

## Antenna: Material gains

Meredith Etherington-Smith hails the collectibility of textile art, including a 1,000-year-old tapestry from Peru and the dyed-cotton installations of Malian artist Abdoulaye Konaté

Both ancient and contemporary textiles are becoming increasingly sought after by collectors interested in the art of cultures from around the world — a field sometimes termed ‘ethno-aesthetics’.

‘I don’t like the expression “tribal art”; we are all members of tribes,’ says British textile dealer Jonathan Hope, one of the star exhibitors at this year’s *Parcours des Mondes* fair in Paris, which specialises in the art of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. Hope insists he prefers the term ‘non-European art’.

The Paris fair attracted collectors from all over the world, who swarmed to the warren of galleries on the city’s Left Bank, each presenting specially curated displays of world art, instead of their usual offering of 20th-century modern and Art Deco.

In the first week of September, London’s *Tribal Art Fair* had previously run as a curtain-opener for the main attraction in Paris. Now in its third year at the Mall Galleries, the event has gone from strength to strength — this year it featured 22 galleries and attracted 4,000 additional visitors.

This constant flow of participants proves that the London event has earned its place as a pit stop for international collectors heading to the French capital. New among exhibitors was Brussels dealer Marcuson & Hall, a self-described ‘ethno-aesthetics’ expert and textiles specialist who showed a Yombe sleeping mat from the 1930s.

Much older was an alpaca tapestry depicting a fish trap (above), made in Peru between 400 and 900 AD. Attributed to the Chimú culture based around modern-day Trujillo in the northeast of the country, it illustrates the importance of fishing to the Chimú, who were ultimately conquered by the Incas around 1470. The piece was presented by exhibitor Kapil Jariwala.

Back at Paris’s *Parcours des Mondes*, a new textile collecting area was unveiled by New York’s Donald Ellis Gallery, which specialises in Native American art, in particular the emerging art of America’s northwest coast and Inuit art.

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Model Tipi, Cheyenne, circa 1870. Buffalo hide, pigments, 57in wide. Courtesy Donald Ellis Gallery

This is a very interesting area to collect in because, historically, textile enthusiasts have looked to works from Europe, East Asia and — increasingly in recent years — Africa. North America opens up a new field of collectibles ranging from dance blankets to entire tipis, like the one shown above.

Textiles are also a living and vibrant contemporary tradition in Sub-Saharan Africa. Ghanaian artist El Anatsui, for instance, has drawn international attention in recent years. Now, from Mali, artist Abdoulaye Konaté is having his first major London show with *Symphonie en Couleur* at Blain | Southern until 24 September.

Konaté is celebrated for his monumental, abstract textile compositions — made from hand-stitched woven and dyed cotton — which explore formal colour composition as a means of reflecting on political and social issues. The brilliant colours of these works are inspired by the hues found in rocks and minerals.

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As the introduction to this show by curator Joëlle Busca points out, 'Textile is always the thread: raw or subtly refined, from minimal to intricate, this ancestral and versatile material unshackles the work from the wall thanks to its texture, physicality and colour. Abdoulaye Konaté explores textile as an aesthetic that is contemporary yet also anchored in perpetually evolving traditions.'

Whether it's an alpaca-wool tapestry dating back more than 1,000 years or a vibrant weave produced by today's leading contemporary artists, textile art, woven with narratives from across centuries, has more than come into its own as a major collectible.

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