

Ralph Ziman: ‘I hated apartheid. I hated what it did to people around me’

The white South African-born artist talks to Charlotte Cripps about his 11-ton apartheid-era vehicle and AK-47s adorned with traditional African beadwork, which are surprising exhibits at this week’s San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show



When we think of tribal art, it’s likely to be indigenous cultural artifacts such as wooden masks, dance regalia and sculptural forms. Not AK-47 assault rifles and an 11-ton war machine that have been transformed into symbols of beauty and peace with multi-coloured traditional African beadwork.

But at the popular San Francisco Tribal and Textile Art Show this week, the artist Ralph Ziman is exhibiting apartheid-era weapons from the Casspir Project (2016), a travelling multidisciplinary fine art exhibition that was recently on display in Miami, during Art Basel.

He created the project in response to apartheid’s effects on South African culture, a regime the white South African artist fled aged 19, when he dodged military service in 1981 and moved to LA.

There are no real guns involved; instead, the AK-47’s are merely bead and galvanised wire sculptures.

The artist Ralph Ziman is exhibiting an Apartheid-era Casspir vehicle covered in 70 million African beads at the San Francisco Tribal and Textile Art Show.

Simone Niamani



Ziman's artworks including the AK-47s which are adorned in African beads explore themes of militarisation of the police, oppression, gun violence and inequality. *The Casspir Project*

“The idea with these was to do a sort of reversal of the arms trade, make beautiful non-lethal weapons in Africa and export them to the world,” Ziman tells me.

The piece de resistance is his massive revamped, apartheid-era Casspir armoured vehicle and troop carrier that will form the centrepiece of this largest and most important tribal art show in the US at the Fort Mason Centre, where visitors will also be able to drop into the American Indian Art Show.

The vehicle, titled *SPOEK I* – which means ghost in Afrikaans, a nod to the friendly cartoon strip ghost Casper – is covered in 70 million brightly coloured panels of glass beadwork made in traditional patterns, in collaboration with artisans from Zimbabwe and the Mpumalanga province of South Africa, including women of the Ndebele tribe.

Ziman whose artworks explore themes of militarisation of the police, oppression, gun violence and inequality, was inspired to reclaim it as an artwork, not only because of its place in the history of apartheid, the system of segregation and institutionalised oppression in which he grew up, but because of its relevance to modern-day America.

San Francisco: The Tribal Show and The American Indian Art Show



“The vehicle designed by the apartheid government for policing and oppressing black communities in South Africa is now showing up in Black Lives Matter protests,” he says. “This along with the assault rifle are having a devastating effect on the streets of the US.”

His project, which is being exhibited in Northern California for the first time, isn't your average exhibit for a Tribal Show.

Also on show are Ziman's knitted regalia costumes, a beaded 1930s South African postal bicycle, as well as photos from his Bone series, in which he and the aforementioned African artists adorned 3D printed replicas of endangered animal species in beads.

The works range in price from about £4,000 to over £45,000 and will sit alongside other highlights in the Tribal Show, including Peter Pap's collection of antique flatweaves, horse covers from Persia, and kilims from Turkey and Central Asia.

There are Navajo flat-woven rugs and pieces from Afghanistan, as well as one of the most complete collections of boldly coloured JB Moore rugs in the world exhibited in the American Indian Art Show.



The artist's knitted regalia costumes will sit alongside more traditional cultural artifacts such as wooden masks at the San Francisco Tribal and Textile Art Show. *Photo courtesy of The Rendon Gallery*

A Taos Pueblo Buffalo hide (circa 1890 to 1910) will be on sale for about £18,500; a Sioux War shirt (a traditional powwow outfit worn by the Native American Indians) will fetch about £46,000; while a rare Thai Court Cloth from an old Japanese collection has a price tag of nearly £58,000.

Kim Martindale who is co-producing both shows is excited about having the Casspir Project on site.

“It’s an extension of the important traditional beadwork done in Africa,” she says. “This is an example of how art evolves and historical mediums are used in contemporary ways. Fairgoers can see where these traditions come from and where they are going, which provides a deeper understanding of the art and culture.”

Ziman, 57, who was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1963, brought the 9ft-tall, 22ft-long vehicle to the US from South Africa in 2018, where they were just mothballed – “put in fields and left to rust,” he says, after being used as an “ultimate symbol of oppression” and to push away protestors of the apartheid regime.

He put the decorated Casspir on a flatbed and drove it to the port of Durban where it was loaded onto a roll-on/roll-off ship designed to carry wheeled cargo – “like a giant six-story floating car park”. “The Casspir did involve me getting an import permit as it is a ‘military’ vehicle,” he adds.



The Casspir being transported on a flatbed around the US to various exhibitions.
Photo courtesy of The Rendon Gallery

Up to 100 local Africans in South Africa worked on the vehicle, which took three years to make with “every bead hand threaded or hand woven”.

It was a cathartic experience for the artist, he says. “It was the early 1980s and the army were being sent into the townships. It felt like a civil war brewing. I had no part of me that wanted to fight for a racist, totalitarian government. I hated apartheid. I hated what it did to the people around me, the people who brought me up and were part of our family.”

