



Traditional Horizontal Mosse Handloom, Burkina Faso | Photo: A. Phillips

Culture, Beauty, Identity

‘Stripcloth Splendours’

Indigenous Traditional Skills and Cultural Identity as ‘Added Value’
in the Contemporary Revival of West Africa’s Textile Heritage

Maison & Objet September 2012

Parc d’Expositions, Villepinte

7 – 11 September 2012

Entrance Hall 1, Animation

www.maison-objet.com

This summer the British European Design Group, London and the Burkina based non-government organisation SOS-SaveOurSkills present the exhibition ‘Stripcloth Splendours’ as part of the Maison & Objet’s 2012 Animation programme. Drawn from the unique ‘Projet de Tissage’ in Burkina Faso, this exhibition brings together for the first time in France, the story of the ancient textile traditions and heritage of West Africa and its survival in the 21st Century.

*“Des Ingrédients appropriés
peuvent créer une Légende.*

*The right ingredients
can create a legend.”*

Coco Chanel 1883-1971

‘Projet de Tissage’ began in 2006 in partnership with the British European Design Group, London and the European Union organisation EU-ACP CDE-Centre for the Development of Enterprise in Brussels.

In 2007 the non-government organisation SOS-SaveOurSkills was registered in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. SOS-SaveOurSkills Africa is headed by its Burkinabe co-founder and Director Desiré Maurice Ouédraogo, a qualified textile engineer and one of Burkina’s leading textile experts.



Cotton cultivation in hand-woven stripcloth

The mission of SOS-SaveOurSkills is to secure the cultural, professional and economic survival of West Africa's traditional cotton cultivating and processing skills, in particular hand-spinning and handloom weaving. The 'Projet de Tissage' is aimed at empowering craftsmen and women to progress from their traditional heritage to contemporary creativity whilst ensuring the continuation of their unique cultural identity. The project is based in two villages in Burkina Faso; Napalgue - Commune Bousse and Sulgo - Commune Zinare.

The cultivation of cotton, Africa's 'White Gold', at local village level on family plots was re-introduced in 2007. Since then harvests grown by the local communities from certified organic seeds have provided de facto organic cotton for local processing, spinning and weaving. All finished products are made entirely by hand without using any artificial energy or intermediate technologies. The entire programme has been designed to strengthen and build upon the indigenous knowledge and skills of the craftsmen and women, most of whom are unable to earn a livelihood from their skills.

'Projet de Tissage' stresses the urgent need to build capacity both in terms of knowledge transfer, education and skills as well as creating a design-led commercial framework to protect the cultural integrity of West Africa's traditional textile industry. Burkina Faso, Africa's largest cotton exporter and 7th largest in the world, would be well placed to increase and support locally driven sustainable production methods to guarantee long term economic viability for its people and help protect the nation's ancient traditions.



Cotton - the white gold of nature | Photo: C. Hackl

The exhibition will examine the significance of the traditional textile heritage showcasing the work of master weavers and explore the importance of sustainable development through cultural and environmental revival.

The exhibition has brought together a wealth of original objects used in the traditional textile weaving process. Examples will include: wooden spindles, hand spun cotton, a traditional wooden handloom, rolls of stripcloth and a variety of textiles and garments. Each tool is made by hand using locally sourced materials. Cotton is handspun by the village women.

Spinning is performed on flat stone slabs with natural wooden spindles for hours at a time. The wooden handloom, the centrepiece of the exhibition, is a singular feat of engineering. Its enduring qualities enable weavers to sustain years of weaving stripcloth, in lengths of sometimes over 100m.

The work of skilled master weavers, none of which has ever before been on display in the Western world, will provide new insights into understanding the important and critical role that indigenous craft and design play both locally as well as internationally.

UNESCO reports that integrating cultural activity into development programmes fundamentally contributes to socio-economic and environmental improvement for communities themselves. SOS-SaveOurSkills and 'Projet de Tissage' support UNESCO's commitment to fostering creativity and sustainable progress by investing in culture and environmental stewardship as a dynamic force for change.

Karin-Beate Philips, Founder of the British European Design Group and SOS-SaveOurSkills said: *"Projet de Tissage represents an extraordinary journey towards the re-habilitation and restoration of traditional cotton cultivating and processing - that is handloom weaving - in Burkina Faso.*

It works on many levels; in supporting communities towards an equitable economic future, safe-guarding cultural identity and the heritage of West Africa's textile traditions through building social capacity to support the continued revival of design and the creative industries.

We are indebted to the many individuals and organisations that have supported this project over the years, such as the EU-ACP CDE-Centre for the Development of Enterprise, Brussels and the Shell Foundation.

We are delighted that this unique project is being shown as part of the Animation programme of the September 2012 Edition of Maison & Objet. This will be the first time that traditional West African handloom weaving on an original loom by a senior master weaver will be shown outside of Africa and this exhibition will enable buyers, architects, interior designers, textile experts and general visitors to engage and learn about these century old craft skills – what they have been and their future potential.

Safe-guarding the diversity and heritage of the designs, motifs and patterns of the master-weavers is urgently required. This endeavour is especially critical in an increasingly globalised world.



The preservation and conservation of indigenous cultural heritage recognizes simultaneously the need for its continual adaptation, progress and evolution without interference from external factors. The challenge lays in how to bring long term economic benefit to the very people whose skills and techniques are in danger of being lost forever.

Stripcloth weaving shows us the ingenious ways in which craft and technique can be used to produce textiles from the most challenging of environments. Through international support and recognition for the communities whose dedication, knowledge and expertise brings to life textiles of beauty and dignity, SOS-SaveOurSkills will continue to develop opportunities and possibilities to ensure a long lasting future for the master-weavers and communities in Burkina Faso.”

London, 20 August 2012

Contacts

For further information and images about SOS-SaveOurSkills and 'Projet de Tissage' please contact Karin-Beate Philips at the British European Design Group: info@bedg.org

Notes to editors

1. SOS-SaveOurSkills works with indigenous communities to ensure the preservation of cultural identities and sustainable economic benefit for traditional skilled practitioners.

For more information visit: www.sos-www.saveourskills.org

2. Karin-Beate Philips is the Founder/Director of the British European Design Group and SOS-SaveOurSkills Africa, UK and Germany

For more information visit: www.bedg.org

3. Image on front cover shows a traditional Mosse handloom from Burkina Faso. Copyright Andrew Phillips / SOS-SaveOurSkills