



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

Culture, Beauty, Identity

‘Stripcloth Splendours’

Contemporary Revival of West Africa’s Textile Heritage

12.09. - 27.10.2012

The London Printworks Trust,
Brixton

19. - 24.09.2012

Bargehouse, Oxo Tower Wharf,
London

as part of the AACDD 2012
Bargehouse Festival ‘Untold Gold’

This summer the British European Design Group, London and the Burkina based charitable nongovernment organisation SOS-SaveOurSkills present the exhibition ‘Stripcloth Splendours - Contemporary Revival of West Africa’s Textile Heritage’ as part of the British Council’s International Architecture and Design Showcase 2012. Drawn from the unique ‘Projet de Tissage’ in Burkina Faso, this exhibition brings together for the first time in the UK, the story of the ancient textile traditions and heritage of West Africa and its survival in the 21st Century.

‘Projet de Tissage’ began in 2006 in partnership with the British European Design Group, London and the European Union organization EU-ACP CDE-Centre for the Development of Enterprise in Brussels. In 2007 the charitable non-government organization SOS-SaveOurSkills was founded and registered in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso headed by its Burkinabe co-founder and Africa Director Desiré Maurice Ouédraogo, a French university trained textile engineer and one of the leading textile experts in his country.

The mission of SOS-SaveOurSkills is to secure the cultural, professional and economic survival of West African traditional cotton cultivating and processing skills, in particular handspinning 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.



Cotton cultivation in hand-woven stripcloth

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, weaving and tailoring. 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.

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.



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

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 often 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.

SOSSaveOurSkills 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 Founder of SOS-SaveOurSkills said:

“Projet de Tissage represents an extraordinary journey towards the re-habilitation and restoration of traditional cotton cultivation and processing and 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 ‘Projet de Tissage’ over the years, such as the EU-ACP CDE-Centre for the Development of Enterprise, Brussels, the Shell Foundation and Comic Relief UK’.

We are delighted that this unique project is being shown as part of the British Council’s International Architecture and Design Showcase 2012 and the London 2012 Festival. This will be the first time that the ‘Projet de Tissage’ has been shown in the UK and this exhibition will enable the public to engage and learn about the extraordinary heritage of Burkina Faso’s textile traditions, both what it has been and its future potential.”

‘Stripcloth Splendours’ Events Programme

As part of the exhibition there will be a special events programme taking place at The London Printworks Trust, Brixton, the Bargehouse, Oxo Tower Wharf and the London Design Festival at The Victoria & Albert Museum

‘Why Indigenous Design Matters’

Seminar and Panel Discussion

Friday, 20th September 2012

10 am – 12 noon

V&A, Sackler Education Centre, Seminar Room 1

Free Admission

‘Contemporary Textile Design based on Cultural Identity and Heritage’

Seminar and Panel Discussion

Thursday 24th October 2012

6.30 – 9 pm

The London Printworks Trust

Free Admission

The exhibition and events programme has been kindly supported by the British Council, The British European Design Group, The London Printworks Trust, SOS-SaveOurSkills UK and the London Design Festival at the V&A

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. The 'Stripcloth Splendours' Exhibitions take place at:

The London Printworks Trust

Unit 7, Piano House, 7 Brighton Terrace, London, SW9 8DJ

12th September – 27th October 2012

Nearest tube station: Brixton

For more information about The London Printworks Trust visit:

londonprintworkstrust.wordpress.com

As part of the African and African-Caribbean Design Diaspora

AACDD 2012 Bargehouse Festival 'Untold Gold'

The Bargehouse, Oxo Tower Wharf, London SE1

19th – 24th September 2012

Nearest tube/train station: Southwark, Lambeth North, Waterloo

For more information about the African and African-Caribbean Design Diaspora Initiative (AACDD) visit:

www.aacdd.org

Bargehouse is owned and managed by Coin Street Community Builders.

For more information about the Bargehouse visit:

www.coinstreet.org

Coin Street
community builders

bargehouse
oxo tower wharf

2. 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

3. Karin-Beate Philips is the Founding Director of the British European Design Group and Founding Director of the charitable non-government organisations SOS-SaveOurSkills Africa, UK and Germany

4. The British Council's International Architecture and Design Showcase Part two takes place from the 17th August - 23rd September as part of the London 2012 Festival.

For more information visit:

backoftheenvelope.britishcouncil.org

www.london2012.com/festival

For additional British Council press enquiries contact:

alex.bratt@britishcouncil.org

5. The London Design Festival takes place across London from the 14th - 23rd September 2012.

For more information visit:

www.londondesignfestival.com

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