He firmly believes that we need to confront the past in order to deal with the present.

“Apartheid was a scar on South Africa that still has not healed. I personally looked on the Casspir as a type of penance. I wanted a bead for every person in South Africa. We estimated 50 million beads. In the end, we used 70 million,” he says.

He also wanted to document the injustices done. He took the Casspir to townships like Soweto and interviewed people who remembered “the bad old days”.

The message of the work in his show, he says, is one of peace.

“I believe that in covering this vehicle with brightly coloured beads it becomes less threatening... The beaded surface is durable, allowing the work to be touched, and it’s my belief that by touching the vehicle, the individual can take the power away from it,” he says. “Bend your swords into plowshares. End the violence, arms race, militarised police, and heavily armed civilian population.”

The San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show and the Antique American Indian Art Show will take place from 21-23 February at the Fort Mason Centre, San Francisco (sanfranciscotribalandtextileartshow.com)

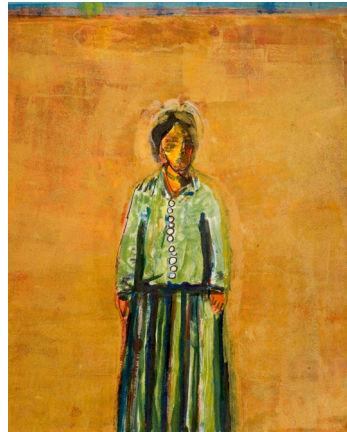


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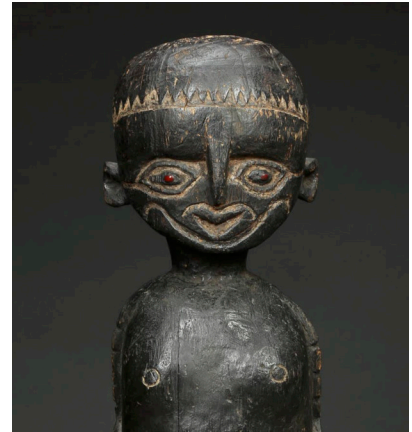
San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Wounaan Indian Basket

Michael Smith Gallery will bring an amazing collection of Wounaan Indian baskets from Panama. *Michael Smith*



American Indian Show - Aaron Freeland

Navajo artist Aaron Freeland was born into the Bitannii Clan and the Tobaaazhni Clan in Rehoboth Mission, New Mexico in 1956. He attended the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe 1973-1976. Aaron is known for both his oil paintings and graphics. His work is represented in major collections throughout America. *Aaron Freeland*



San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Papuan Gulf Figure, Turama River Area

This amazing Papuan Gulf Figure was previously in the collection of Eva and Harry Standen who founded the Bamu River Mission in 1936. It's made of wood, natural pigments and seeds. *Erik Farrow*



San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Afshar extra weft wrapped Horse Cover

Peter Pap will have this extraordinary Afshar horse cover on offer. It is exceptional both for its rarity and its artistic merit. Executed in an extra weft wrapping technique, a field of 'boteh' paisleys is drawn against a tawny apricot ground. An inner reciprocal trefoil border folds back on itself and forms a new mirrored motif within the chest flap, while an outer white border of linked rosettes frames the entire piece. The distinctive palette of this piece is seen in many mid-century small Afshar pile pieces. In this case, the drawing and resolution of both motifs and borders speaks to a heightened understanding of design and execution on the part of the weaver. *Peter Pap*



San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Chevron Beads

Carol Sissoko will bring a large bead collection. This piece is from Nigeria 1700s.



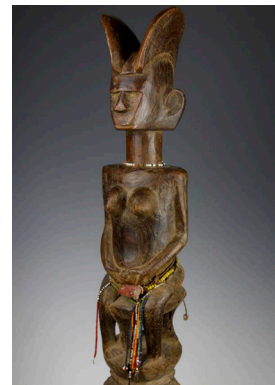
San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Albert Lubaki painting

Hunters with Wild Animal by Albert Lubaki will be part of a set on offer at the San Francisco Tribal and Textile Art Show.



American Indian Show - Antique American Indian jewelry from Turkey Mountain Traders

Turkey Mountain Traders will bring a selection of fine antique American Indian jewelry to the American Indian Art Show in San Francisco. *Turkey Mountain Traders*



San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Wood carving from Kwere culture, Tanzania 1st half 20th century

Bryan Reeves of Tribal Gathering London will offer this rare figurative ancestral post of a female holding her navel and sitting on a prestigious stool. Kwere culture, Tanzania, first half 20th century. *Bryan Reeves*

San Francisco: The Tribal Show and The American Indian Art Show



American Indian Show - American Indian Basket

This basket is offered at the American Indian Art Show by John C Hill Antique Indian Art Gallery. The show always features beautiful and important basketry
John C Hill Antique Indian Art Gallery



