



Suzanne Spahi: Camels, Carpets, and the Stories We Tell

By Marcelo de Melo

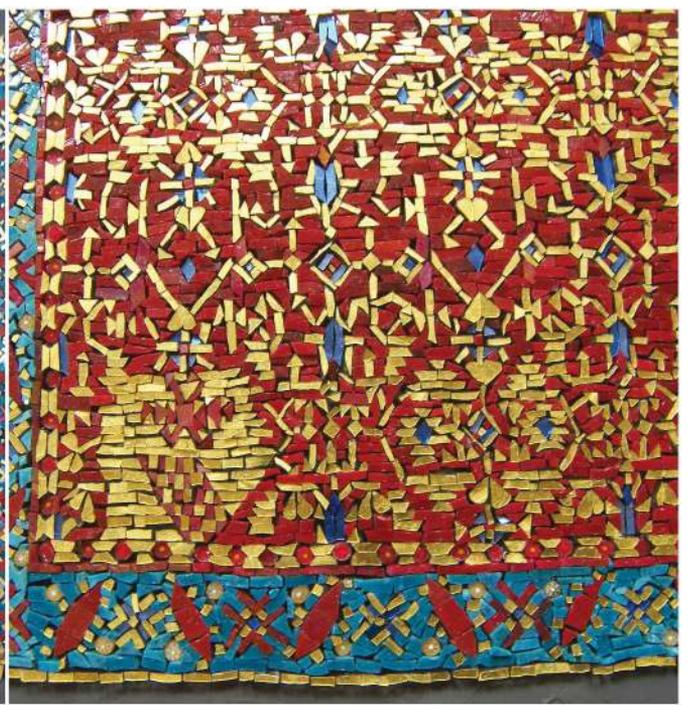
It was a beautiful sunny day in spring and there it was: a loft apartment full of magical content, books, artworks, oriental rugs and the amazing scent of exotic spices. I thought I had entered the Middle East. Reality check: it was Montreal, Canada. I had entered the world of Canadian mosaic artist Suzanne Spahi.

Suzanne Spahi
born in Lévis, Quebec,
Canada
she lives and works in
Montréal
<http://suzannespahi.wordpress.com>

*Every Rug Tells A Story
and Every Camel Tells A
Story, 2015*
75 x 45 cm

After a lovely meal inspired by Palestinian cuisine, Suzanne explained to me that she feels of Middle Eastern origin, with a Western mentality, not necessarily Canadian. Her identity evolved from her upbringing as the only child of Egyptian parents. Her family tree is mixed: she has Syrian, Turkish and Tunisian ancestry. I could not stop imagining where her beautiful Byzantine eyes come from. Having talked about her childhood and travels, I started noticing her wonderful mosaic works.

They were everywhere, glimmering. Curious by nature, I could not stop looking at them, enchanted. Mixed with all the contents of her apartment and the replicas of famous rugs, I noticed a vast array of small-scale works, from flowers adorning a metal column, to playfully subversive Christmas decorations, featuring well-known dictators and politicians such as Muammar Gaddafi and Silvio Berlusconi. As days passed, more stories filled my ears: her love for rugs and textiles, Middle Eastern cuisine, mosaic



left
Tuduk or not Tuduc 2 or "Oro e Rosso", a piu non posso!
 2016
 64 x 34 cm
 smalti, marble, millefiori.

right
Tuduk or not Tuduc or Lotto design carpet.
 Workshop of Tuduc, Romania, circa 1925-1940.
 2012
 54 cm x 30 cm
 Smalti, millefiori and gold

opposite
South-west Anatolian Kilim
 Galveston Collection
 2012
 49 cm x 26 cm
 smalti, gold

Photos Suzanne Spahi

art, and above all teaching. Being the owner of Mosaikashop and School, Suzanne has been passing on all that she learned in the last twenty years of mosaic making. Her technical skills, gained from many books and, more recently, workshops with renowned mosaic artists.

"Throughout my childhood and teenage years, I nourished myself with images that filled my head with dreams, desires and fantasies. In particular the imagery of two movies that marked me and continue to influence what I do. One showed two children flying over a city on a flying carpet. I remember thinking

how lucky they were to travel in that manner. The other was a scene from the James Bond movie "For Your Eyes Only", where Bond and his girl go diving into the Mediterranean and come by a fabulous mosaic. It was the unexpected surprise and utter beauty of that scene that captured me. In some way, it was as if I was subliminally drawn to do something with these visual experiences into my adulthood."

