in Pakistan for a long time and in the 1990's he founded a group of three -Iftikhar Dadi, Elizabeth Dadi, Durriya Kazi- friends in Pakistan Karachi and the group is called "Karachi Pop". This group aims to question the distinctions of high art and folk art. Karachi Pop, is also referred to as a group investigating the separation of high art with local art items (Nasar, 2016: 91).

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The artist performed the first weaving intervention on the carpet in 2010. Alesworth, however, is not the first example in terms of taking place in his works of art. The eastern folk were not only inspired by today's artists, but the Uşak Carpets are depicted in the history of European art. For example, the artists such as Holbein and Lotto used the carpets of Anatolia in their art pieces.

The purpose of this research is to identify the traces of eastern carpets in the works of David Chalmes Alesworth and to introduce the artist who produce works combining traditional carpet art and contemporary art. In this research the method is, literature and document review. The scope and limitations of the research constitute works produced by David Chalmers Alesworth in his life history and in the interweaving of eastern carpets. The carpet's motifs are not understood clearly because, he makes plans on these carpets. For this reason, the similarities between his seven works and Iran, Pakistan, Baluchi and Anatolian Turkish carpets will only be studied in this research.

2. Carpet Art

The carpets, meet the basic needs of people such as warming and welcoming. Due to its wide range of motifs, symmetry and technically challenging work, carpets are considered valuable. It is also known that Eastern Europeans are important in Europe and they are a sign of wealth in this sense that is why, they are sold to high sums and they are taken place in the works of European artists.

Carpets were first used in Turkistan, especially the region of West Turkistan. The carpets referred to as Uşak Carpets in Group 1 were produced in this region in a large scale. Medallion motif, is the dominant motif of these carpets. Even if this motif is used in Iranian Carpets, it has been applied completely differently in Turkish Carpet Art (Şerare, 1991: 189, 191-192). The carpet, known to be as old as human history, has been used to meet basic requirements such as heating. It is known that the carpet originates from Central Asia. The best known sample, which is Pazırık carpet and it is located in Hermitage Museum (Çaycı, 2015: 247-249).



Image 1: Pazırık Carpet, Hermitage Museum (Virtual-1, 2017).

In the late 15th century, western painters placed geometric motifs on their paintings. After 1451, Italian, Dutch and Dutch painters painted carpets in 16th century works. In particular, the carpet motifs of Anatolia, which are frequently used in the paintings of Hans Holbein and after wards those carpets are called as Holbein carpet (see Image 2) (Aslanapa, 2010: 350).



Image 2: Hans Holbein, "French Envoys", Tempera and Oil Painting, 207 x 209 cm., 1533 (Virtual-2, 2017).

In this works by Hans Holbein, the French Envoys, it is seen that the armies of the ambassadors are resting on a carpet that carries Anatolian motifs. In addition, the ud, which is regarded as Eastern musical instrument, was depicted in this works. Not only Holbein's, but also painters such as Lotto, Bellini, Memling used carpets in their works (Aytaç and Aksoy, 2006: 3,4). According to Çaycı (2015: 251), these carpets came from the Caucasus, Mamluk, Iran, Bergama, Uşak and Konya. Eastern families, saints, important rulers and composition of daily life were used in works. Lorenzo Lotto's "Husband and Wife" exemplifies this situation.



Image 3: Lorenzo Lotto, "Husband and wife", High Renaissance, 1523 (Virtual-3, 2017).

Other Holbein carpets, like the crucifix-like rich bellies and the octagonal octagons have many motifs and the shape is the same. These carpets, always were made of yellow on red ground, had a length of 6 meters. The Holbein works which has carpets made in Uşak region or Western Anatolia (Aslanapa, 2010: 350).



Image 4: Lotto Carpet in Philadelphia Museum (Aslanapa, 2010: 354).

There are many studies on these Uşak carpets. Uşak carpets are divided into two, one with medallion and the other with Holbein carpets being evaluated in the group of Uşak carpets. It is stated that medallions represent infinity (Aslanapa, 2010: 354). In this way, it has become an intermediary in the exchange of culture. The excursions, gifts sent to the monarchs, carpet arts spread thanks to the masters from abroad.

In 1514, Yavuz Sultan Selim surrounded Tabriz and thus, a great number of artists came from the Safavids to the Ottomans. These artist were placed in Topkapı Palace “nakkaşhâne”s (Çokay, 2015: 29). Those artist produces many Turkish carpets with traces of Safavids carpets. Also a place in İstanbul/Kumkapı was allocated for carpet artists. Also today Kumkapı carpets in Topkapı Museum are similar to the ones in Iran during Safavid period (1501-1772) (Leader, 2015: 104).

