

AROUND THE WORLD TO SANTA FE

JULY 2010

New Mexico

MAGAZINE

**Arts
Extravaganza:**

**World
Folk Art**

**Spanish
Market**

**O'Keeffe
Anew**

**Nature's
Secrets:**

**Hidden
Forests**

**River
Diaries**



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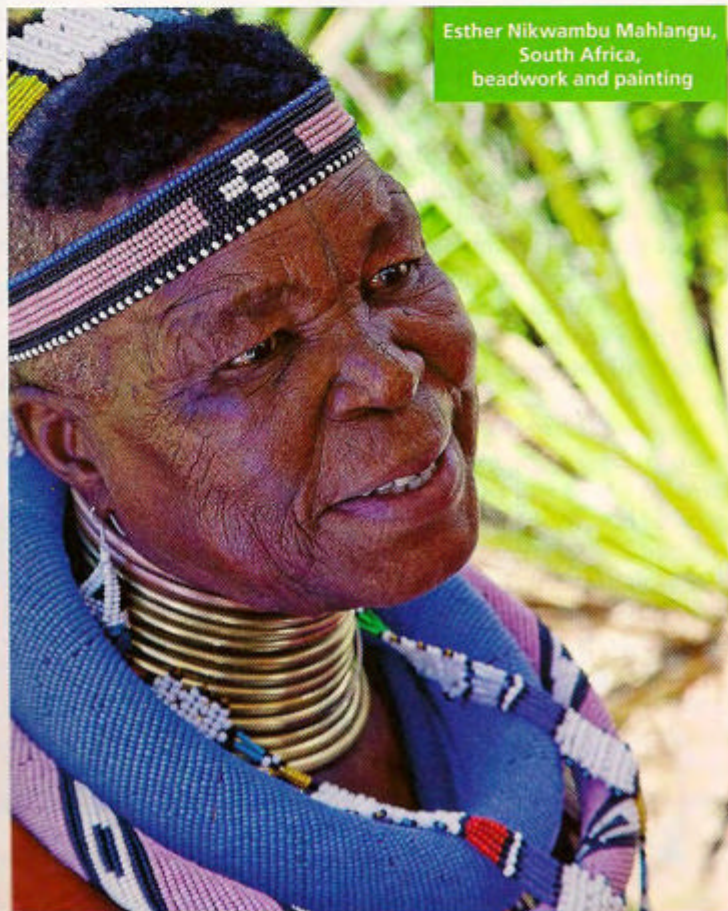


Baskets from Swaziland

WORLD TOUR

As a Santa Fe-based travel journalist, I've crisscrossed the globe for 30 years, at last count had visited more than 70 countries, and am an obsessive collector of folk art from some of the planet's most remote and exotic places. Friends jokingly call my abode "the Museum of International Folk Art annex."

About five years ago, I was in South Africa. I had heard about the Ndebele tribe of that region, and, with great difficulty, I found a Zulu guide who could negotiate the Ndebele language and take me on a four-hour ride to the remote village in Mpumalanga where Esther Nikwambu Mahlangu lived. As an obsessive and longtime collector, I wanted to buy a piece of beadwork from this master.



Esther Nikwambu Mahlangu,
South Africa,
beadwork and painting

This month, an estimated 20,000 folk-art lovers will arrive at the **SANTA FE INTERNATIONAL FOLK ART MARKET** to browse the works of 170+ artists from more than 50 countries. Circle the globe in a day with writer **Judith Fein** and photographer **Paul Ross**.

So imagine my surprise to see, sitting pretty in a booth at the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market, Esther Mahlangu—with copper and brass coils wrapped around her neck and legs, she's unmistakable—selling her beadwork and paintings! Not far away are Mayans from Guatemala, selling the same backstrap-loom-woven *huipiles* (blouses) I bought in their highland villages. In another cluster of booths I find Elizabeth Savanhu, from Zimbabwe, selling *weya*—pictorial patchwork art fashioned from recycled materials, each piece telling a story of village life. (A particularly colorful *weya* has hung in my living room for years.) And I peek through a crowd of admirers to see Moussa Albaka, from Niger, dashing handsome in layered tunics of sky-blue and white and a flowing black turban, selling silver Tuareg pendants similar to the one I bought in Africa three months before.

Now I understand why the steadily growing Santa Fe International Folk Art Market draws thousands each year, including both novice and seasoned collectors, as well as folks with a penchant for travel: From July 9 to 11, 2010, master craftspeople and artists from more than 50 countries come here to sell their work. You don't need a plane ticket or visa, there are free shuttles to transport you to the market on Museum Hill, and for \$15 at the gate, you can experience remote, enticing cultures from half a world away. Lunch on exotic foods. Attend free performances of Japanese chanting, Indian dancing, or Latin jazz. Feed your culture-loving soul by watching artists demonstrate their crafts in a quiet, low-key, authentic way.



