

Be good and do good

After her recent trip to Nepal, New York designer Amy Helfand talks to **Michael Christie** about working amid adversity and the indomitable spirit of the Nepali people

Amy Helfand is a Brooklyn-based artist turned carpet maker who began designing Tibetan-weave carpets in 2005 as an adjunct to her multidisciplinary artwork, producing them in Nepal. Her eponymous label is known for expressive carpets that utilise abstract organic elements, often inspired by landscape, in a graphic and intensely coloured manner. Known for her highly individualised commissions, Amy is now embarking on a 'relaunch' with the aim of bringing her distinct look to a broader audience while maintaining its uniqueness. We talk with her about her influences, inspiration and perspective.

'I couldn't help but feel a connection when Nepal was devastated by last year's earthquake. I was finally designing new work after a hiatus due to Hurricane Sandy flooding my home and studio in 2012,' she begins. 'I spent over a year shepherding my family through relocation and renovation, mitigated, fortunately, by the fact that I live in a first-world country and had insurance coverage. Though disruptive you can't compare it to what has happened in Nepal. Recovery is infinitely more difficult there.'

Amy has just returned from the Kathmandu Valley, where she was inspecting the weaving of her forestalled and now re-imagined collection. 'We could learn a lot from the indomitable spirit and patience of the Nepali people. It's not only the painfully slow earthquake recovery, but also now the fuel crisis, increasing electrical shortages, and a government that many of my Nepali and expat friends say is more corrupt than ever.'

For her new collection, entitled Be Good and Do Good, Amy has turned her eyes towards traditional carpets. Featuring interconnected elements weaving over, under,

and through an ordered structure, the collection gives nod to classic Persian designs, while remaining contemporary with its subversion of the border and interplay between layers of pattern and no pattern.

'My trip reminded me of the connected and serendipitous nature of life. I have always felt lucky to work in Nepal and this trip further motivated me to make a better rug and a better business,' Amy says of her new work. 'My designs explore the seen and the unseen, allowing the patterns to reveal themselves over time. I feel much the same way about my connection to Nepal.'

'I largely put my rug life on hold after the storm,' Amy begins before acknowledging again that Nepalis have had no such luxury. For those in Nepal, 'life must go on and work must be done' to provide basic food and shelter needs. 'I visited Hamro Ghar (GoodWeave's transit home and school for former child weavers in Nepal – Amy Helfand is a long-standing member of GoodWeave) during my trip and learned that inspectors are finding more kids on looms than usual, which maybe isn't surprising, all things considered.' Even in the daunting face of these adversities Amy reports that her contacts in the carpet industry seem to be soldiering on. 'What else can they do?' she asks rhetorically.

Amy has been thanked more than once for her perseverance and for continuing to do business in Nepal. This reminder that everyone plays a role in Nepal's recovery has further motivated the designer, knowing her future success will create more work, and thus further help Nepal.

Amy Helfand's Be Good and Do Good Collection will debut during the International Contemporary Furniture Fair (ICFF) at New York's Javits Centre on 14-17 May 2016. www.amyhelfand.com



01 Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu. Photo by Amy Helfand

02 Folklore rug, Be Good and Do Good Collection, Amy Helfand

03 Snowflake rug, Be Good and Do Good Collection, Amy Helfand

04 Amy Helfand with Raj Kumar Khadka, the warden of Hamro Ghar at Hamro Ghar – GoodWeave Nepal's transit home and school in Kathmandu



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