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(54) **MERCHANDISER ASSEMBLY**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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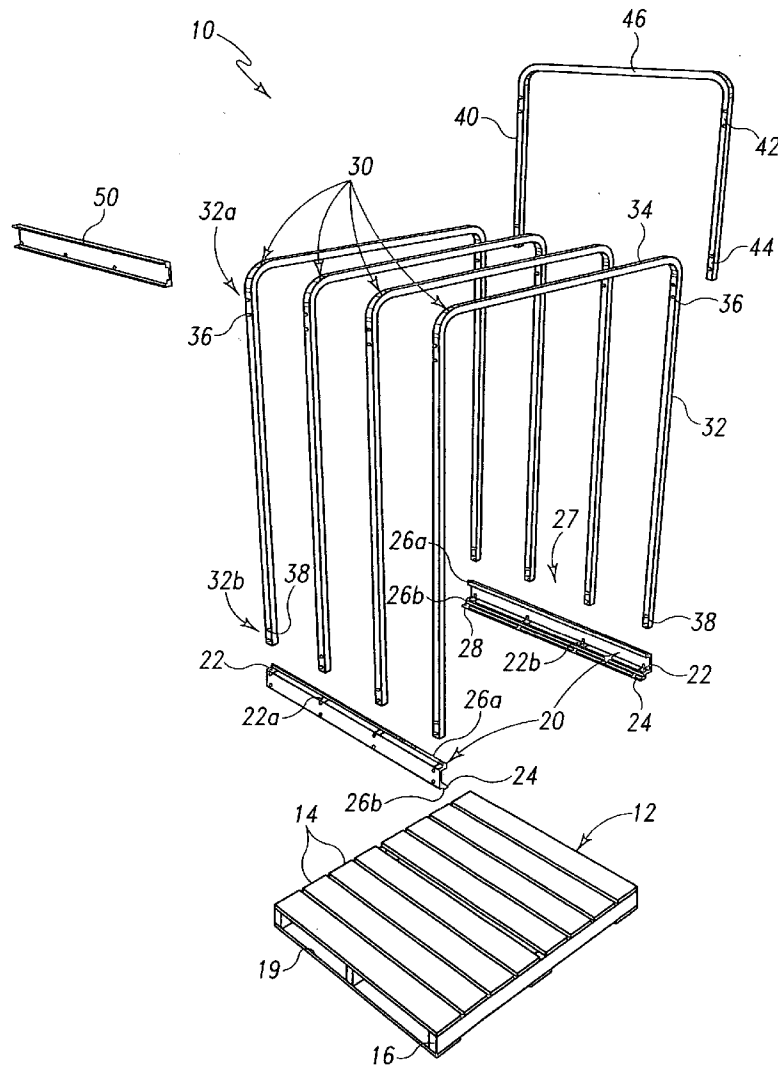
A merchandiser assembly includes a base and a plurality of support hoops having lower ends, wherein the lower ends may be secured adjacent to the base. The hoops may define a gap formed between the hoops for containing rolled articles from movement in a transverse direction. The assembly further comprises a rest rail attached across the gap so as to contain rolled articles from movement in a forward direction perpendicular to said transverse direction. The rest rail may include a rest surface and be adjustable between a tall and short orientation, wherein when the rest rail is in the tall orientation, the rest surface is at a greater distance from the base than when the rest rail is in the short orientation, so as to allow the rail to be adjusted to support rolled articles of multiple lengths.

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Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 60/601,096, filed on Aug. 12, 2004.