Elizabeth Savanhu,
Zimbabwe,
weya patchwork art



Moussa Albaka,
Niger,
silver Tuareg
pendants



Felt dolls from Kyrgyzstan



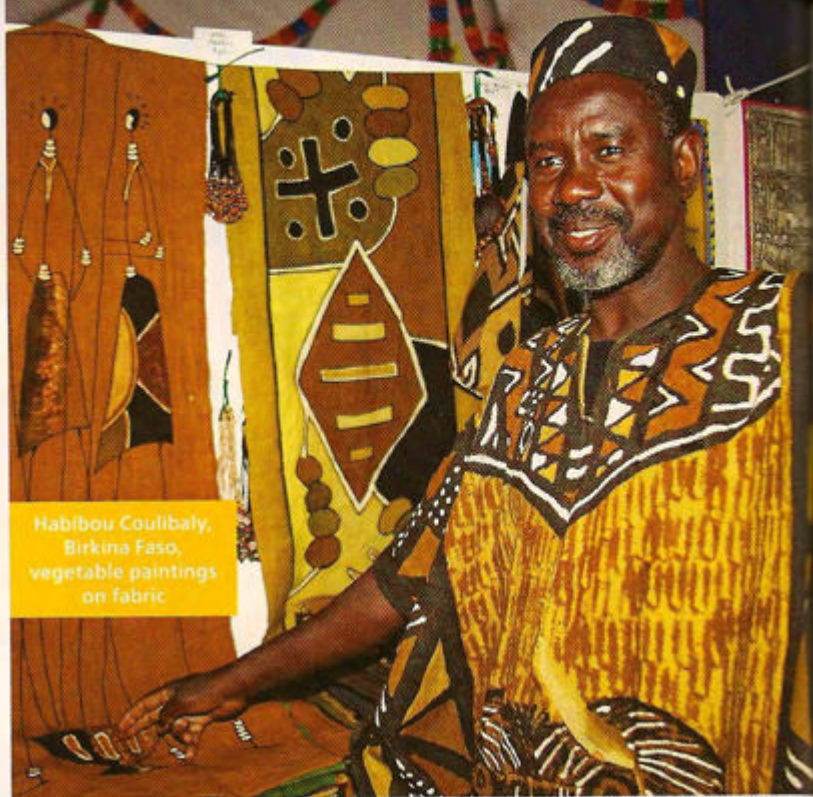
Jewelry from Tibet

The festivities begin on the evening of Friday, July 9, when several hundred enthusiasts pay \$125 for a sneak preview, one-on-one time with the artists, a lavish buffet, and the most talked-about event at the market: a procession of all of the artists in their native attire, walking, swaying, and boogying down the runway in alphabetical order, by country. “Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bolivia; Botswana,” the announcer calls out, and the audience is transfixed by the once-in-a-lifetime chance to see all of these countries at once as represented by their artists—rather than by their warriors, athletes, or statesmen. By the time the last countries are announced—Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Zambia, Zimbabwe—the audience is standing, applauding, and cheering.

“I’ve been all over the world,” says a gentle, gray-haired woman sitting next to me, “and never have I seen anything like this.”

When the market officially opens the next morning, early birds swoop down on the stalls, buying prized pieces they’ll cherish for a lifetime. Other folks are so dazed by the array of art they don’t know where to begin. The choices of affordable folk art in riotous colors are endless: textiles, sculpture, jewelry, silk jackets, caftans, baskets, pottery, paintings, toys, slippers, hats, gourds, beadwork, handbags, table runners, dolls, wall hangings, carpets, lacquered boxes made of papier-mâché, amulets.

“We should buy as much as we can,” a petite woman from



Habibou Coulibaly,
Burkina Faso,
vegetable paintings
on fabric

Corrales tells her husband as he slips an embroidered vest over his shirt. “How often do we get to do good by shopping?”

She’s right. The artists, carefully selected by a panel of experts, keep 90 percent of their earnings. And the money shoppers spend here helps bring food, clothing, and medical care to refugee camps, builds health clinics, and pays for wells. It gives financial independence to women in Afghanistan, and provides support for villagers struggling to survive the devastations of war and social, political, and environmental upheaval.

“What will you do with the money you earn here?” I ask Esther Mahlangu.

“You saw the school when you visited me,” she says, referring to a large tree near her house where a gaggle of children sat, learning the geometric painting and beading for which the Ndebele are famous. “Now perhaps I can build a proper schoolhouse.”


