



The Artists of International Folk Art Market | Santa Fe

The Extraordinary Stories Behind the Extraordinary Art

“I wish I could put a basket made in Rwanda in the home of every American . . . by people who’ve been through things that no American will ever know. And they’ve concluded, after being humbled by their own rage and the pain of their losses, that what we have in common is much more important than our differences. If I could give one gift, I’d put that basket—with an explanation of what it is and who made it and why—in every home in America.”

—PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON, *Condé Nast Traveler*

On July 10, 11, and 12, 2015, master artists from 57 countries will show their work at the International Folk Art Market | Santa Fe. Below are just seven of the many stories behind the beautiful work. These artists, and more than 150 others, are the heart of the Market. Their art has been chosen by a panel of experts from that of more than 400 applications for its exceptional beauty, quality, and authenticity.



The Artist: **Meeri Tuya,**
Maji Moto Widows Project
The Country: **Kenya**
The Medium: **Beaded jewelry**

Maasai girls are rarely permitted to attend school beyond the elementary grades. They drop out and are married to far older men. Their husbands typically pre-decease them. The outcome for the widows is stigma and hardship. Meeri Tuya was one such Maasai girl. She dropped out of school in the fourth grade to be married. When her 80-year-old husband died, she was newly pregnant. Her father refused her shelter. In 2007, a progressive Maasai chief recognized the plight of widows like Meeri and founded a sanctuary for them on tribal lands. Today, the Maji Moto Widows Village is home to Maasai widows who are prohibited from remarrying or inheriting or owning land after the deaths of their husbands. Child care responsibilities are shared. Meeri now attends high school. In 2014, she represented the Maji Moto Widows Project at the International Folk Art Market | Santa Fe for the first time. **The Art:** The Maasai widows make beaded jewelry and objects in bright and bleached colors that reflect the contrasts found in their environment. Colors and patterns follow generations-old traditions, with different designs used for pieces meant for different age groups. The jewelry is especially striking, with its many dazzling colors, and each bead tells a story about the artist’s life. Beads, leather, seeds, and wire are used in crafting the dazzling bracelets, pendants, and necklaces, including wedding collars, as well as belts and bags. Before the Maji Moto Widows Project’s first appearance at the Market in 2014, the widows sold their jewelry only to tourists who found their way to the sanctuary camp. Now each woman who contributes jewelry to the project receives some personal income. The rest is pooled into a fund, a kind of giving circle, that the widows collectively decide how to spend. They have used the money to buy food staples in drought years, as well as to pay school fees for Maasai girls.

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The Artist: **Rosmery Elizabeth Pacheco,**
Cooperativa de Alfombras
The Country: **Guatemala**
The Medium: **Rug hooking**

Rosmery Elizabeth Pacheco was just 13 years old the first time textile artist and educator Mary Anne Wise traveled from Minnesota to bring a rug-hooking workshop to Maya women in the Guatemalan highlands. At five, Rosmery had begun cleaning houses for \$1 a day. She lives in Chiyax, which today is one of six small highland villages where the 52 Maya women of the Cooperativa de Alfombras live and work. In 2011, Mary Anne Wise and Cultural Cloth co-founder Jody Slocum returned to Guatemala to train seven Maya women—the cooperative’s founding group—in advanced rug-hooking techniques, enabling them to teach in turn. At 16, Rosmery was their youngest student. She hooks rugs at home with her single mother, who had to overcome her early objections that Rosmery’s time would be better spent continuing to clean houses. With the money she’s earned, she bought land to improve the one-room adobe house that shelters their family of five. Rosmery has formed a young women’s rug-hooking group. The cooperative members in their village gather together once a week. While every cooperative member creates her own hooked rugs individually, the collective shares specific patterns that have been passed down for generations. **The Art:** *Alfombras* (“street rugs”) are a fundamental part of Guatemalan cultural and religious life, shared by religious communities during Holy Week pageants leading up to Easter. The cooperative describes rug hooking as “an evolution of our textile repertoire and a way of portraying our culture in a new format.” While the rugs in the past were knotted from wool pile, the Cooperativa de Alfombras changed all that. After the women took to rug hooking enthusiastically, they began sifting through used clothing as source materials. Recycled clothing cut into strips begins the rug-hooking process. 2014 was the Cooperativa’s first year at the International Folk Art Market | Santa Fe, and they enjoyed a near sellout of their wares.



The Artist: **François Fresnais and Sylvie Didier,**
Poterie de Sampigny
The Country: **France**
The Medium: **Glazed earthenware**

The survival and revival of glazed earthenware in France lies behind the Poterie de Sampigny’s story. Sylvie Didier and her husband, François Fresnais, both trained in ceramics in art school in Bourges, France. In 1984, after they had worked at the famous Clousclat pottery, they established their own workshop in an 18th-century mill in Burgundy. François turns and models the earthenware. Sylvie glazes and decorates it with handmade slips. Their specialty is a ceramic form that had persisted in France for centuries before almost completely disappearing after World War II. The potters say that the traditional earthenware reflected the simplicity and often the humor of daily life during pre-industrial conditions that were precarious. The country of France recognized François and Sylvie in 2007 as “Living Heritage” producers who are keeping vibrant the utilitarian and aesthetic earthenware objects that decorated French households for centuries. **The Art:** The ancient glazed earthenware shapes, patterns, and designs of medieval potters, including playful female figures, plates, and planters from southwestern France, are given new life at Poterie de Sampigny, one of the last (more) traditional potteries in France.

Burgundy, of course, is known for its wine, so don't be surprised to see many raised bunches of grapes attesting to the pleasures of quaffing.



