

INTRO *spectiv*e
EYE V *magazine*

Brad Davis *AND*
Janis Provvisor

It was an unlikely dream in an unlikely place that brought Janis Provisor and Brad Davis to launch their rug company Fort Street Studio. And it's a good thing they did not listen to people who said it simply could not be done. Back in 1993, in the heart of an economic slowdown, the couple, both accomplished artists who had met at the Holly Solomon Gallery in New York and bonded over Chinese painting, were restless. Having already visited and fallen in love with China, sometimes running off to Hong Kong from the East Coast to attend art auctions, they decided to take a year off with their then-six-year-old son, Alec. "We just did it," says Provisor, meaning they dropped out, left their comfortable loft and headed East to divide their time between bustling Hong Kong and the serene, artistically inclined Hangzhou.



An example of Fort Street Studio's New Traditional carpet design (based on antique Oriental rug motifs) shown here at the offices of Dineen Architecture + Design, NYC.



Necklace, semiprecious gemstones, 22-karat gold.

They landed in Hong Kong and enrolled Alec in school, where he learned to speak Mandarin. They got temporary teaching jobs at The Chinese University of Hong Kong and were the first westerners on faculty (Provisor was the first woman). They hosted new friends who could write, but not speak, English. "We'd have dinner parties and we'd write everything down on paper and laugh and laugh," says Provisor. "We had an adventure that allowed us to see a world that we hadn't seen before." They then headed to Hangzhou, and found a small, two-bedroom apartment with no heat and naked lightbulbs hanging from the ceiling and a fridge held together by a bungee cord. "There was ice in the toilet when we woke up on our first morning," says Provisor. They were in complete culture shock, and they were exhilarated. They made traditional woodblock prints, marveled at centuries-old Chinese watercolor techniques and soaked up beautiful Chinese weaving.



Provisor and Davis working.

One night Brad came home and asked Janis if she might want to collaborate on a carpet design. They began experimenting with watercolors, and consulted a retired carpet technician to see if their vision could be translated to hand-woven silk carpets. "We holed up for ten days straight, designing," remembers Davis. "The technician saw what we were trying to do and kept saying, 'It can't be done.' But we kept saying, 'It can.'"



Ring, in red, based on a watercolor by Davis.



Fort Street Studio's New York showroom.

