

The Collector: On David Broillet's Passion for African and Middle Eastern Art



David Broillet with a work by Barthélémy Toguo entitled *Nature pure, interdit de baiser*. 2001

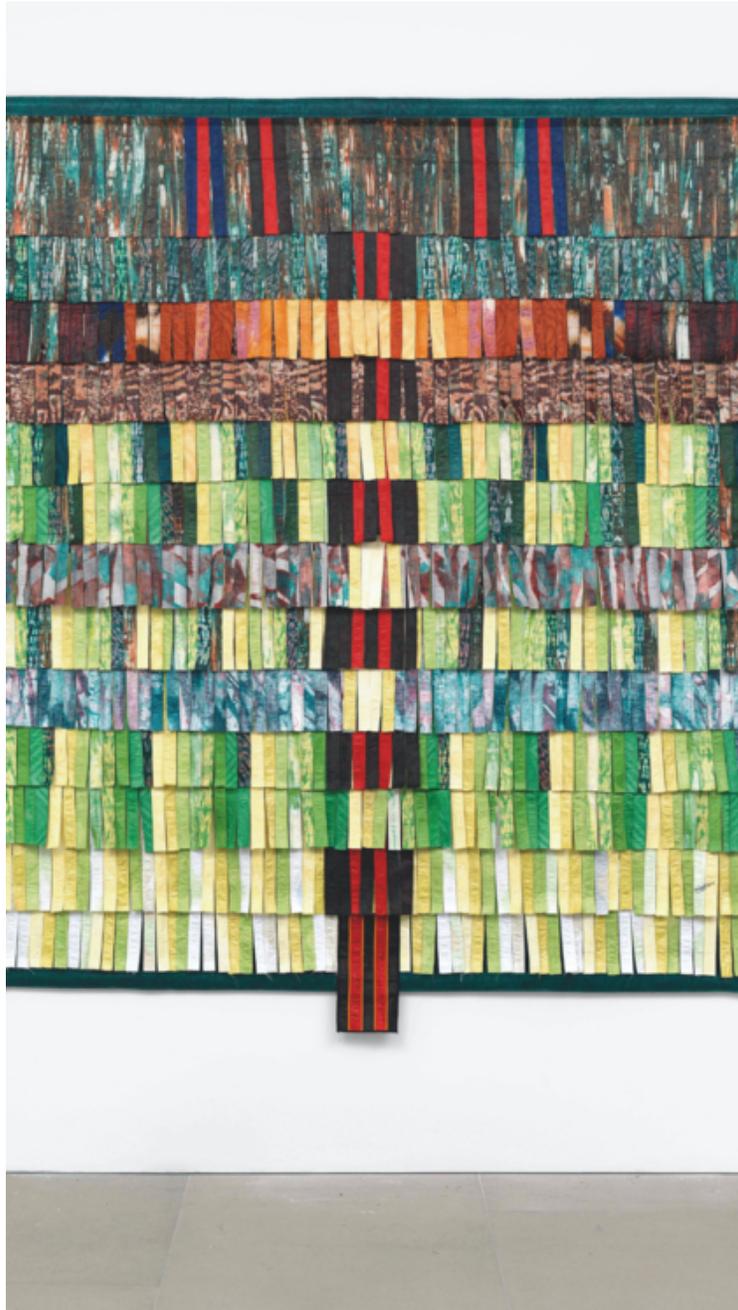
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REBECCA PROCTOR

The Swiss collector and filmmaker discusses his recent purchases of works by Meschac Gaba, Reza Aramesh and Ramin and Rokni Haerizadeh and his current love affair with Africa.

A collector of contemporary art for the past 40 years, one can easily spot David Broillet around the world at fairs as diverse as 1-54 [Contemporary African](#) Art Fair in Marrakech, Art Basel, Frieze London and Art Dubai. It all started when the Swiss dealer Pierre Huber gave him his first artwork when he was 18 years old. Ever since he's been hooked. And while his family desired him to join their real estate firm,

Brolliet decided on the creative route and instead began his own communications and production company for music and film. It's a chilly October day and we're seated outside Somerset House taking a breather from the plethora of African contemporary art on show at 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair.



*Abdoulaye Konaté. Composition: Vert avec bande rouge et noire. 2016. Textiles.
220x190cm. © Abdoulaye Konate, Collection David H. Brolliet, Geneva*

At the fair he purchased a work by South African artist Siwa Mgoboza from Casablanca-based Loft Art Gallery. “My mother was the one who really initiated my love for art because she was a member of a group of ladies supporting the Future Contemporary Art Museum of Geneva,” he recalls. “As a teenager she took me along on different trips. We did San Francisco together where I met Ed Ruscha, Sam Francis and others and that was when I was just 14 and 15 years old.” Brolliet’s parents didn’t speak much English so it was the young Brolliet that would go up and speak to the artists and he quickly developed an affinity for them, their creativity and ways of expression. “When I was very young my parents would take me to museums on the weekend,” he recalls about how he developed his passion for art. His father was a collector of drawings and cabinet de curiosités.