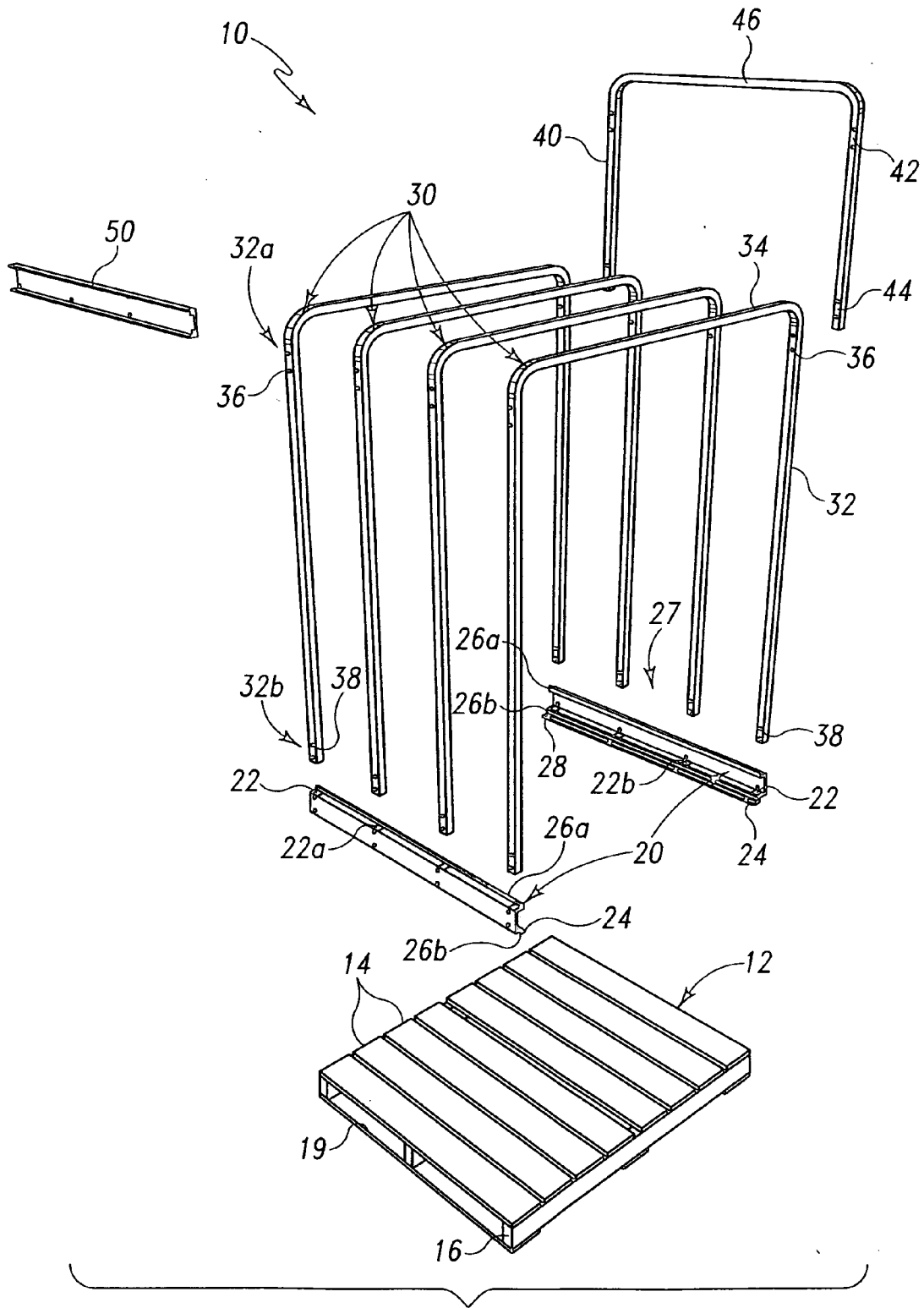


Fig. 1

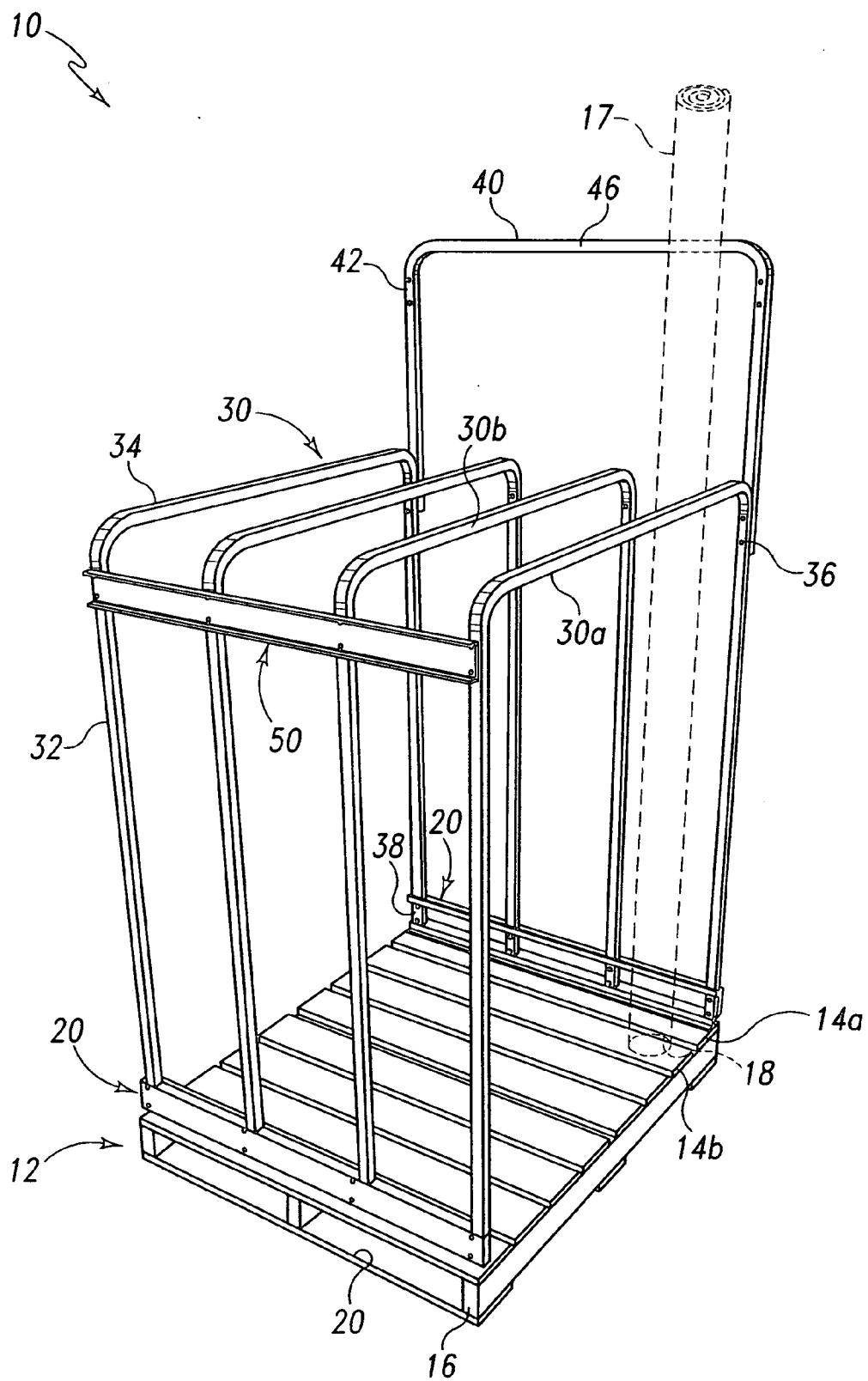


Fig. 2

MERCHANDISER ASSEMBLY

CROSS REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/601,096 filed Aug. 12, 2004, the entire disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference herein.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates to an assembly for transporting and displaying rugs.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] In the rug industry, manufacturers design and produce rugs for shipment to distributors and/or vendors. Once produced, it is desired that the rugs be packaged in a manner to allow easy loading/unloading of the rugs onto/off of a truck. In the past, manufacturers would roll the rugs and place them lengthwise on pallets. The problem with this approach was that pallet loaders or forklifts had difficulty accessing the pallet and loading the pallet full of rugs on the truck. To solve this problem, manufacturers began using open top merchandiser assemblies so that rugs could be stood on end (e.g. vertically) within the cage of the assembly. However, these merchandiser assemblies proved to be weak and often failed due to the weight of the heavy stacked rugs. In addition, as vendors desired to display rugs in the same assemblies in which the rugs were shipped, stronger, more functional assemblies were needed.

