

Jonathan Hope relaxing  
in Solo's Mangkunegaran  
Kraton.

# JONATHAN HOPE

The first of many visits to Indonesia in 1974 resulted in Jonathan Hope's lifelong fascination with the arts and culture of Southeast Asia. Soon after returning to London he began trading in textiles and in 1977 he worked on the first ever museum exhibition of Southeast Asian ikat in the United Kingdom at the Abbot Hall Museum in Kendal, Cumbria. The curator was the museum's director, the late Mary Burket OBE, and all the textiles were from Hope's own collection. Over the next decade he travelled extensively in Asia, from Tibet to outer island Indonesia. During this time, a widening circle of international collectors and museums became regular clients. Research was always important to Jonathan and he published numerous articles on various subjects, usually for Hali magazine, the textile journal, for which he is also a contributing editor. His acquired knowledge and first hand experience of Asian artifacts and culture meant that he has often been invited as a guest lecturer by several institutions. These include the Sotheby's education course, the Textile and Rug Society of Great Britain, the British Museum BA course and more recently S.O.A.S. After spending much time in museums studying their collections of world, ethnographic art, he began acquiring examples of sculpture and metalwork from the countries in which he had travelled. Many of these pieces are now in important private and public collections, including the Australian National Gallery, the Dallas Museum of Art and the Musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac. In 2011 his collection of fine Javanese batik and Indian export textiles, made for Indonesia, was exhibited at the Edinburgh International Festival. The show was called "Heirlooms" and was curated by Jonathan Hope himself. It attracted much attention and was favourably reviewed by the world's press, from "the Hindu" to "the Wall Street Journal". Parcours has become an annual event for Jonathan and he greatly enjoys the interaction with both academics and amateur collectors from so many countries.

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**YOU SPENT A LIFETIME TRAVELLING, COLLECTING AND RESEARCHING. BUT WHAT WAS YOUR PATH TO BECOMING A DEALER?**

As a child I took more pleasure from the antiques and paintings in my parents' collections than from my toys. At the age of 10 or 11 I began browsing the antiques shops of Chelsea where we lived some of the time and would make the occasional purchase. The first specific object I bought was a Chinese export ware plate decorated with birds and butterflies and mysterious robed figures. I still have it today in fact. My grandmother had had an influential decorating and antiques business before I was born, but her taste was somehow always in the air at home.

I always wanted to travel inspired by books I had read, and remember an early trip to Morocco opening my eyes to the amazing diversity of this world. I made a few modest purchases in the souks of Marrakesh and Fez and after seeing much of that beautiful country returned home to London and sold most of my purchases, including a splendid 'ceinture de Fez' to a couple of antique dealers here.

Not convinced that this was what I wanted to do with so much of my life I nevertheless spent a lot of time admiring the artefacts and textiles displayed in those London galleries with a flavour of the 'exotic East' as much of Asia was still perceived.

**WHO BECAME YOUR PERSONAL MENTOR AS YOU BEGAN YOUR PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY?**

I do not remember having a specific mentor but the dealers who inspired me with their taste and knowledge included a gallery specialising in the arts of Afghanistan named Oxus, Jean- Claude Giacimino who had the first commercial exhibition here of tantric art, and Christopher Gibbs, whose antique shop was always full of Moroccan textiles and Persian carpet fragments. As a teenager, I remember attending a concert of sitar music that lasted all night and becoming fascinated by the *suzanishungupatthebackofthestage*. Incidents like that inspired me. I never planned to become a dealer. It just happened.

A block-printed and mordant and dye painted cotton textile made in Gujarat for export to Indonesia during the first half of the 17th century. 524cm x 98cm



**WHAT MAKES YOUR COLLECTION UNIQUE? CAN YOU TELL US A BIT MORE ABOUT SPECIFIC ITEMS OF NOTE IN YOUR COLLECTION?**

My collection at this point is eclectic. I have sculptural objects, textiles (of course )and ethnographic artefacts which come from all over the world but somehow relate to one another because they were all chosen by the same pair of eyes. Most collectors have a vision of sorts; an innate sense of how things should look.

