

# Weaving Hope

by Sara Goodman



**Wander through the galleries of the department of Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and you will be astounded by the carpets in the collection.** Hanging on the wall is a silk carpet from the second half of the 16th century, woven at 800 knots per square inch, that looks like the finest velvet. It is startling to realize that the carpets we prize in the 21st century as the finest quality are commonly only 100 knots per square inch.

The carpet traditions of the world are one of our most enduring textile legacies. Where finer textiles have mostly disintegrated over the centuries, sturdy carpets have survived. Since the early days of the Silk Road, the West—first Europe and then North America—provided a market for these sumptuous textiles. The knowledge of how to make them persists in the many carpet-making centers of the Middle East and Asia.

Since the 1980's, this flow of goods and information has taken an extra lap around the world. Contemporary carpets designed in Europe and North America are now being manufactured in Asia, then shipped back to markets in the West. Certainly, western rug designers are taking advantage of the inexpensive labor available in the global marketplace. But there is another factor at work here, too—the existence of a readily available skilled workforce that cannot be found in the West for any price. So how can a conscientious western designer be assured that her products are made without exploiting the workers who are making them, especially in this industry notorious for using child labor? Enter the world of Fair Trade, a system of random inspections and certification that is the customer's best guarantee that the products are made under ethical conditions.

The **International Labour Organization** (ILO) estimates that 215 million children around

the world are involved in harmful forms of forced labor. Of those, an estimated 250,000 children are spending long days at looms instead of going to school. Child weavers often work as bonded laborers and never see a penny for their work. Adult weavers make less in environments where child labor is used because child labor drives down wages, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

To address the problem of child labor in the industry, **The GoodWeave Foundation** was founded in 1994 by Nobel nominee and human rights activist Kailash Satyarthi. GoodWeave® (formerly RugMark) certification is the best assurance that a handmade rug was made without child labor. In 1999, Nina Smith launched the US office, and in 2005 she was awarded the first Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship. GoodWeave now operates in North America, Europe, India, Nepal and Afghanistan.

It is impossible to tell the story of GoodWeave without talking about **Stephanie Odegard**. Her rugs were the first to arrive in the US with the RugMark label, at the time that GoodWeave was just getting started in 1994. Today, there are about 90 North American companies certifying their carpets with GoodWeave. With support from the US government, GoodWeave launched its certification in Afghanistan last year, as well as social programs that improve conditions for the predominantly women weavers and their children. This is an example of the positive role of US diplomacy to encourage economic development in this region struggling to emerge from decades of war.

*ABOVE:* The GoodWeave Foundation rescued Sanju Maya (left) from bonded labor earlier this year to become the first person in her family to attend school. Sanju is shown with a friend at Hamro Ghar, Nepal Goodweave Foundation's residential center for rescued child weavers.

Photo: © U. Roberto Romano, courtesy of Goodweave USA.



*Silk Animal Carpet* Silk (warp, weft and pile), asymmetrically hand-knotted pile, 94.88" x 70.1", made in Iran (probably Kashan) during the second half of the 16th century. Collection of and photo © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.



STEPHANIE ODEGARD *Suzani III (shown in indigo)* Wool, Super Abu quality, hand-knotted, natural-dyed, 7' x 5', 2006. Made in Nepal. Photo: John Bigelow Taylor.

The first certified rugs from Afghanistan will be available later this year.

GoodWeave programs include three essential components, based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The first component is to change the market by educating consumers to demand child-labor-free rugs. The second is to monitor weaving facilities with random, unannounced inspections, and certify carpets that meet the strict standard. These carpets are issued numbered labels before being shipped to the West so that they can be traced back to the production site. The third effort is the rescue, rehabilitation, and education of child laborers that are found in the factories.

To date, GoodWeave has emancipated 3,700 children from weaving looms, and more than 10,000 children have benefitted from its social programs. It also invests in prevention strategies, such as daycare for weaver's children and workers' health and safety awareness initiatives. Figures extrapolated from external reports by UNICEF and the US Department of Labor show the number of children exploited on South

Asian looms has dropped from 1 million to 250,000 since GoodWeave began.

Stephanie Odegard was among the group of human rights activists and child advocates who comprised the founding board of GoodWeave, lending valuable support at a critical time. In many ways, GoodWeave would not exist without her support. She came to the carpet industry through her experience in international development, first as a Peace Corps volunteer, and then as a consultant with the World Bank. For Odegard, a successful business has to be founded on ethical business practices, and her carpets have set the standard for quality and elegance in the industry for decades.

The work of four additional contemporary designers who certify their carpets with GoodWeave offers a glimpse of the incredible range of rugs being produced today through fair trade practices. Most rug designers now use a computer program called **Galaincha** ([www.galaincha.com.np](http://www.galaincha.com.np)). This program was developed in Kathmandu and has many functions similar to other graphic design software,



**BENNETT BEAN STUDIO** *Aerial* Tibetan wool and silk, hand-knotted, 100 knots per square inch, runner: 7' x 2.5', available in custom sizes, 2008.