[0004] As such, there is a need for durable merchandiser assemblies configured to secure a number of rugs during transport and display.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] Accordingly, the present invention is intended to address and obviate problems and shortcomings and otherwise improve previous merchandiser assemblies.

[0006] A merchandiser assembly comprising a base, a plurality of support hoops having lower ends, wherein the lower ends are secured adjacent to the base wherein the hoops define a gap formed therebetween for containing rolled articles from movement in a transverse direction, and a rest rail attached across the gap so as to contain rolled articles from movement in a forward direction perpendicular to the transverse direction comprising a rest surface and being adjustable between a tall and short orientation, wherein when the rest rail is in the tall orientation, the rest surface is at a greater distance from the base than when the rest rail is in the short orientation, so as to allow the rail to be adjusted to support rolled articles of multiple lengths.

[0007] To achieve the foregoing, a merchandiser assembly may comprise a base, a plurality of support hoops having lower ends, wherein said lower ends may be secured to the base. The assembly may further comprise a rest rail having a rest surface and a tall and short orientation, wherein when in said tall orientation, said rest surface is at a greater distance from said base than when said rest rail is in said short orientation.

[0008] To still further achieve the foregoing, a merchandiser assembly may comprise a base, a plurality of support

hoops having lower ends, a base arm mount secured to the base, the base arm mount comprising a plurality of apertures configured to removeably receive the lower ends of the support hoops, and a rest rail comprising a plurality of orientations, wherein the rest rail is configured to be removeably secured to at least one of the support hoops.

[0009] To still further achieve the foregoing, a merchandiser assembly may comprise a base, a plurality of support hoops having lower ends, a plurality of base arm mounts secured to the base, the base arm mounts comprising a plurality of apertures configured to removeably receive the lower ends of the support hoops, and a rest rail comprising a rest surface and a tall and short orientation, and wherein when the rest rail is in the tall orientation, the rest surface is at a greater distance from the base than when the rest rail is in the short orientation.

[0010] Still other embodiments, combinations and advantages will become apparent to those skilled in the art from the following descriptions wherein there are shown and described alternative illustrative embodiments of this invention for illustration purposes. As will be realized, the invention is capable of other different aspects, objects and embodiments all without departing from the scope of the invention. Accordingly, the drawings and description should be regarded as illustrative and illustrative in nature only and not as restrictive.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] It is believed that the present invention will be better understood from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

[0012] **FIG. 1** is an exploded perspective view of a merchandiser assembly in accordance with one illustrative embodiment of the present invention; and

[0013] **FIG. 2** is a perspective view of an assembled merchandiser assembly of **FIG. 1** with a rug secured therein.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

[0014] Referring to the drawing figures in detail, wherein like numerals indicate the same elements throughout the drawing figures, **FIG. 1** illustrates an exploded view of the merchandiser assembly **10** according to one illustrative embodiment of the present invention. As illustrated, the merchandiser assembly **10** may comprise a base **12**, a pair of base arm mounts **20**, a plurality of support hoops **30**, a rest rail **40** and a rear rail **50**. As discussed later herein, and illustrated in **FIG. 2**, these and other components can be fitted together to form a merchandiser assembly for transporting and displaying rugs **17** and other articles of various sizes in a convenient and space efficient manner. Moreover, while the present invention is described as being used with transporting and displaying rugs, other products may be used in association with the present invention.

[0015] Referring to **FIGS. 1 and 2**, base **12** of merchandiser assembly **10** is illustrated as comprising a pallet type design. More particularly, pallet **12** may comprise a plurality of spaced slats **14** secured to a frame **16**. The design allows vertically displayed rugs to rest in between the spaced slats **14**. For example, as illustrated in **FIG. 2**, corner **18** of rolled rug **17** may rest between slats **14a** and **14b**. This design may

assist in keeping the rolled rugs **17** in a vertical orientation. Pallet design is also useful as it provides channels **19** for accepting forks of a forklift and/or a pallet loader for transporting the merchandiser assembly about a display surface or from/to a transport truck. Of course any base may be used such as, for example, a base comprising a solid sheet in place of the slats with a plurality of holes cut therein so as to accept and secure a rolled rug.