Gaba Meschac. Médecine. 1994. Paint and collage of a confetti of CFA franc banknotes on wood 88.5x52x1.5cm. Courtesy of Galerie In Situ - fabienne leclerc, Paris

At home growing up he remembers how there was no single place free because of all of his father's artwork. "But it had nothing to do with contemporary—it was all modern artwork," he says. "My father would always joke with me about how my contemporary art was worth nothing. He would say, 'Your *l'art comptant pour rien* (your art is worth nothing)!' because he was so into his modern art collection." However, one day he convinced him to go to an important dealer in Geneva at the time: Pierre Huber. "He was on the board of Art Basel and also created the Shanghai Art Fair. He introduced me to artists such as Cindy Sherman, Robert Mapplethorpe and Thomas Demand, and at the time one of these artists' pieces would be only around a few thousand dollars!" he exclaims. But this, as Broillet smirks, was more than 20 years ago.



David Broillet holding a work by Mounir Fatmi entitled Maximum Sensation 5 (2012) ©

Photo by Steeve Luncker / Tribune de Genève

To Broiliet's surprise, his father finally bought a piece of contemporary art from Huber by a young artist called Igor Mitoraj because it was akin to an ancient Roman sculpture, which his father loved. Then, Huber asked Broiliet to go into the back of his gallery and into the reserve and to pick a small sculpture of a paintbrush by the Lyon artist Jean Philippe Aubanel. Thus began the journey of Broiliet's art collecting. "The sculpture I picked up has been with me all over the world and is still in the same condition," he smiles proudly. It was even on display at the recent showing of Broiliet's collection at the Fondation Fernet Branca (27 May 2018-30 September 2018) in Saint-Louis, France. Since the early 2000s, the French production company Creativty has been filming a documentary on his life as a collector. They have followed him to various art fairs to artists' studios, art fairs and the Venice Biennale. The one-hour long film was also shown at the Fondation Fernet Branca.



Hassan Sharif. Buttons. 2016. Buttons and copper wire. 84x22x15cm. 84x22x15cm. © Estate of Hassan Sharif, collection David H. Broiliet, Geneva

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Yet it is not just art that gives Brolliet his spark. He produces film and music and also sometimes appears as an actor and a singer. “My grandfather was a friend of the famous director of the Cannes Film Festival, Fabre Lebre,” he says. It’s impossible to miss Brolliet eclectic and larger-than-life demeanor at an art fair. Tall and always vibrantly dressed donning his usual large glasses, he has a zest for life and all things creative that is infectious. “I started supporting and co-producing movies for Canal Plus and others,” he says. “That’s my creative side.”



Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh, Hesam Rahmanian Her Majesty. 2018. Acrylic, gesso, watercolor, gouache and lacure on a wooden table. 50x110x70cm. Collection David H. Brolliet, Geneva Courtesy: Galerie In Situ - fabienne leclerc, Paris © Thomas Lannes

There are now around 800 works in Brolliet’s collection. These include such names as John Armleder, Sylvie Fleury, Roman Signer and Pipiloti Rist. In the mid-90s Brolliet took a base in Paris that opened him up to a whole new art scene, providing him with the opportunity to collect such names as Saâdane Afif, Kader Attia, Wang Du, Richard Fauguet, Marlène Mocquet, Bruno Peinado, Barthélémy Togo, Mounir Fatmi and

Erwin Wurm and Chen Zhen. Among the most valuable works in his collection are are a painting by David Salle entitled *Curtain Down*(1993), a photograph from Cindy Sherman's *Witches* series (1994) and a large wooden armoire by Wim Delvoye from around 1988. "I used to take my car and drive to Lyon to buy artists—artists that today are non-existent," he says. "They may no longer be artists but they are still in my collection and in my heart they have exactly the same place as Cindy Sherman." Clearly, Brolliet loves to discover new artists, emerging names in the industry. For instance, he is closely involved with the Marcel Duchamp Prize for young artists and with Geneva's Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain.



Reza Aramesh. Action 191. 2017 Hand carved Carrara marble. 225x76x67cm. © Installation view at SCAD Museum of Art © Marc Damage

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“My home is a temporary place,” says Brolliet, a fervent traveller. “Everything is either loaned to museums or in storage in Geneva, Paris, London and New York.” But he wants that to change. A central base is important. Yet where? Time will tell or maybe, the art will tell. For now, one can find Brolliet spending much time gallivanting throughout Africa and the Middle East. “Hassan Sharif is in my collection—I met him before he died,” he says. “I bought his work after his death.” What draws Brolliet to a work of art is its energy. “I have to talk to the artist,” he states. “If I don’t know the artist, I will never buy the work. I don’t buy to make money. I buy a work of art because I love it.” Another favourite is work by Iranian-London based artist Reza Aramesh. “I am so amazed by his sculptures—I can’t stop looking at them,” he says. He’s recently purchased one sculpture by Reza that is touring the world right now, making stops in Azerbaijan, the US and then the [UAE](#).



Siwa Mgoboza. Reaching the Dream II. 2016. Isishweshwe (Three Cats Cotton), tulle, beads and cotton thread 220x158 cm. © Siwa Mgoboza, Collection David H. Brolliet

But it is Africa that has stolen his heart for the moment. “I love Africa, I really love Africa,” he muses. He’s just been to Marrakech for 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair where he acquired a sculpture by Beninese conceptual artist Gaba Meschac from Galerie In Situ – Fabienne Leclerc in Paris entitled *Peinture, Sculpture and Médecine* (1994). He’s recent been to Dakar, Senegal to do some filming. Africa, it seems, is always on his mind these days. It’s the place that is drawing most of his attention. And just like the places that he loves, Brolliet collects with his heart and not his wallet. And he keeps going with the zest and the eclectic pizzazz that he is known for acquiring the artists he so greatly loves.