

Weave on! The ongoing reinvention of textile art gains wider recognition

ARTS

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By AGENCY



A woman takes a picture of an artwork titled 'L.A. Liberty' by Pacita Abad at the Frieze Art Fair in London. Photo: AFP

From weaving to embroidery, the world of textiles - often largely ignored at Western contemporary art showcases - took centre stage recently at the Frieze London art fair.

The prestigious annual showcase, held this year in Regents Park, organised a new section called *Woven* devoted entirely to textile fibres.

It featured eight solo artists of different generations from a host of countries, including Brazil, the Philippines, China, India and Madagascar, who tackled perhaps surprisingly topical themes.

"(Weaving) had always been a central part of artistic practice everywhere in the world," said curator Cosmin Costinas, explaining the exhibition's name.

"But indeed it was marginalised because it was associated with women," he added, noting "eurocentric" perspectives that the

For Cosmin, it was a chance to celebrate textile arts while weaving issues like Britain's "unsolved colonial legacy", with other contemporary matters such as sexism and ethnocentrism.

"There was a strong intention to do something that responds to the current moment, the current mess the UK finds itself," he said, referring to the political turmoil engulfing Britain over Brexit.

Woven brought together artists like Mrinalini Mukherjee (1949-2015), an Indian sculptor who used dyed and woven hemp, and Pacita Abad (1946-2004), an American-Filipino artist renowned for merging traditional textiles with contemporary painting.

Abad's "Trapunto" canvases, festooned with sequins, shells and swatches of precious textiles, among other things, took on a three dimensional quality.

"For many people it was considered craft versus art," said Amrita Jhaveri, owner of the Jhaveri Contemporary gallery in Mumbai, which presented the weavings of Monika Correa at the Frieze.



People view artworks titled *The Spirit People I* and *The Spirit People II* by Simphiwe Nzube at the recent Frieze Art Fair in London. Photo: AFP

"But it's been changing for some time now.

"The art world is looking outside the kind of formal art practice to other areas for instance ceramics, or textiles," she added.

Their increasing recognition on the international art stage has also coincided with ongoing reinvention.

Chitra Ganesh, a 44-year-old Indian-American visual artist, noted "a larger conceptual approach to bringing together disparate iconographies, histories, looking for way to connect the very old and the very new."



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Angela Su, a Hong Kong artist known for her scientific drawings and performance works, showcased a series of works inspired by the months of pro-democracy protests sweeping her home city and former British colony.

The central painting depicts a brain to evoke "the schizophrenic identity of Hong Kong".



Filipino artist Cian Dayrit poses with his artworks at the Frieze Art Fair in London. Photo: AFP

"We don't know if we're Chinese or Hong Kong or British, we're this mix of everything," Su said.

The artists was also showed that sewing could be modern and "a form of protest" as well as a traditional craft.

One of her pieces exhibits lips sewn together with hair to showed "the suppression of freedom of speech".

Cian Dayrit, a 30-year-old Filipino multimedia artist, also tackled contemporary themes in his works, using embroidery to comment on colonialism and its present day legacies.

He created idealist political messages and maps of modern cities with textiles and colorful threads, based on archival photographs of Filipinos taken in the early 19th century by an American settler.

"This whole aspirational project of development and the future is actually depossessing marginalised communities," he said on his motives behind the works.

"The intervention is also exposing the ills of the neo-colonial present." - AFP

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