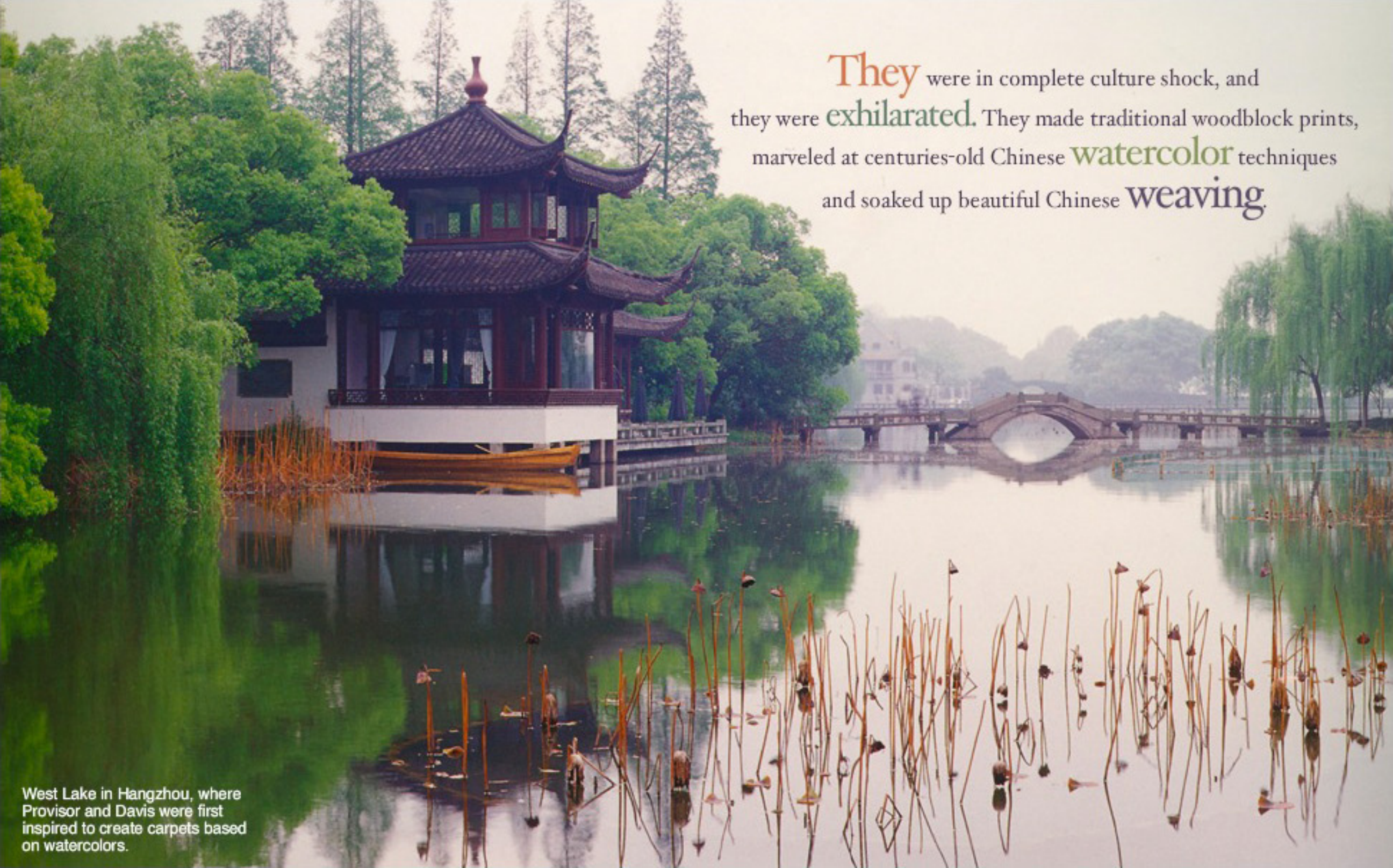


New rings: dentritic agate, moonstones, rutile quartz and 22-karat gold.

Their tenacity paid off; they found an affordable, defunct factory and weavers who were cautiously optimistic about the new approach they were attempting, and although Davis says 50 percent of the weavers quit after the first week because they couldn't weave what the couple was asking for, the other half stayed and slowly mastered the art of infusing painterly techniques into contemporary carpet weaving. "They found that our patterns were actually easier to read than the traditional ones," says Davis. "It was like taking classical musicians and teaching them jazz — it's still music but a different kind of language."



A plaid carpet, in a home in the Philippines.



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West Lake in Hangzhou, where Provisor and Davis were first inspired to create carpets based on watercolors.