[0016] In order to secure support hoops **30** to base **12**, a pair of base arm mounts **20** may be used. As illustrated, each base arm mount **20** may comprise a generally U-shaped configuration with a number of support hoop apertures **22** therein. In addition, base arm mount **20** may comprise a mount lip **24** and upper and lower prop lips **26a** and **26b**. Although a pair of base arm mounts **20** are illustrated, any number of base arm mounts **20** may be used.

[0017] Base arm mount **20** may be secured to the base **12** and be configured to telescopingly receive the support hoops **30**. More particularly, mount lip **24** of base arm mount **20** may be positioned located on slat **14** of base **12** and then be secured thereto by drilling fasteners **27** through holes **28** located in the mount lip **24** and into slat **14** of base **12**. As illustrated in **FIG. 2**, base arm mounts **20** may be secured to base **12** at the outer edge thereof. However, it is contemplated that base arm mounts **20** may be secured at any location on the base. In addition, it should be understood that base arm mounts **20** may comprise any apparatus or assembly configured to receive and maintain support hoops **30** in a desired position.

[0018] As illustrated, merchandiser assembly may also comprise a plurality of support hoops **30**. Between these support hoops **30**, a gap may be formed so that rugs may be inserted and maintained during transport and/or display. More particularly, rugs or other rolled articles positioned within the gaps are contained from movement in a transverse direction. While rugs may be able to move side to side to the adjacent hoop, such rugs are contained sufficiently to prevent the rugs from falling to the ground side to side.

[0019] Each support hoop **30** may comprise two support arms **32** and a divider arm **34** to form a generally U-shaped configuration or hoop. Support and divider arm **32** and **34** may comprise individual components telescopingly fitted together, or in another embodiment, may comprise a single piece, such as a single post bent into a U-shaped configuration. Of course, in another embodiment "support hoops" may actually comprise a wall or other such divider for rugs or articles capable of containing the same. Accordingly, the use of the term "hoop" is not intended to connote a structural limitation. Upper and lower ends **32a** and **32b** of support arms **32** or hoop **30** may comprise openings **36** and **38** for accepting one or more fasteners discussed below.

[0020] As shown, merchandiser assembly **10** comprises four support hoops **30**. However, any number of support hoops **30** may be secured to any desired size base. As previously discussed, support hoops may be telescopingly received in base arm mounts **20** at support hoop apertures **20**. More particularly, lower end **32b** and support hoop **30** may be received in upper and lower apertures **22a** and **22b** of base arms mounts **20** and be secured thereto with, for example, a fastener, or other locking arrangement. In one embodiment, lower end **32a** of support hoop **30** may rest on base **12** (e.g. **FIGS. 1-2**). In another embodiment, lower end

32a of support hoop **30** may rest on support arm mount **20**. In addition, aside from resting on base **12**, lower ends **32b** of support hoops **30** are similarly stabilized against upper and lower prop lips **26a** and **26b** of base arm mounts **20**. Because of this design, the support hoops **30** of the present invention can support heavy loads, such as rolled rugs between respective support hoops **30**.

[0021] Merchandiser assembly **10** may also comprise a rest rail **40** configured to be removably secured to one or more support arms **30**. More particularly, rest rail **40** may comprise upper and lower rail apertures **42** and **44** each configured to be secured to support arm openings **36**, depending on the desired orientation of the rest rail **40**. The rest rail **40** may be configured to provide a surface for one or more vertically rolled rugs **17** to or other articles rest against (see **FIG. 2**). In addition, rest rail **40** may be removable so as to load and unload merchandiser assembly. Of course, a number of components or combinations of components can be used to provide a surface to prevent or inhibit movement of the rugs in a forward direction. Accordingly, use of the term "rail" should not be limited in structure as other such components (e.g., divider, barrier, etc.) can be used.

