

REEDS & WOOL

Patterned Screens of Central Asia

The Royal Alberta Museum is proud to host *Reeds & Wool: Patterned Screens of Central Asia*, a new international travelling exhibition produced by Kauffman Museum, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, and organized by Dr. John L. Sommer from the reed screens in the Sommer-Krieger Collection.

Reeds and Wool features 11 richly textured and intricately patterned screens made by nomadic Kyrgyz women as traditional furnishings for a yurt or felt tent dwelling.

The exhibition displays two types of patterned screens from the 19th to mid-20th century. The long *kanat chiy* (3 to 4 metres in length) is placed between the yurt's lattice frame and its outer felt covering, helping to insulate against winter cold. The *ashkana chiy* functions as a freestanding space divider, separating the central fire and cooking area from the women's area where food and utensils are stored. In addition to 11 screens, the exhibition includes examples of pile, flatweave and felt textiles used by Kyrgyz nomads. The twining technique is explained through a hands-on, reproduction "weaving" frame.

Knowledge of Kyrgyz culture and arts has been limited because Kyrgyzstan was part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1920-1991). Traditionally the Kyrgyz were nomadic herders who carried all their possessions with them when they moved seasonally to new pastures. Decorative objects needed to be portable, serve a functional purpose, and be constructed of natural materials from their highland environment.