Besides financial benefits, artists derive deep satisfaction and pleasure from telling people about their lives and cultures. Habibou Coulibaly, from Burkina Faso, reveals that his father had four wives, who didn’t always get along, which created a lot of tension for their children. His vegetable paintings on woven fabric depict women and their daily work, the difficulties of polygamy, people who don’t pay their debts, and the importance of honesty.

Reinata Sadimba, from Mozambique, sits among her anthropomorphic pottery, smiling as a translator tells potential buyers how each piece comes to Reinata in a dream, and that she often gets up in the middle of the night to start work, so that she doesn’t lose the immediacy of her vision. She holds up a tan-colored ceramic woman with lip and earplugs; the figure sports the same facial tattoos that adorn Reinata’s face.

Ousmane Macina, from Mali, displays an enormous pair of gold earrings. “These are worn by Fulani women,” he explains. “They start putting earrings in children’s ears when they’re very small. The ears get bigger over time, and so do

JUDIE FEIN’S 10 TIPS FOR BUYING FOLK ART

- To evaluate quality, look at a piece for the delicacy of its execution and the details of the finishing.
- Expect to pay more for time-consuming work, like miniatures or gold leaf.
- Trust your emotional response to a piece. It doesn’t matter what others think—if you like it and would enjoy having it in your home, buy it.
- Look for commonality with a piece; for example, if it depicts mountains and you love mountains, or it’s about marriage and you’ve recently wed.
- Talk to the artist about the piece’s meaning or cultural significance. You’re buying not only the art, but the story that comes with it.
- Have someone photograph you with the artist and the work.
- Do your holiday shopping in advance at folk-art markets. It’s a way to bring the world to your friends and relatives.
- Don’t be afraid to bargain. In much of the world, this is commonplace. Go back and forth a few times until a deal is struck; if both parties walk away feeling good, it’s fair.
- At the end of the day on Sunday afternoon, prices are generally lower, as the artist is anxious to sell his wares.
- Get the artist’s contact information, in case you or your friends want to buy more pieces in the future.

A photograph of Reinata Sadimba, a woman from Mozambique, sitting and holding a large, brown, textured clay figurine of a monkey. She is wearing a red dress with a white collar and a long red beaded necklace. The background shows other people at a market.

Reinata Sadimba,
Mozambique,
pottery



“They start putting earrings in children’s ears when they’re very small.

The ears get bigger over time, and so do the earrings... I make them from 22-karat unrefined gold, in all sizes—from small to very big.”

—Ousmane Macina



the earrings. These earrings are the symbol of our tribe. No one can replicate them, although they have tried. I make them from 22-karat unrefined gold, in all sizes—from small to very big.”

“Are you sure you want to hear the story?” asks Yuzhen Pan, from Guizhou Province, in southern China. When I nod, she talks about the figures, which are made by pounding egg yolk into cotton fabric. “This is a hero who offended the gods and was sent down to the human world,” she begins. “Everyone else was killed by angry gods in a flood, and only he remained. He had listened to the whispers of the gods and climbed into a boat, so he was saved.”

A young couple, mesmerized by the tale, exclaims, “That’s like the Noah story!”

Moussa Albaka speaks proudly of the role of art in Niger. “The foundation is the artisans, who belong to the Inadan caste. They’re the only ones who have the right to critique the chiefs. They are empowered to resolve conflicts. They can go to a chief to ask him if a boy and girl can have permission to marry. Without them, the culture is lost.”

The idea that native artists keep culture alive and are highly valued is very familiar to people in New Mexico. The Museum of International Folk Art, the largest folk-art museum in the world, is renowned for its imaginative exhibits; its much-loved Girard Wing, with its collection of thousands of figures, masks, costumes, and textiles from around the globe, is at the top of the must-see list for tourists and locals alike. Spanish Colonial arts such as *colcha* embroidery, tinwork, *retablos*, and *bultos* are handed down by grandparents to parents to children, and sold at the summer and winter Spanish Markets (respectively, July 24–25 and December 4–5, 2010). Native American jewelry and pottery-making—precious traditions that are passed down as cultural heritage—are made and sold throughout New Mexico, and August’s annual Indian Market draws more visitors

“Navajo people love color, because where we live, it gets so brown in the summer. The same is true of African cultures, where it also gets dry and brown.”

—Rose Williams

than does any other event in the state.

During my visit to the Folk Art Market, the nearby Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian hosts a visit and demonstration by Rose Williams, the matriarch of Navajo pottery, who is somewhere between 94 and 99 years old. Attired in colorful earrings, pin, bracelet, and rings, the diminutive artist fashions a clay pot in front of delighted onlookers, and says she credits her longevity to her daily work with clay. When the demand for Native pottery declined with the advent of trading posts offering metal cookware, Williams kept the ceramic tradition alive by making drum pots, which are used for ceremonies and are still in great demand. Although known for her large drum pots, these days Williams also produces pieces that are more decorative than functional.