In this context, Turkish Carpet Art and Iranian Carpet Art show similar features. It is thought that the masters who came from Tabriz carried the Iranian style to the Ottoman Empire. However, the Turks worked in their own way with their own understanding. Still life, maps, plant and animal motifs have been used, too.

For example, Talat Pasha gave Atatürk two carpets from Feshâne (a place where carpets were produced in Turkey/İstanbul) because of Çanakkale Victory in 1918. There is a map of Çanakkale in the middle of it and on the lower border, "Çanakkale Victory Memorandum 1331 (1915)" is written, on the upper border, "First World War Memorandum 1334 (1918)" is written (Küçükerman, 2015: 47-48). It is thought to be a striking example of this carpet woven in Feshâne in 1918 in a period of first world war.



Image 5: A Sample of Carpet with A Map on It (Arkas Carpet Collection, 2015: 47).

It is stated that the things that David Alesworth used carpets produced from Iran and Pakistan in his works. Pakistan is mainly defined as a country where cotton production is concentrated. Cotton is grown in various regions of the world. At the beginning of these continents; Asia, America and Africa take place. Turkey is among the leading countries and the other countries are USA, China, India, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Brazil (Özdoğan, 2011: 230-231). It is thought that the Pakistani carpets Alesworth used in his works were made by Turkmen craftsmen. These carpets are hand woven and are used and mentioned by Turkmen carpets

(see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxAc3fsNPnE>)

2.1 David Alesworth's Works

David Chalmers Alesworth announced his name in Eastern geography with the prize he won at the 4th Jameel Art Awards. This prize is considered important for contemporary Islamic art. The first prize was held in London in 2009 and the fourth prize was organized in Istanbul in 2016. The architect Zaha Hadid has been counselling this award since the beginning (Roth, 2016: 8). In this part of the research, the seven works belonging to the artist will be examined in terms of form and content. In addition, it will be tried to determine where the woven interventions on the works are referenced from and on which cultural heritage they are used.



Image 6: David Chalmers Alesworth, "Garden Palimpsest", 2010, Restored Kerman Carpet, 324 x 238 cm., (Virtual-6, 2017).



Image 9: Old Carpet Example, 170 x 240 cm. (Virtual-9, 2017).



Image 10: David Chalmers Alesworth, "Hyde Park," Kashan 1862 "Kashan, Isfahan, Iran 2010-2011. (Virtual-10, 2017).

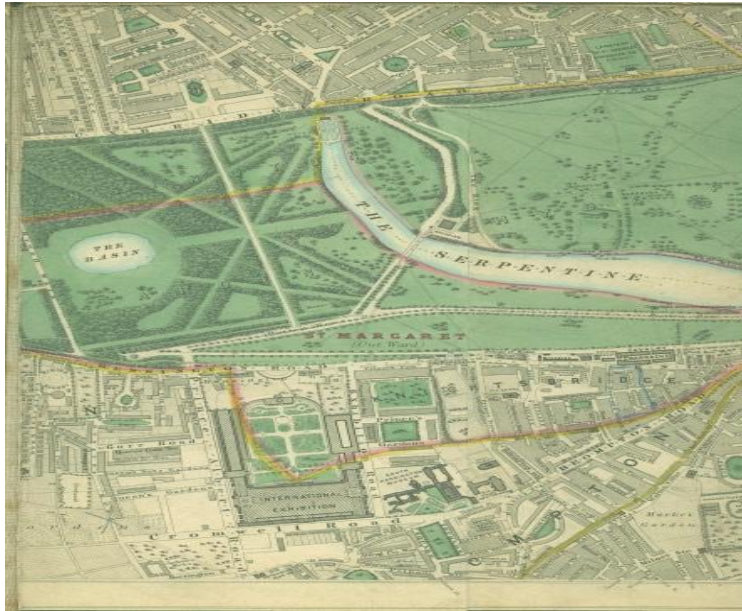


Image 11: Stanford Maps "Hyde Park", 1862 (Virtual-11, 2017).



Image 12: Medallion Uşak Carpet Example (Virtual-12, 2017).

The works named "Hyde Park" (see Image 10) was made in 2010-2011 and he used antique carpet. On this carpet, which is said to belong to Isfahan State of Iran, a map called "Stanford maps" was processed in 1862 (Virtual 12, 2017). It is an ancient carpet of this type mentioned. Alesworth, who painted Hyde Park's plan in England on his carpet, applied the weaving technique known as cage in the exhibition space called "International Exhibition". The medallion motif in the centre of the carpet is striking.

This, on the other hand, brings to mind the possibility that he may have come from Anatolia (see Image 12). It is thought that the works, resembles the medallion carpets which fall into the category of Holbein carpets. It is known that these motifs are used both in Iranian carpet art and Anatolian carpet art.



