



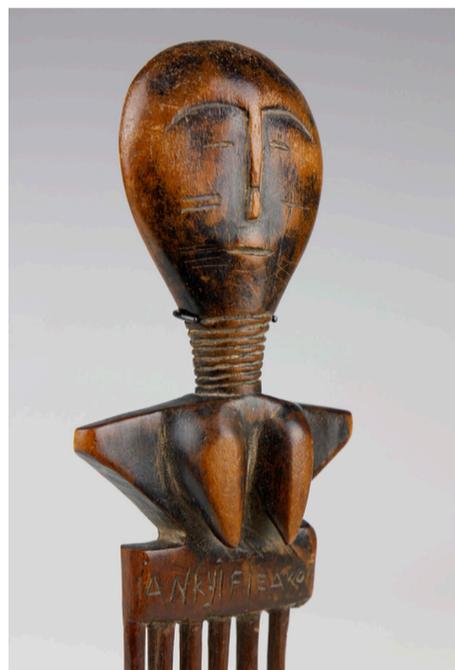
Bryan Reeves: Tribal Gathering

Art for the head and the heart

Whether the artist intends it to be or not, all art is a window into the lives and culture of the people who make it. This is especially when it comes to tribal art from the African continent. Whilst there can be no unified trends across such an enormous landmass, in general tribal art is functional as well as beautiful.

This aesthetic utility is at the heart of *Tribal Gathering London's* first in-person exhibition since lockdown; *Head and Hair: The Art of Adornment*. The exhibition covers everything from the neck up: with a startling array of hats, headdresses, crowns, combs, hair pins and parters collected from across Africa. Bryan Reeves, the proprietor of *Tribal Gathering*, has been buying and selling tribal art for nearly three decades; but in speaking to him it's clear that his passion for the art he brings together remains white hot.

Tribal Gathering's new location on Ladbroke Grove comes across as much as an Aladdin's cave as a gallery and Reeves's deep affection and enthusiasm for the collection he has built is an almost physical presence over the course of our chat. Due to the nature of the tribal art market, it takes years to acquire and assemble the pieces for an exhibition, more than enough time to fall in love with them. "I'm in no great rush to sell some of these" he laughs, admitting to "a certain sinking feeling in your stomach when someone buys a major piece" Reeves is a central luminary for tribal art in London (*Tribal Gathering* is the only such gallery in the capital) the founding member for Tribal Art London: the leading art fair for tribal art in London.



Top left:
Head & Hair. Modelling a hair pin.
Top right:
Woman's ceremonial head adornment. Lega culture. Democratic Republic of Congo.
Middle left:
Kwere hair comb. Tanzania.
Middle right:
Comb (Duafe). Akan, Ghana.
Above:
Bamileke prestige hat. Cameroon.

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Bryan Reeves; Tribal Gathering London

Bryan's deep knowledge of the art form sees him uncovering unexpected depths in items as ostensibly prosaic as hair pins. In tribal African culture, headgear often serves as a crucial shorthand for personal identity: representing everything from the wearer's family (living and dead), their community and even their perceived destiny; fashion statements in the most literal sense of the word. Whilst the exhibition is focused on items that frequently have a ritual purpose, these are functional, even necessary objects as well. Reeves explains that across the African diaspora tools to shape and control hair served as miniature works of art as of themselves, but often were very much intended for day-to-day life. The delicately carved hairpins might teem with the writhing forms of man and beasts but they are not so removed from their original function that you can't imagine using them to hold up your hair. It's this alive quality to the objects on exhibit compared to other classical forms of art that's the partial inspiration for the exhibit: the items on display are not just historical curios but something living, that relate to our own lives and that we can enter into a conversation with.

Whilst there is obviously a finite number of tribal artefacts (the ever-active forgeries market notwithstanding)

Reeves explains that this is something of a febrile time within the market. A huge selection of the original buyers of tribal art were post-war collectors and enthusiasts, many of whom have recently begun to pass on their collections as inheritances. These collections are now ending up back on the market; with a younger audience, hungry for genuine authenticity increasingly becoming buyers. Frequently buyers are from Africa themselves, with Reeves commenting that even in the last two years his African client list has exploded. Tribal Art returning to its homeland is "a big slow wick that's burning", with its popularity amongst the young African intelligentsia beginning to steadily increase. Whatever the future, for tribal art it seems certain that Reeves will be involved.

Thanks to the vagaries of the past year, *Tribal Gathering* has been hosting some digital showings (*Head and Hair* was originally supposed to take place last March) but whilst they've had success with these platforms and have plans to continue with new ones, Reeves is somewhat sceptical of the efficacy of larger shows versus seeing pieces in person. Some of the larger digital shows see dealers, unrestrained by size limitations, each place hundreds of lots on sale. As a result, quality can often be drowned out in the visual noise of literally thousands of images that sees you "lost in the ocean of imagery and overload". By contrast, in person the art has a startling vivacity that positively demands your attention; especially after a year starved of new aesthetics. Walking into *Tribal Gathering* you can't help but feel an almost physical thrill at the collection's impact. In Reeves's own words "we all need wow factor, now more than ever".

Head and Hair: The Art of Adornment is running until 10 July 2021
Gallery viewing by appointment
7 days a week
www.tribalgatheringlondon.com
Tribal Gathering London
335 Ladbroke Grove, W10 6HA