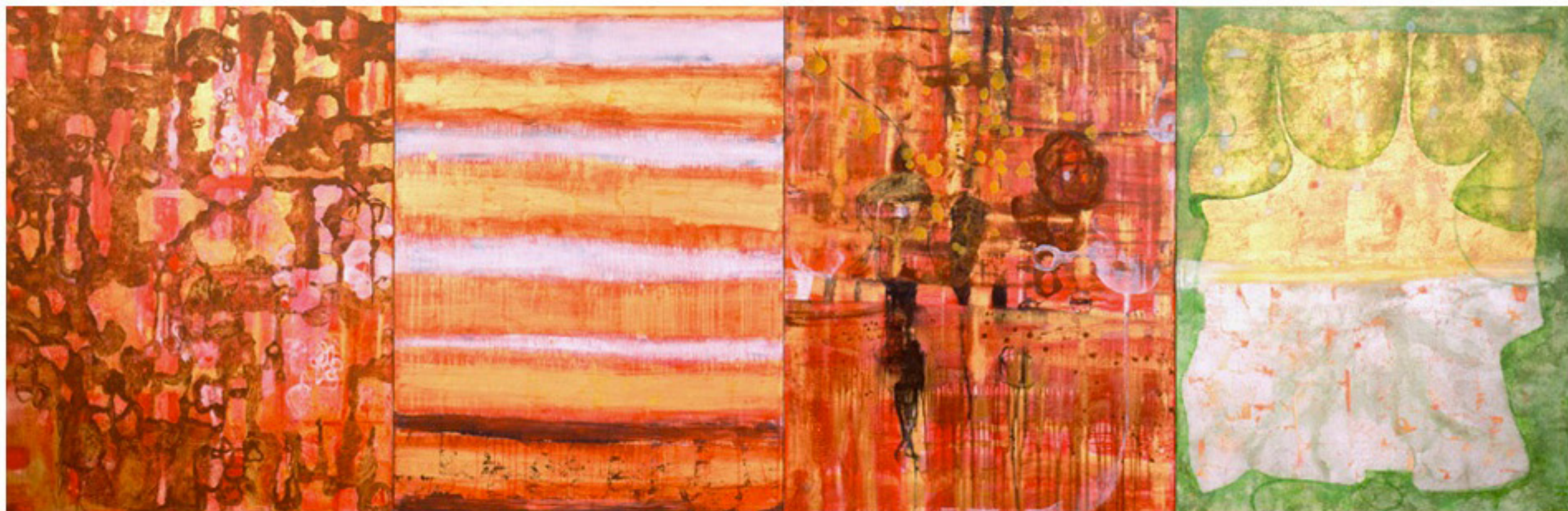


One year in China turned into three, and Provisor began dabbling in crafting jewelry for herself from metals and semiprecious stones she had gathered in her travels. The pair opened a rug showroom in Hong Kong (naming it after the street they lived on — Bo Loy Gui, or Fort Street). "Then it was really by chance that the jewelry got started," says Provisor. "I had made myself a necklace and was wearing it in the showroom while showing carpets to potential clients, who admired it. A week later this woman's husband called and said, 'We're going to buy a rug, but would you consider making a second necklace like the one you were wearing?' I had never really thought of that before." She dove in, scouring the pearl center in eastern China for craggy, flat freshwater pearls. She ventured to Indonesia and Bali, meandering down dirt roads in small villages to find the best metalsmiths, who helped her manipulate silver and gold using practices that had been passed down for generations.

For six more magical years, the family thrived in China, until one day in 2002 the couple found themselves ready to return to New York. Almost as easily as they had up and left for China, they packed a 40-foot homemade container with their rugs, jewelry and treasures and moved to Tribeca. Back in the city, Provisor and her friend and early client Debi Wisch decided to take the jewelry business to a more serious level and set about distributing the pieces at trunk shows and in select boutiques (currently Gail Rothwell in East Hampton and Julianne in Port Washington, New York). Her few designs soon grew into an impressive collection of gold necklaces peppered with the likes of black and white potato pearls, amethyst, ruby, smoky topaz, aquamarine and diamonds; earrings, bangle bracelets and hammered-gold cuffs; and, most recently, custom rings centered by dazzling stones.



Lavender jade, cherry quartz, amethyst, 18 and 20K gold



Janis Provisor painting, *Heart Stop*, oil, metal and leaf on canvas.