Image 13: David Chalmers Alesworth, "United Kingdom", Textile Intervention on Handcrafted Carpets, 365.76 x 304.80 cm, 2014 (Virtual-13, 2017).



Image 14: Map of Great Britain (Virtual-14, 2017).

In this works named "United Kingdom", an antique form belonging to Iran Isfahan State has been used (Virtual-14, 2017). This works with ninety-seven islands, which make up the British Isles, are processed by textile intervention on their bodies. Artist, described each island in different colours, differentiating and dividing the islands in a cultural sense.



Image 15: David Chalmers Alesworth, "Cantt-Runner 1893", Textile Intervention, 113 x 36 cm., 2012 (Virtual-15, 2017).



Image 16: The View of The Lahore Cantt Map Today (Virtual-16, 2017).

"Cantt - Runner 1893" (see Image 15) is based on a drawn of a map of Lahore Cantt of Pakistan in 1893. It is expressed that this state is an ancient tribal state. After the war of independence in Pakistan, the British army in Lahore, Pakistan, moved to a region outside the city. This situation has also been seen as a reflection of independence for Pakistan. It is also stated that William Glover in his book "Modernizing Lahore" also represents the region expressed as "the spatial dream of the colonists" (Virtual-15, 2017).



Image 16: David Alesworth, "Gwadar China Periodic Table, 1926", 2013 (Virtual-16, 2017).



Image 17: A Preliminary Study by David Chalmers Alesworth for The "Grawadar China Periodic Table" (Virtual-17, 2017).

It is stated that the "Gwadar China Periodic Table" is a Baluchi rug obtained from Pakistan's Baluchistan Province, and it is stated that the Baluchi were seized by the Chinese, mainly of the raw materials inhabited in the geographical region they lived in Central Asia (Virtual-17, 2017). It is stated that the Baluchi now live in the lands of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan (Ülgül, 2016: 62). It is seen that the Baluchi rug was intervened by writing the Chinese Periodic Table with coloured embroidery threads. The carpet that forms the ground of the works is the existence of the motifs used in Anatolian carpets similar to life tree, amulet, flower and eight-pointed star. This situation summarizes the fact that the interaction between cultures in carpet art is intense. Warm colours are used in Baluchi Rugs. Especially red, black and yellow colours are expressed as the most popular colours used in these rugs. Rugs are also on the forefront in playful dolls and women's clothes. The embroidery is seen as a source of income, so it is possible to see the main features of Baluchi rugs on motifs woven on toy dolls.

Repeating geometric motifs also stand out in Baluchi rugs (Nikouei and Nasirabadi, quoted from Dakali and Dakali, 2016: 36). It is reported that these motifs represent fertility (Nikouei and Nasirabadi from Opie, 2016: 36).



Image 18: Baluchi Carpet, Motifs Touched on Toy Dolls (Nikouei and Nasirabadi, 2016: 37).



Image 19: Holbein and Lotto Type Carols, Uşak Carpet Sample (Virtual-24, 2017).

It is thought that the shape of the works "Gwadar China Periodic Table" (see Image 18) is similar to the carpets of Lotto and Holbein type medallion Uşak. It is seen that the carpet on which the Chinese periodic table has been painted containing three medallions.

3. Conclusion

It is known that African sculptures, calligraphy, Japanese samplers have influenced Western artists. In this context, it is possible to see those effects in the works of artists such as Picasso, Henri Matisse, Paul Klee, and Wassily Kandinsky. Besides, the beliefs of the East and abstract understanding that consists the core of Islamic art are other influences on artists. The meeting of the art of carpet with the West started with the paintings of artists such as Hans Holbein and Lorenzo Lotto in the works of Anatolia.

It is understood that David Chalmers Alesworth using experimental materials and techniques combines local art with contemporary art practice with original expression methods. The artist has lived in Pakistan for many years and has been influenced by the cultural and social structure of the country. Today he is questioning the place of traditional art. The carpets from Iran and Pakistan he commented and the Anatolian carpet art examples are show similarities. Particularly in the works titled "China Periodic Table" and "Hyde Park", there are traces of medallion Uşak carpets. Textile interventions on the carpets prevent the detailed examination of the motifs.

Alesworth has benefited from artistic practices such as placement, video and photography. In many of his works he took reference of social, economic and political events that took place in Pakistan. It is ironic and provocative that the topics he chooses to use as a form of material in his works are versatile. By using antique carpets belonging to the East, the artist wanted to represent the stinging pain in the geography. However, this situation does not change the fact that he harms carpets which are regarded as a cultural heritage.

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