Made in Nepal. Photo: Bennett Bean Studio.  
**RIGHT:** Galaincha software developer Jyoti Kandukar in his Kathmandu office.

Photo: Sara Goodman.

**LEFT:** The GoodWeave label certifies that a rug was made child-labor-free.



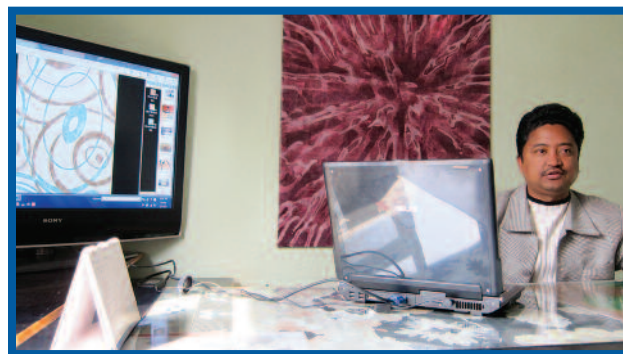
but it is tailored specifically to requirements for carpet manufacturing. It provides an efficient way to translate digitized artwork into a rug design and, with one click, facilitates the communication of variations in designs between rug designers, their customers, and the workshops in Asia.

### **Carini Lang**

Founded in 1998 by Joseph Carini and Aurelie Lang, Carini Lang produces fine handmade rugs from Nepal. Artist, entrepreneur, musician, collector, urban explorer and nature-lover, Joseph is the creative force behind Carini Lang. Having worked in contemporary carpet design for 20 years, and with a deep fascination and thorough knowledge of antique oriental carpets, Carini says handmade carpets are the medium in which he is most free to express himself. When he discusses his work, it is about dynamics, movement, space, tension, and release. He is an accomplished colorist who talks a lot about energy—colors vibrating and blending optically to create new color. He deeply mulls both past and future to create something timeless. At its core, the work is a spiritual quest. “I look for answers in what I do. Maybe this is a stretch,” Carini confesses, “but I hope to understand the universe through this work. It’s all connected somehow, and that’s what intrigues me.”

### **Bennett Bean Studio**

Bennett Bean has built a reputation over the last 40 years as a sculptor and painter working primarily in ceramics. Bean began making rugs in 1997. Elizabeth Rand joined the studio in 2004, bringing new and innovative rug designs. The interplay between the two artists makes for a unique body of work. Bennett says, “We see each rug as an art project, each with its own specific conceptual start and each with its own story.” The only over-arching concept is variety and complexity. As an example, their *Aerial* carpet came from a photo Rand took out of a plane window over Thailand; the combination of textures and colors in this design are reminiscent of the rice paddies and fields. Color is Bean’s primary obsession. Since the colors look different depending on the materials, they use Tibetan wool and





JOSEPH CARINI and KARL KLINGBIEL *Klingbiel* Imperial silk, hand-spun, natural-dyed, hand-knotted, 9' x 6', 2011.  
Made in Nepal. Photo: John Bigelow Taylor and Joseph Carini. Shown courtesy of Carini Lang.

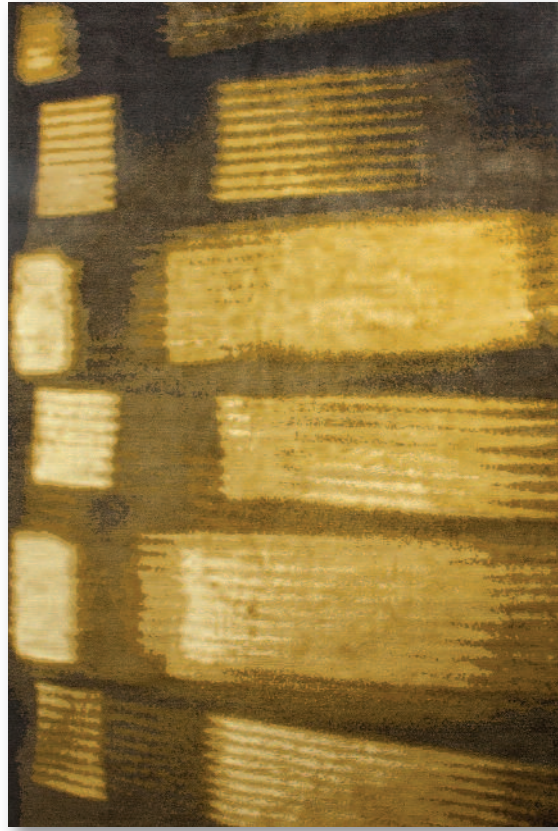


**TANIA JOHNSON** *Ripples* Wool and silk, hand-knotted 200 knots per square inch, made to order dimensions, 2012. Made in Nepal.  
Photo: Gavin Kingcome.

silk dyed the same color or pair looped and cut pile together. “We also use more colors in each knot—twisting multiple strands of varying tones or materials together—to achieve a specific look.” In addition, they use “orphans,” which are single knots of color that stand alone in a field of another color. While this may take longer to design and weave, they believe that the orphans improve the final product.