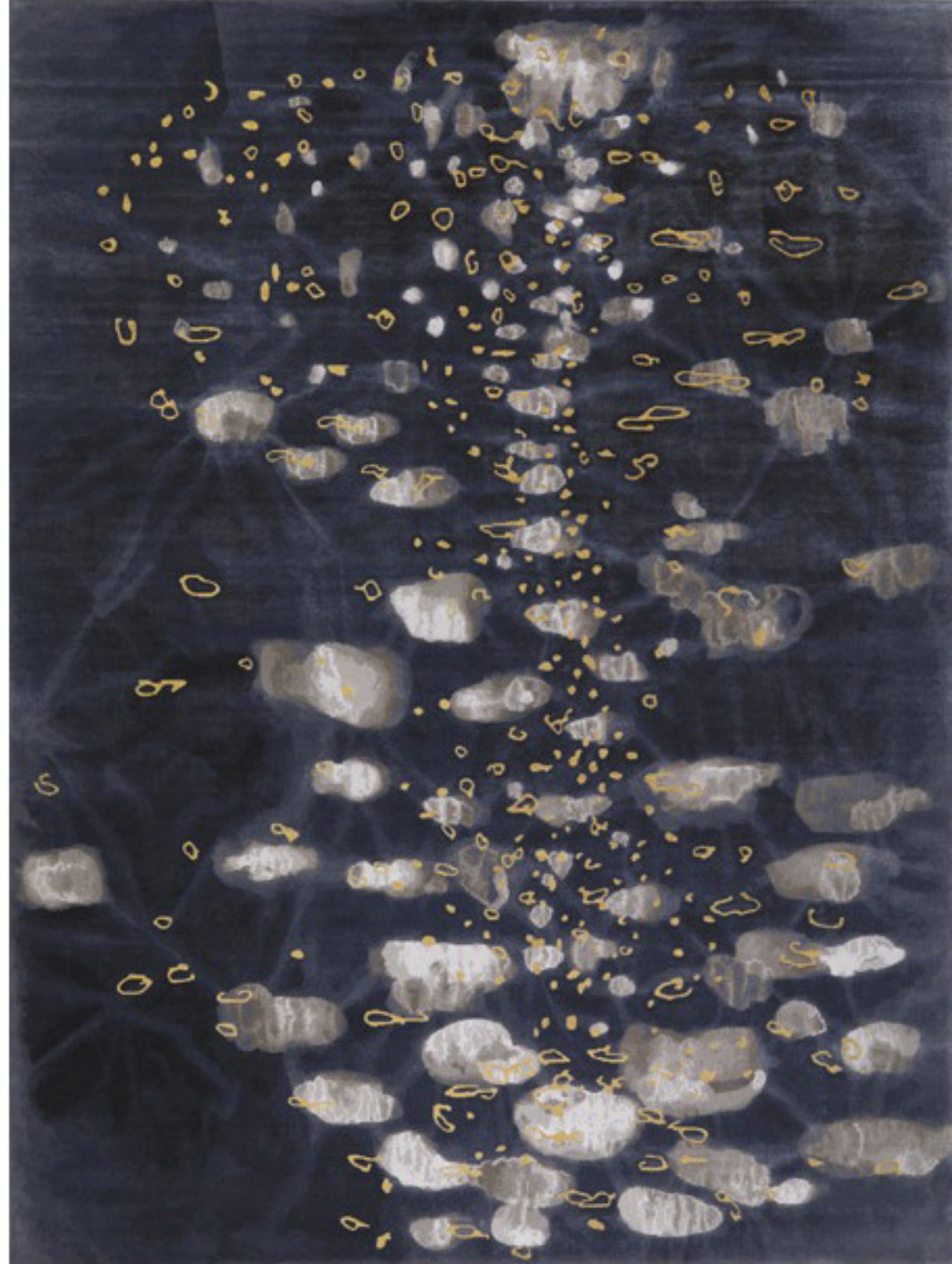
At the Fort Street Studio showrooms in Hong Kong, Soho and Los Angeles, the artists' rugs, most still based on Provisor's watercolors, are on elegant display. (They are difficult to fully appreciate in pictures, and must be seen in person, walked upon and touched to completely understand their sublimity.) There's the Watercolors collection, containing some of their earliest designs and defined by broad "brushstrokes." The Stripes are made up of colors preselected by Davis and then handed to the weavers to decide which work best next to one another. The New Traditionals are the sole designs in which the artists play with repeat patterns found in classic antique Oriental carpets, only they are highly abstracted and modernized. One of the newest designs, Shag and Hair, is the most luxurious silk shag imaginable, with surprise "roots" show-

ing at the base. Another recent design is Glimmering, its Twilight version full of tiny pools of gold Soumak (a kind of herringbone) weaving within a surface that resembles moonlight on a lake; its background wrinkles are the direct result of the crinkling of the original watercolor's paper. That these carpets are made up of more than one million tiny knots, each done by hand to an exact pattern, is almost unfathomable; in fact, Davis says he's often adamantly told that these carpets can't be anything other than machine-made, which he considers a compliment to their construction. (It takes three or four weavers knotting the finest Chinese silk dyed in Germany and Switzerland about four months to weave a standard nine-by-twelve-foot carpet; each knot contains 15 strands of silk, each of which has 11 strands of silk fiber.) "The weavers and the dyers are the heroes of this process," says Davis.

Glimmering (in Twilight),
silk and metallic Soumak.

Bottle green quartz, pave
diamonds, tourmaline and
18K white gold

The very near future will see Provisor and Davis revealing new rug designs for a major European luxury brand. Beyond that, their path is hard to guess, but as in the past, it is certain to take a fortuitous turn.



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