[0022] In use, rest rail **40** may be attached across one or more gap so as to contain rolled articles from movement in a forward direction perpendicular to the transverse direction discussed above. Such containment of forward movement can mean prevention of the rugs from falling forward or backward (depending on the location of the rest rail) to the ground. Limited movement perpendicular to the transverse side-to-side direction discussed above may be appropriate when the merchandiser is not full.

[0023] It is a feature of the present invention that rolled rugs **17** of various sizes may be accommodated by switching the rest rail from tall and short orientations. By way of example, if the rolled rug **17** of **FIG. 2** was a 8×11 rug (e.g. 8 foot wide, and therefore, 8 foot tall in the merchandiser assembly **10**), rest rail **40** may be configured in its tall orientation as shown (e.g. rail apertures **44** aligned and secured to support arm openings **36**) so that a taller rolled rug does not fall out of merchandiser assembly because rest surface **46** is higher. However, if a 6×9 rug were inserted into the merchandiser assembly **10** of **FIG. 2** (e.g., an assembly with the rest rail in the tall orientation), the rug may fall under rest rail **40** and onto a display surface. Accordingly, rest rail **40** may be switched to its lower orientation (e.g. rail apertures **42** aligned and secured to support arm openings **36**) to provide a support surface **46** for smaller sized rugs. It is contemplated that if larger rugs are to be transported or displayed, the rest rail **40** will be secured in its tall orientation (e.g., **FIG. 2**).

[0024] It should be understood that although rest rail **40** is illustrated as being fixedly secured to two support hoops **30** (e.g. rail apertures **42** or **44** aligned and secured to support arm openings **36**), a number of alternative embodiments are contemplated. For example, rest rail **40** may be configured to be telescopingly received by support hoops **30** such as at the outermost support hoops, between adjacent support hoops or intermittent support hoops. Such may be accomplished by providing apertures within support hoops and securing rest rail therein through snap locks or other convention locking devices. In addition, although rest rail **40** is

illustrated as being located toward the outer end of support hoops 30, any type of rest rail may be located at any position along support hoops and/or base.

[0025] Rear rail 50 is illustrated and configured to prevent one or more rolled rugs 17 from falling out of the rear of the merchandiser assembly 10. As illustrated, rear rail 50 may be configured to be fixedly secured to one or more support hoops 30 such as at openings 36. This embodiment may be desired when rugs are being transported and increased stability of the merchandiser assembly 10 is preferred. However, in another embodiment, rear rail may be selectively removable from one or all support hoops 30. Such embodiment may be desired when the merchandiser assembly 10 is used to display rugs. More particularly, if a customer desires to purchase a rug displayed in the merchandiser assembly 10, a vendor can simply remove rear rail 50 and remove the rolled rugs from the adjacent support hoops (assuming the desired rug is not first in line). Once removed, vendor can reattach rear rail 50. In such embodiment, the rear rail 50 may be secured to one or more support hoops through a snap and lock assembly, or other locking arrangement. The rear rail 50 may be configured to be removable from the all of the support hoops 30 or simply between adjacent support hoops, such as 30a and 30b (see FIG. 2). Such may be accomplished by, for example, providing hinges between adjacent rear rail pieces and corresponding to the support hoops 30. Of course, as discussed, it is contemplated that rest rail 40 may similarly be removed to load and unload rugs in the merchandise assembly.

[0026] One of the aspects of the present invention, as previously discussed, is that the merchandiser assembly can be used to transport and display rolled rugs. It is contemplated that the merchandiser assembly 10 can be modular so that each can be individually broken down and shipped to a vendor and/or manufacturer. For example, if a manufacturer has rugs to be shipped, the broken down merchandiser assembly can be delivered to the manufacturer in a packaged container. The manufacturer may then use its own base (e.g., a pallet where applicable or desired) and construct the merchandiser assembly as discussed above. The manufacturer may then load the merchandiser assembly full of rugs for transport to a vendor. Because the merchandiser assembly is designed to adapt to a conventional pallet, the constructed assembly with pallet base may be loaded onto a truck and shipped to a vendor. Once received by the vendor, the vendor may unload the merchandiser assembly from the truck and place the assembly directly in a display room, thus eliminating the step of unloading each individual rug and transferring the same to a display rack. In addition, if a vendor has rugs from a manufacturer that does not utilize the merchandiser assembly, the same broken down packaged merchandiser assembly can be shipped to the vendor, assembled and use solely to display any number of rugs. As such, the present invention provides a stable assembly for transporting and displaying rugs.