Since 2007, Suzanne has been focusing on creating miniature oriental rugs. Her current style of work is strongly inspired by Byzantine mosaics. Her rugs are reinterpretations and compositions based on pri-



The Missing Poem Is The Poem

Inspired by a work in exhibition in Rome at the MAXXI. It is also a twist on a Marcel Duchamp work. 2016, 17 x 43 cm smalti, gold

Star, Cross, Moon or Dream and Reality
Composition according to "flying" tribal rugs exhibition seen in Otranto, Italy 2010, 23cm x 56 cm smalti and silver

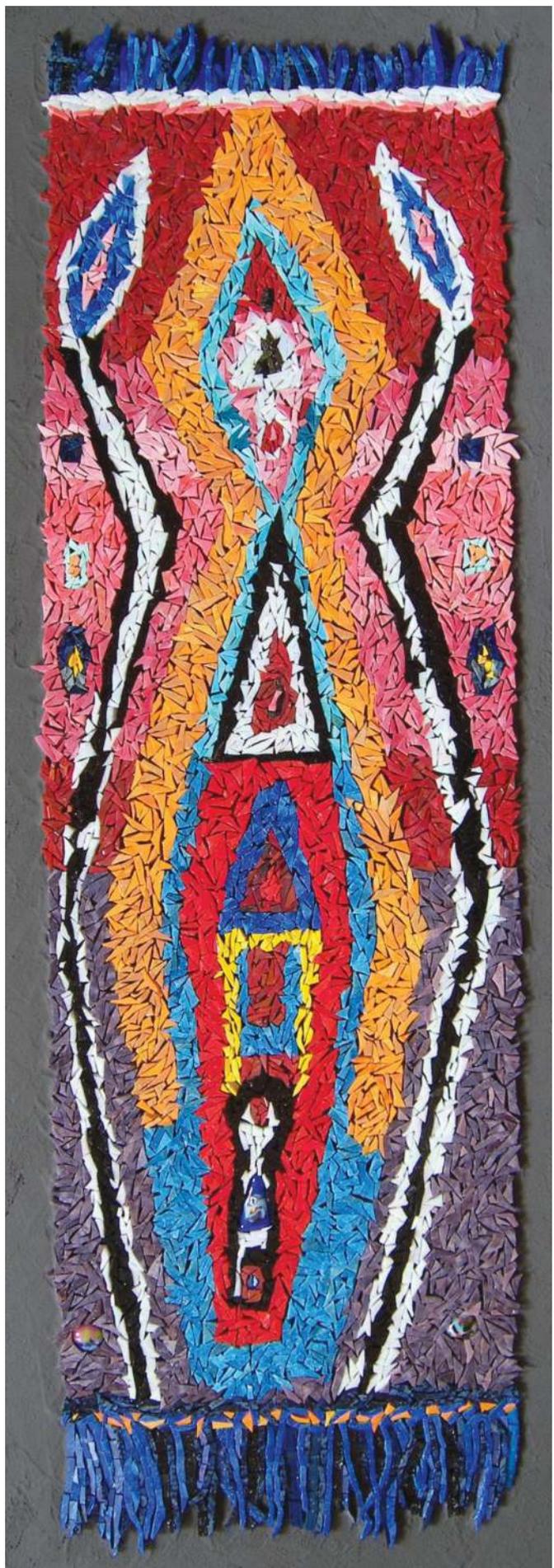
celess examples from famous public and private collections around the world. What make Suzanne's rugs more interesting than the average mosaic rug are her intricate tessera work and a practical understanding of additive synthesis. At a certain distance, some of her mosaics provide us with an intriguing phenomenological sensation: they look like high quality photographs floating on the wall, and we are not quite sure of their spatial location - especially the work *Kilim 2, Central Anatolia*. Only at close inspection we notice their true materiality, and the fact that they are actually made from a myriad of carefully cut and modulated pieces of smalti

and marble. These creations are not literal copies. However, they offer a very important way of documenting in glass the compositional elements of actual rugs, fixing their vivid colours for posterity. This project has a historical importance that goes beyond the mere creative endeavour.

"I truly get a sense of peace and joy when looking at a rug, so imagine my soul when I am actually weaving one in mosaics!"

Suzanne is also an avid collector of mosaic art. She has acquired works by Luca Barberini, Enzo Tinarelli and myself, among other established artists and students. She truly understands the need to collect mo-

Moroccan "boucherouite" rag rug 1
(From the collection of Gebhart Blazek,
Berber carpets and textiles)
from the collection of Gebhart Blazek, Ber-
ber carpets and textiles
2013
25 cm x 82 cm
Smalti, gold, glass fusions by Martin Cheek



saics, and the importance and impact they can have for future generations. In my view, it is by collecting work that we can pave the way for a long lasting influence of mosaics on the art world and the market. Many public collections that we visit today are the result of past private ownership and interest. I praise Suzanne for her support for other mosaic artists, and I would wish many others would follow suit. Suzanne is also committed to promoting mosaic art via her Facebook page Spazio S for Professional Mosaic Art. Here, she features a wide-range of works by professional artists, as well as her students and enthusiastic makers from around the world. Graduated in French Literature and Translation from McGill University in Montreal, Suzanne is a great storyteller. Her passion for interpreting oriental rugs in mosaics has led her to weave her personal stories, beliefs and adventures into every work - my personal favourite being *Lazy Lines*, an analytical mosaic composition, inspired by discontinuous weaving known as "lazy lines" in traditional weaving methods. As "Every camel tells a story", for Suzanne every rug tells a story too, either whimsical or emotional. ■