The Artist: **Aroti Rani, Living Blue**

The Country: **Bangladesh**

The Medium: **Kheta Bengali quilts**

In Bangladesh, a *kheta* is a birthright. Almost every newborn child receives a *kheta*—a simple, robust quilt traditionally made from recycled saris that have softened with age—when they enter the world. Almost every Bangladeshi woman knows how to make them. The Living Blue textile collective came into existence to pair the centuries-old tradition of *khetas* in Bangladesh with the sourcing of indigo dye native to northwestern Bangladesh and the region of Bengal. With the colonization of the indigo trade in the early 20th century, planters were exploited and farmers forced into starvation; now the Living Blue organization is replanting indigo as an organic rotation crop that replenishes the soil between rice harvests.

The Living Blue label falls under the auspices of a social enterprise organization, Nijera Cottage and Village Industries (NCVI), in collaboration with CARE Bangladesh. Master quilter Sona Rani Roy represented Living Blue at the International Folk Art Market | Santa Fe for the first time in 2014. This year will be Living Blue's second Market appearance, with master artist Aroti Rani, who lives in the village of Goalpara with her husband, daughter, and in-laws. She specializes in making *shibori* quilts, which take six months to complete. The *kheta* texture has been revitalized by master artists like Roy and Rani, who create the quilts' distinctive undulating, wave-evoking surface. **The Art:** *Kheta khadi* quilts are traditional Bengali hand-stitched quilts dyed with organically grown *Indigofera tinctoria*. They reflect local geographies of Bangladesh in their patterns and designs. Living Blue also presents a range of scarves, stoles, and cushion covers at the Market.



The Artist: **Dahyalal Atmaram Kudecha, Independent Artist**

The Country: **India**

The Medium: **Weaving/handloom**

Weaving is the traditional profession of Dahyalal Atmaram Kudecha's district of Kutch, in western India, where his family has resided for seven centuries. After the 2001 Gujarat earthquake that killed 12,000 people in Kutch, Dahyalal, who had worked for a weaver for 25 years, decided to follow a lifelong dream to become a designer of weavings and an educator. His first student was his wife. In 2008, he took

Kala Raksha Vihyalaya's (KRV) yearlong design course, which enabled him to come up with design innovations in his weaving practice. He says that as an independent artist, "I enjoy the sense of independence and freedom and the satisfaction of

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standing on my own feet.” He now teaches at KRV as a core faculty member. His wife and one of his sons work in the family business. **The Art:** When Ali MacGraw attended the 2014 International Folk Art Market | Santa Fe draped in a tasseled Dahyalal Atmaram Kudecha weaving, it proved eye-catching for many other Market visitors. Dahyalal’s textiles include handwoven stoles in cotton yarns with warp-and-weft ikat patterns, inspired by textiles of the nomadic Robari people. Other Dahyalal handweavings are inspired by the agrarian Kanbi and Ahir people.



The Artist: **Janet Nkubana, Gahaya Links**
The Country: **Rwanda**
The Medium: **Handwoven baskets**

Janet Nkubana spent her childhood in a refugee camp in Uganda, where she learned firsthand what it means to be poor and hungry. When she returned to her native Rwanda after the devastating genocide of 1994, she encountered scores of women, most of them newly widowed, facing the same challenges. She helped these women—Hutu and Tutsi—organize into a basket-weaving cooperative called Gahaya Links. “I realized that this was an opportunity not just for women to earn money, it was an opportunity to build peace,” says Janet. “It was a chance to help heal the wounds from the genocide and war. It did not matter if one woman’s husband had killed another’s. I said, ‘Don’t we breathe the same air? Speak the same language? Don’t we all love our children? Let us just weave and try to put the past behind us.’” In recognition of her work, Janet won the Hunger Project’s 2008 Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger. Today, Gahaya Links has close to 4,000 weavers whose art is helping them earn an income and rebuild lives. Artists from Gahaya Links have participated in Mentor to Market training programs and were featured in the *Empowering Women* exhibit at the Museum of International Folk Art in 2010.

The Art: Janet returns to the Market with Gahaya Links’ signature “peace baskets.” These exquisite baskets are featured in collections worldwide, including MoMA’s. Coming out of the weaving traditions, Gahaya Links will also bring a new collection of earrings made by women with AIDS, enabling them to make a sustainable living from their traditional artwork.



The Artist: **Rangina Hamidi, Kandahar Treasure**
The Country: **Afghanistan**
The Medium: **Fine-needle embroidery**

“Trade, not aid, can bring substantial and sustainable change to disenfranchised women,” says Rangina Hamidi. When Rangina was four years old, her family fled Kandahar for America, but she never forgot her homeland, nor did she escape horrifying wartime personal tragedies. After receiving a degree in religion from the University of Virginia, she returned to Afghanistan and co-founded Afghans for a Civil Society. At the time, many Afghani families had no alternative but to become involved in the

dangerous and illegal trade in poppies used in heroin production. Rangina helped the families to revive traditional embroidery, a cultural heritage almost lost in the days of the Taliban. Afghans for a Civil Society became a way for women to safely support their families while at the same time satisfying deep and long-repressed creativity. “This work is a way for the women of Kandahar, once so marginalized, to engage once again with that world,” says Rangina. **The Art:** The embroidery—fine-needle, exquisitely detailed work known as *khamak*, featuring rich colors and elaborate designs—provides income for the artists and is helping to fund literacy, health care, and grassroots political training for many women. Rangina has participated in the Mentor to Market program.

For more information or photos, or to schedule artist interviews, please contact Clare Hertel at clare@clarehertelcommunications.com, 505-474-6783.

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