San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Ecuadorian ikats

Kinara Handmade will bring Ecuadorian ikats to the show. They are woven using a resist dyeing technique. Each textile is handwoven on a back strap loom and tied off in a series of hundreds of knots. The ikats are heritage woven which means each pattern comes from the culture in which they were woven. The patterns have a cultural meaning that is important to the history and heritage of the people of Ecuador. By purchasing an ikat from the weavers, Kinara Handmade is supporting a dying cultural heritage as well as preserving the art of weaving.
Kinara Handmade



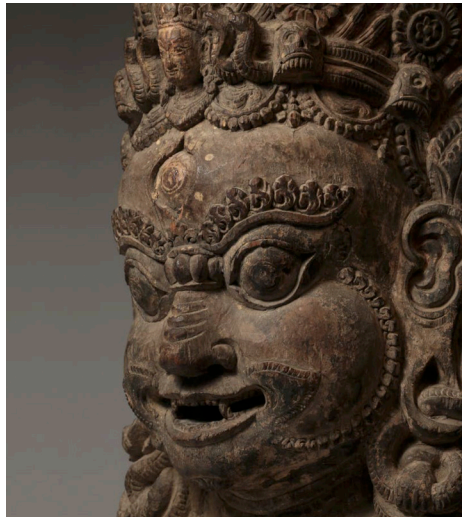
San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Ancient Marble Annular Eye Idol

On offer by New York based Art For Eternity, this Ancient Marble Annular Eye Idol, is from Anatolia, 5th to 4th Millennium BC. Size: 13-5/8 x 11 inches (34.5 cm x 28 cm) Height + custom mount. White marble Anatolian idols were often highly schematic in nature; this specimen is noteworthy for its abstraction and quality.
Art for Eternity



American Indian Show - J.B. Moore Weaving

This weaving is part of the American Indian Art Show and its special exhibition "Variations on a Loom: The J.B. Moore Collection."



San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Bhairava Mask

On offer from Vicki Shiba of Asian and Tribal Art, this Bhairava mask from Nepal, Ca. 18th century, made of wood (H: 30 in x W: 14 in x D: 8 in) is not to be missed. *Asian & Tribal Art*



San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Hand-Stitched Tunic by Chinalai Modern

This hand-stitched, hand-embroidered reversible tunic by Somporn Intaraprayong and her seamstresses, on indigo dyed cotton will be on offer at Chinalai Modern. *Chinalai Modern*

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American Indian Show - Taos Pueblo Buffalo hide (1890 to 1910)

A Taos Pueblo Buffalo hide (1890 to 1910) will be on offer at the San Francisco American Indian Art Show.



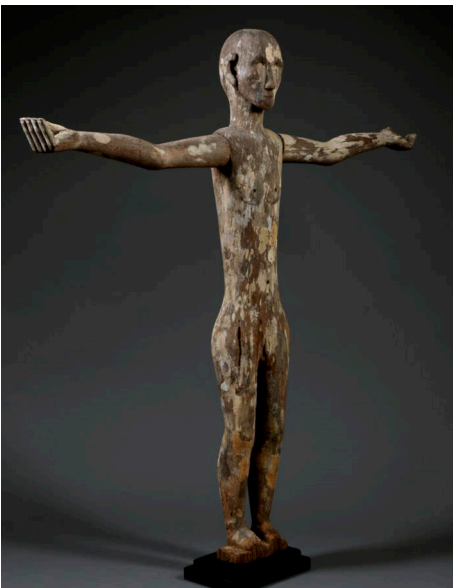
San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Maya Hacha, Bird of Prey

This Maya Hacha, Bird of Prey, Granite Guatamala, is from the Pacific South Coast (Late Classic AD 600- AD 900).



American Indian Show - J.B. Moore Weaving

This weaving is part of the American Indian Art Show and its special exhibition "Variations on a Loom: The J.B. Moore Collection."



San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Territory Marker

Offered by Mark A Johnson Tribal Art out of Marina del Rey, CA. A hardwood territory marker that is Kantu or Kebahan Dayak from the Borneo Island, Indonesia. 19th century or earlier, height: 48" (121.9 cm), arm span: 49" (124.5 cm)
Mark A Johnson Tribal Art



American Indian Show - Variant 02 in collection plate XXIV

This weaving is part of the American Indian Art Show and its special exhibition "Variations on a Loom: The J.B. Moore Collection."



San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Dancing Threads Textile Treasures from Indonesia

Curtis and Margaret Keith Clemson were school teachers in Indonesia from 1974 to 1983; during this time they travelled extensively and fell in love with the amazing variety of textiles in the different cultures of the archipelago. They will have hundreds of pieces on offer at the San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show.

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San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show - Chinalai Modern

Chinalai Modern is a favorite exhibitor at the San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show.



American Indian Show - Germantown Weavings

Beautiful Germantown weavings will be on offer at the American Indian Art Show in San Francisco.



San Francisco Tribal and Textile Show

Show goes at the San Francisco Tribal and Textile Art Show will see over 100 exhibitors at the 2020 fair.