My favourite possessions right now include a group of exquisite Javanese batiks and several splendid Indian trade cloths made in India centuries past. One of these, dating from the 17th century is more than 5 meters long and bears the forms of 11 dancing ladies, a musical instrument held in one hand and a parrot perched upon the other. I also have a really exceptional Baule figure of a seated woman with an extraordinary presence suggesting high rank and spiritual force. My collection of Javanese theatrical masks representing characters from the Ramayana stories which feature in the Wayong Wong theatre gives me immense pleasure and I am trying to research the more obscure characters at this moment.

I also enjoy the presence of a large polychrome wooden head of a Garuda, from East Java which I bought in situ around 1990 from Yamin Makawaru, a marvellous Indonesian dealer who died far too young.

**YOU ALSO PUBLISHED A NUMBER OF ARTICLES, MOSTLY FOR HALI MAGAZINE OF WHICH YOU ARE A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR. ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON A NEW PAPER ?**

I have been writing articles for Hali magazine for more than 30 years and cannot remember how many. The most important of these was called "Echoes of a Golden Age"(issue 90) and was a 5000 words study of Cambodian silk traditions, especially the superb weft ikats illustrated with my own field photographs. I had intended to do a book but at that time, the mid '90's, publishers in the West were not interested.

I have an article in the current issue called A Travellers Treasure Hunt which covers some of the same ground as this interview, with illustrations of 11 really exceptional pieces handled over a period of several decades.

A carved polychrome wooden head representing the Garuda, East Java, 19th century or earlier, for use mounted on a small wooden cart.  
73cm x 32cm



IN OUR OCTOBER CATALOGUE YOU PRESENTED A REMARKABLE CHINTZ PALEMPORE MADE ON INDIA'S COROMANDEL COAST FOR THE THE DUTCH MARKET. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE INTERESTING CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC EXCHANGES THAT THESE TEXTILES REVEAL?

I recently showed an exceptionally fine palempore on your website. This particular example made on the Coromandel coast of India around 1720-30 reflects Dutch taste of the period with glorious arrangements of flowers in each corner and a European coat-of-arms in the centre. It was discovered in Japan where it has probably been stored since the 18th century. It would have been made as a gift perhaps for a wealthy Dutch merchant stationed in Nagasaki. More than that we do not know. It demonstrates the technique of Mordant and dye painting on cotton, and resist dyeing applied with astonishing finesse by Indian artisans working from designs most probably drawn back in Europe. The global trade in textiles provided a network of design cross-pollination across continents. We see Asian inspired motifs in the European textiles and plasterwork, and even fine carpentry of the 17th and 18th centuries. Also there are chintzes produced in India for the Armenian Church with scenes from the Bible and the figure of Christ. Many of the floral motifs on Indian export cottons were taken from European floralegiums and found their way, via trade, into the design inventory of Indonesian batik makers.

HOW DO YOU STORE YOUR COLLECTION AND WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF STORING HISTORICAL TEXTILES?

I store my textiles in cupboards, folded or rolled with acid-free tissue paper and moth repellent materials such as lavender or citronella sachets which need changing every 6 months. Strong daylight, moisture and moth are the main enemies of textiles. Fortunately moth do not like cotton unless they are desperate but they do like silk and of course wool. Sometimes I put textiles into the deep-freeze for a couple of weeks which is supposed to eliminate the pests.

YOU CURATED THE EXHIBITION "HEIRLOOMS", AT THE EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL.