#### **Tania Johnson**

Tania Johnson worked as a designer for different companies for many years, including designing the first rug collection for Calvin Klein Home in 2002. She launched her own company in 2010. With a deep understanding of the technical aspects of the weaving process, Johnson produces carpets of wool, silk, and pashmina at 200 knots per square inch. This is at the upper end of luxury for carpets being produced today. All of her carpet designs are based on her photography. Inspired by patterns that form and change around her, it is a small detail in nature or the interplay of light and shadow that captures her imagination. “The whole idea of transience and capturing a fleeting moment in time fascinates [me],” Johnson says. “The most recent collection,



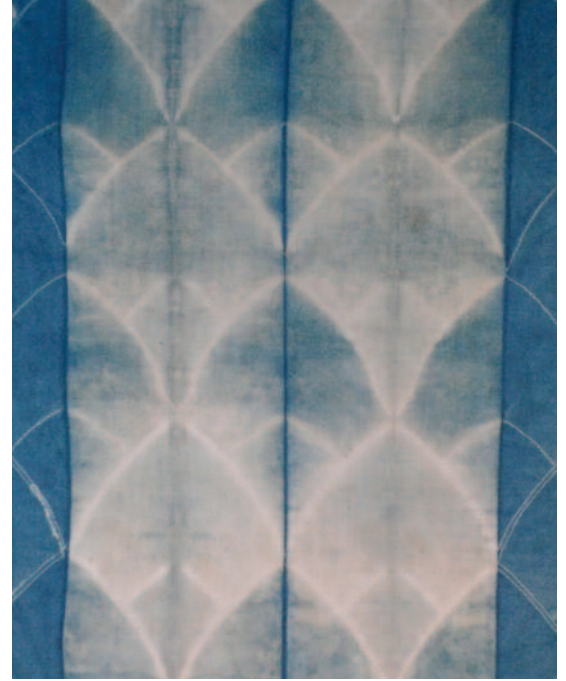
**TANIA JOHNSON** *Haze* Wool and silk, hand-knotted, 150 knots per square inch, made to order dimensions, 2011. Made in Nepal.  
Photo: Gavin Kingcome.

*Water*, is inspired by the patterns formed on the water’s surface. Every time the wind blows or the light changes, reflections appear and then fade within seconds.”

#### **Sara Goodman Fiber Studio**

I came to GoodWeave through a career in education, combined with a life-long passion for textiles. As I was leaving teaching to spend more time as a studio artist, I was asked to join the GoodWeave Board of Directors. This led to a trip to Nepal and India in 2010 to visit the GoodWeave factories and social programs with fellow board member and textile artist Mary Zicafoose. Not long after our return to the US, we were invited by Kesang Tashi, owner of Khawachen/Inner Asia, to design rug collections based on our original textiles. My collection is derived from my handmade shibori fabrics that are then transformed into carpet designs with the aid of Galaincha. All the carpets are woven with naturally dyed yarn, holding true to my commitment to only work with natural dyes.

By shining a spotlight on the tragedy of child labor, GoodWeave has helped to build awareness of this global crisis. It is demonstrating



ABOVE LEFT: Sara Goodman's *Shell* carpet (wool yarn, indigo dye, 12' X 9') being woven by artisans in Kathmandu, Nepal. Photo: Lobsang.

ABOVE RIGHT: Sara Goodman's original piece of indigo dyed Katano shibori cotton fabric that inspired her *Shell* carpet. Photo: Sara Goodman.

RIGHT: The Galaincha design software rendering for Sara Goodman's *Shell* carpet.

that successful businesses can be built without exploiting children and GoodWeave is making it more difficult for looms to profit from luxury goods made by child labor. Artists working in the carpet industry no longer need to sacrifice ethics or quality design for progress or profits. The GoodWeave Foundation is improving the lives of children and adult workers in the communities where carpets are made throughout the world.

To learn more about textiles at the Met, visit [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org). To learn more about GoodWeave and see samples of carpets, visit [www.goodweave.org](http://www.goodweave.org). To learn more about the Galaincha rug design program, visit [www.galaincha.com.np](http://www.galaincha.com.np). Stephanie Odegard: [www.stephanieodegard.com](http://www.stephanieodegard.com). Carini Lang: [www.carinilang.com](http://www.carinilang.com). Bennett Bean Studio: [www.bennettbeanstudio.com](http://www.bennettbeanstudio.com). Tania Johnson: [www.taniajohnsondesign.com](http://www.taniajohnsondesign.com). Sara Goodman's rugs are produced in Nepal by InnerAsia, [www.innerasiarugs.com](http://www.innerasiarugs.com). To read Goodman's SDA Newsblog story about the non-profit group WARP: Weave A Real Peace, visit [www surfacedesign.org/newsblog/](http://www surfacedesign.org/newsblog/).

—Sara Goodman is a textile artist based in Lyme, New Hampshire. Her work has been featured in *Handwoven and Shuttle, Spindle and Dyepot* magazines, and *Julie's Artisans Gallery* in New York. [www.saragoodmanfiberstudio.com](http://www.saragoodmanfiberstudio.com)

