

Antiques

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Rare Works By Eminent Britons

Among collecting fields, British 19th- and 20th-century design appeals mostly to a small but passionate group. Sotheby's hopes to broaden that base next week with two London sales of British furniture and works of art from 1840 to 1970, in styles that include Gothic Revival, Arts and Crafts and British Art Deco.

"British design is not celebrated on the international market as much as it could be, considering how important it is and how much it has been copied," said Jeremy Morrison, a Sotheby's 20th-century-design specialist. "Think of how important the British Arts and Crafts movement was to American designers like Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Comfort Tiffany and the Greene & Greene brothers."

The first sale, which is not an auction, showcases 134 pieces belonging to Paul Reeves, a London dealer since 1976. (Before that he designed clothes worn by, among others, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.) Each work has a set price tag and is to be sold on a first-come-first-served basis, beginning on Friday and continuing through Thursday.

Mr. Reeves is also involved in the second sale, a 130-lot auction on Thursday. He asked clients to consign the furniture, textiles, ceramics, brass and stained glass he had sold them over the years.

"I knew where a lot of this stuff was and encouraged my friends to get involved," he said. The viewing begins today. The auction is expected to realize \$5 million to \$7 million.

There are rare works by pre-eminent British architect-designers like Edwin Lutyens, C. R. Ashbee, William Morris, Thomas Jeckyll, A. W. N. Pugin and E. W. Godwin.

The auction's star lot belongs to Jimmy Page, the guitarist who founded the band Led Zeppelin. It is a 24-foot-long Pre-Raphaelite tapestry, one in a set of six depicting the Arthurian legend of Sir Galahad and the Holy Grail. The set was commissioned for Stanmore Hall in Middlesex, England. Edward Coley Burne-Jones designed it in 1891; William Morris's Merton Abbey work-



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Part of a Holy Grail tapestry designed in 1891 by Burne-Jones.

shop wove it. This panel depicts Sir Galahad about to receive the golden chalice. It is estimated at about \$2 million.

"This is the largest panel and was considered William Morris's masterpiece," Mr. Reeves said. "It took eight men two years to weave it."

Samarkand Carpets

New York galleries often stage exhibitions on Asian themes during Asia Week (which started this week and is actually two weeks).

This week Doris Leslie Blau, a gallery with hundreds of antique and modern carpets at 306 East 61st Street, in Manhattan, opened a show (though March 26) of about 60 Samarkand carpets made between 1880 and 1930. It is noteworthy because few American dealers sell these rugs.

Samarkand rugs are not woven in Samarkand, the second-largest city in Uzbekistan. Most come

from the villages of East Turkistan, in China, and are then passed through Samarkand, a 2,700-year-old city. It was a market town on the Silk Road, the trade route between China and Europe.

"Everything was going on there," said Nader Bolour, the owner of Doris Leslie Blau. "Samarkand was stuck in the crossroads between India and Russia, China and Europe."

The city has been inhabited since 700 B.C. Alexander the Great conquered it in 329 B.C. The Mongols sacked it in 1220. Tamerlane made it his capital in 1370.

"Samarkand is history's definitive melting pot," Judith Glass, an antique-rug consultant, writes in the catalog. The carpets "display themes from many cultures, including China (with fretwork borders, lotus blossoms and cloud bands); India (with the swastika denoting infinity); Turkey (with bold reciprocal borders

and carnations); and Persia (with floral trellis work)."

These are sturdy wool rugs, not like silk Persian carpets. "The weave in these carpets is actually quite coarse," Mr. Bolour said. "They are all about color and design, not fineness of weave." He is attracted to their unusual color combinations. "None are red and blue like Oriental carpets," he said. "They have very soft colors with a little tweak: magenta with acid green, peachy beige with brown, saffron yellow with lacquer red, bone with brown or slate blue."

Each rug incorporates woven symbols. Three medallions together may represent Buddha. Pomegranates signify prosperity and fertility.

Chinese Furniture

Two London dealers are showing classical Chinese furniture from the Ming and Qing dynasties during Asia Week in New York. M. D. Flacks opened a show at 38 East 57th Street, in Manhattan, with altar tables, coffers, stools, stands and chairs from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

His proudest offering is a matched pair of 17th-century huanghuali tapered cabinets formerly in the Museum of Classical Chinese Furniture in Renaissance, Calif.

"They are one of the best pairs of cabinets that exist," said Marcus Flacks, owner of the gallery. Christie's sold them in 1996 for that California museum for \$386,000. The collector who bought them sold the pair to Mr. Flacks, who is now asking \$1.4 million for them.

Nick Grindley will show Chinese furniture at the New York Arts of Pacific Asia Show, next Friday through March 24 at the Gramercy Park Armory, Lexington Avenue at 26th Street. He has a set of four faux-bamboo drum stools made of jichimu, a Chinese hardwood.

"I have not had a set of four 18th-century drum stools for 15 years," Mr. Grindley said. "These are particularly interesting because they use an expensive hardwood to simulate the cheapest one available." Don't miss the increasingly rare appearances of such pieces.