[0027] The foregoing description of the various embodiments of the invention has been presented for the purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise form disclosed. Many alternatives, modifications and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art of the above teaching. For example, the merchandiser assemblies in

accordance with the present invention may display rugs of varying sizes and shapes in a variety of different arrangements and can include bases, arm base mounts and support hoops organized in a variety of arrangements. Accordingly, while some of the alternative embodiments of the merchandiser assembly have been discussed specifically, other embodiments will be apparent or relatively easily developed by those of ordinary skill in the art. Accordingly, this invention is intended to embrace all alternatives, modifications and variations that have been discussed herein.

What I claim is:

1. A merchandiser assembly comprising:

a base;

a plurality of support hoops having lower ends, wherein said lower ends are secured adjacent to said base and wherein said hoops define a gap formed therebetween for containing rolled articles from movement in a transverse direction; and

a rest rail attached across said gap so as to contain rolled articles from movement in a forward direction perpendicular to said transverse direction, said rest rail comprising a rest surface and being adjustable between a tall and short orientation, wherein when said rest rail is in said tall orientation, said rest surface is at a greater distance from said base than when said rest rail is in said short orientation, so as to allow the rail to be adjusted to support rolled articles of multiple lengths.

2. The merchandiser assembly of claim 1, wherein said rest rail is removeably secured to at least one of said support hoops.

3. The merchandiser assembly of claim 1, wherein said lower ends of said support hoops are removeably secured to said base.

4. The merchandiser assembly of claim 1, wherein said merchandiser assembly further comprises a base arm mount having a plurality of apertures configured to removeably receive said lower ends of said support hoops.

5. The merchandiser assembly of claim 4, wherein said lower ends of said plurality of said support hoops are removeably secured to said base arm mount.

6. The merchandiser assembly of claim 4, wherein said base arm mount further comprises a mount lip configured to secure said base arm mount to said base.

7. The merchandiser assembly of claim 1, wherein said base is a pallet.

8. The merchandiser assembly of claim 1 further comprising a rear rail.

9. The merchandiser assembly of claim 1, wherein said base comprises channels configured to receive forks of a forklift.

10. The merchandiser assembly of claim 1, wherein said articles are rugs.

11. A merchandiser assembly comprising:

a base;

a plurality of support hoops having lower ends;

a base arm mount secured adjacent to said base, said base arm mount comprising a plurality of apertures config-

ured to removeably receive said lower ends of said support hoops; and

a rest rail having a plurality of orientations, wherein said rest rail is configured to be removeably secured to at least one of said support hoops.

12. The merchandiser assembly of claim 11, wherein said rest rail further comprises a rest surface, and wherein when said rest rail is in said tall orientation, said rest surface is at a greater distance from said base than when said rest rail is in said short orientation.

13. The merchandiser assembly of claim 11, wherein said lower ends of said plurality of said support hoops are removeably secured to said base arm mount.

14. The merchandiser assembly of claim 11, wherein said base arm mount is further comprised of mount lips configured to secure said base arm mount to said base.

15. A merchandiser assembly comprising:

a base;

a plurality of support hoops having lower ends;

a plurality of base arm mounts secured adjacent to said base, said base arm mounts comprising a plurality of apertures configured to removeably receive said lower ends of said support hoops; and

a rest rail comprising a rest surface and a tall and short orientation, and wherein when said rest rail is in said tall orientation, said rest surface is at a greater distance from said base than when said rest rail is in said short orientation.

16. The merchandiser assembly of claim 15, wherein said rest rail is removeably secured to at least one of said support hoops.

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