“When I see the work of artists from around the world,” Williams says in Diné, the Navajo language, “I know how much work goes into them. Like us, they make pottery and baskets—which are some of the oldest arts in the world. Navajo people love color, because where we live, it gets so brown in the summer. The same is true of African cultures, where it also gets dry and brown. I think we’re almost the same. We are all ethnic.”

The international artists at the market also find similarities between their homes and New Mexico, and willingly express their appreciation of the people they meet during their visit here. Habibou Coulibaly, of Burkina Faso, says, “I was in New York, and there is no comparison. People there didn’t talk to you. It was noisy. Here people are gentle, open . . . and they talk to you.”

Ousmane Macina, of Mali, offers, “This place is my home. The houses are the same color. The climate is even similar, even though it is cooler here.” (I laugh—today, the temperature is around 95 degrees.)

Karma Lotey, from Bhutan, chimes in: “We like the adobe architecture that blends into the landscape. It’s an art city. People appreciate art and museums.”

Wilber Huaman Ciprian, a carver from the highlands of Peru who works with rare redwood, white woods, and native Inca wood, concurs: “It’s a beautiful city and an honor to be here. People are so friendly.”

Elizabeth Savanhu, of Zimbabwe, sums up what many of the other artists probably feel: “The people of Santa Fe love me. I love the way they love and support me. I wasn’t this way before. I look better, I feel better. This is so good for me.”

At press-time, world-traveler Judith Fein was in China.



IF YOU GO:

WHEN & WHERE

The Santa Fe International Folk Art Market is held July 9–11, 2010, in Milner Plaza on Museum Hill, home to the Museum of International Folk Art, the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, and the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art.

EVENTS & TICKETS

May 1	.....	Tickets go on sale. Find out where to buy them at www.folkartmarket.org .
Friday, July 9, 6:30–9 p.m.	.....	Market Opening Party, \$125
Saturday, July 10, 7:30–9 a.m.	.....	Early Bird Market, \$50
Saturday, July 10, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.	.....	Saturday Market, \$10 advance, \$15 at the gate
Sunday, July 11	.....	Family Day, \$5
Kids 16 and under:	.....	Free Saturday and Sunday
Saturday and Sunday	.....	Market ticket includes free admission to all Museum Hill museums.

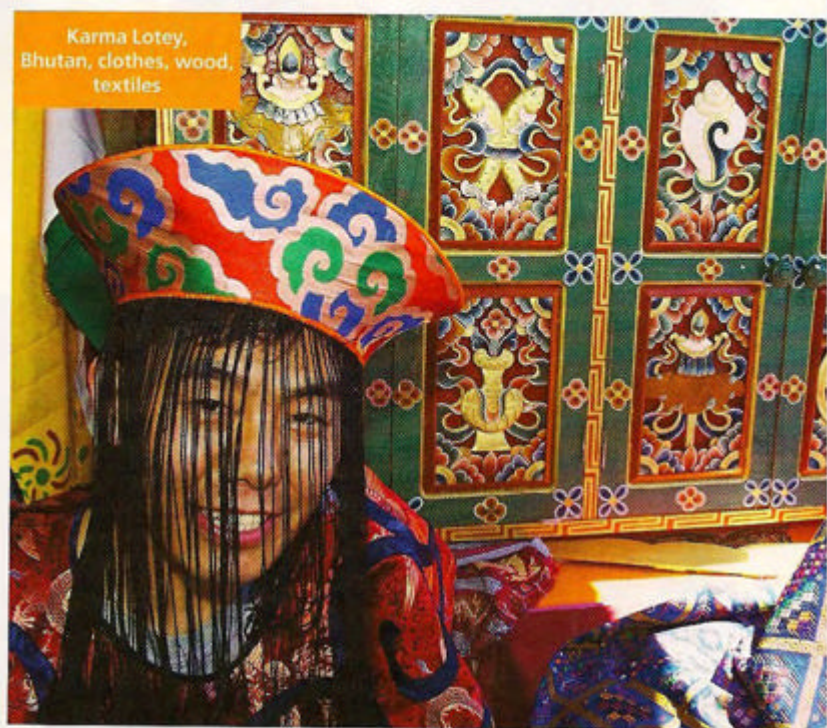
PARKING

Guests can park in the Museum Hill parking lots. Additional parking is available at the New Mexico Tourism Department, 491 Old Santa Fe Trail, with free shuttles to the market.

For info: (505) 476-1189, www.folkartmarket.org



Rose Williams,
Navajo,
pottery



Karma Lotey,
Bhutan, clothes, wood,
textiles



Yuzhen Pan,
Guizhou Province,
China, textiles



Wilber Huaman
Ciprian, Peru,
wood carvings