Adu Zatua,  
female ancestor figure  
Central Nias, Indonesia,  
blackened wood,  
19th century.  
height: 43 cm



A Tapis Kucu Kuning, ceremonial skirt-cloth, hand-spun cotton, silk, gold-wrapped thread, mica sequins, South coastal Krui region of Lampung, Sumatra; 19th century (first half). 120cm x 100cm

### HOW DID YOU EXPLORE THE CENTURIES-LONG TRADE AND INTERACTION BETWEEN INDIAN TEXTILE AND JAVANESE BATIK DESIGNS ?

Heirlooms was a beautiful show at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2011. It received more than 4000 visits from the public and had a good reception. We used a small number of Indian trade cloths and a larger number of fine Indonesian batiks to show the influence of the former upon the latter. We used perspex display boxes containing examples of the paraphernalia required to make batik, including wax, pens 'tjantings' and different types of bark and leaves for making organic dyes. There was also a copy of the Raffles History of Java open at an illustration of a gloriously dressed prince from Central Java wearing a batik dodot around his waist.

It was enjoyable to curate because I had so much support from both the "Festival people" and the local library and the botanical gardens who lent me some dried indigo branches and 18th century engravings of the materials needed for making dyes in India, rather than Indonesia. The Wall Street Journal described the show as "quietly gripping" and it received almost a full page review in India's 'The Hindu'. The Indonesian ambassador visited and thanked me "for showing my country's culture where it is little known".

### YOU ALSO COLLECT AND DEAL WITH ART PREMIER AND HAVE AN ANNUAL SHOW AT THE PARCOURS DES MONDES IN PARIS. TELL US WHY YOU DON'T LIKE THE EXPRESSION "TRIBAL ART" ?

I prefer the term "les arts premiers" or "ethnographic art" to "tribal art" only because I feel that mankind is divided into tribes everywhere. Look at America right now...It does not really mean anything, but it can be a convenient term which is why I use it as a part of my instagram address.

I have great enthusiasm for 'arts premiers' and enjoy exhibiting at Parcours des Mondes showing objects and sculpture and using textiles to bring the exhibition to life. My strength is probably the ethnographic art of South and Southeast Asia. A few years ago I sold a splendid pair of Naga figures from the Konyak people. The year before last I had a powerful Batak wooden guardian statue that went into a distinguished Parisian



collection. My African pieces are always popular as well but I am most successful with Southeast Asian works.

**YOU HAVE ALSO COLLABORATED WITH THE CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY GALERIE MAX HETZLER WHERE YOU FEATURED YOUR EXHIBITION "SPIRITS AND ANCESTORS ». HOW DID THE CONTEMPORARY COLLECTORS REACT? ARE YOU COLLECTING ANY CONTEMPORARY ART?**

My show, Spirits and Ancestors at the Max Hetzler galleries in Berlin was a lot of fun to do. It took place during the annual "gallery weekend" and again I appreciated being able to work with a team. I met a number of museum curators from various countries and the contemporary artists appeared to enjoy the exhibition. There were works from Indonesia, Nagaland, Nepal and West Africa arranged on white plinths within a white space. I think it worked and made a refreshing diversion from the contemporary shows elsewhere.

Had I not been in Berlin for a while I would never have got to see the splendid collection at the Grassi museum in Leipzig. (spelling?) For that experience alone I am profoundly grateful. Their Oceanic material is absolutely incredible.

I do occasionally buy contemporary art for example a gouache on paper by Anish Kapoor and several contemporary ceramics.

**YOU WORK BY APPOINTMENT FOR MANY YEARS NOW SO I PRESUME THIS PANDEMIC DIDN'T CHANGE TOO MUCH YOUR DYNAMIC. BUT HOW DID YOU CHALLENGE YOURSELF DURING THIS PERIOD?**

Yes, I have always worked by appointment but the pandemic has made a huge difference to my trading of course. Clients like to see and touch textiles and artefacts as well as view them on line and since travel is currently so difficult and we are all socially distanced from each other, the business has slowed down. Having said that, I have some loyal clients and they are still collecting. I have not been too sad and have used much of the time to read and write a series of memoirs about my life, my travels and the world of collectors and dealers. The next step would be to find an enthusiastic publisher.

A Mui Li, ceremonial batik hanging used in Paranakan (ethnic Chinese) weddings on the North coast of Java, made in Lasem circa 1890. 206cm x 105cm

