



## FREDERIC ROND

Frederic Rond was born in 1974. In 1999 he won the Ehrhardt prize in atomic physics.

From 1999 to 2006, he was a Business Intelligence consultant with Axa group, with frequent stays in India.

In 2006 he established Indian Heritage, specializing in Indian and Himalayan art.

The gallery offers both primitive and classical pieces, with a focus on Himalayan masks.

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WHEN WAS YOUR FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH TRIBAL ART? WAS IT IN A MUSEUM OR IN A GALLERY? WHAT TRIBAL ART OBJECT ATTRACTED YOU FIRST?

It was more than 20 years ago, behind Jama Masjid (Old Delhi's main mosque) in a small dusty shop in the scrap merchants area that I discovered a Bhuta ("spirit") mask of a boar-headed deity, in bronze, from Karnataka (South West India).

Struck by the strong primitive expression of this piece and, at the same time, by the extreme refinement of the technique used for its fabrication (lost wax casting), I started gathering information about Bhuta worship besides collecting masks.

HOW DID YOU BEGIN SELLING TRIBAL ART? ARE YOU A SELF-TAUGHT DEALER OR DID YOU HAVE A MENTOR? WHICH DEALERS INSPIRED YOU EARLY ON?

Having always been fascinated by ancient arts, I studied atomic physics hoping that one day I could work in a museum's lab or in archaeology.

When I realized that I could not find a scientific job in relation with art, I spent 10 years in IT consulting in order to save enough money to buy a commercial lease and then establish my own gallery.

As by that time I had already been travelling to India and the Himalayas for almost a decade (up to 5 times a year - a real addiction!), I could not think of selling something that was not related to this part of the world.

In a way scientists and art lovers share the same approach: They search, sometimes find and then try to learn as much as possible from and about their discoveries.

ARE YOU A SELF-TAUGHT DEALER OR DID YOU HAVE A MENTOR?

In a way, I am a self-taught dealer as no one in my entourage runs a business but in another way I am also, in a big proportion, the result of all the discussions I have had with my clients, friends and suppliers. When I asked an Indian friend of mine who had been in this business for decades, about what was the best way to learn this job, he answered : « Just be silent and you will learn from others ». So the correct answer is that I have hundreds of mentors!

DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT WAS THE FIRST REAL PIECE YOU BOUGHT?

I have a very clear memory of the first Himalayan mask I dreamt about.





The price was much too high for me at that time but I finally managed to get my hands on it by trading other pieces.

It was a colourful tiger mask from the South East of Nepal.

After I saw it I just could not get it out of my head and it was at this precise moment that I realised the gravity of my disease!

#### DO YOU THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE INITIATED TO START COLLECTING?

I would compare this situation to a mathematical problem that you need to solve.

If someone brings you the solution, it will be useless unless you have already carefully studied the problem by yourself.

So, when you start a collection, I think being initiated can be helpful only if you are already on the path of research.

#### THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF CASES OF FORGERIES IN THE TRIBAL ART MARKET. HOW DO DEALERS GIVE THEIR CLIENTS CONFIDENCE REGARDING WORKS THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO TRACE?

Fakes are a part of the journey for all dealers and collectors.

They push you to improve your skills in terms of investigation, logic, iconography and intuition.

From a more practical point of view, before selling an object, a dealer should be able to explain to his clients what a fake version of it would correspond to.

#### ARE WE SEEING A NEW GENERATION OF COLLECTORS EMERGING IN THE HIMALAYAN TRIBAL ART MARKET?

In the Himalayan tribal art market, most of the new collectors (whether young or old) are experienced players coming from other specialities.

Their number has grown significantly in the past two years.

#### DO YOU COLLECT ANYTHING YOURSELF OR DO YOU JUST ENJOY TURNING DEALS?

I do collect Himalayan masks and figures with a lot of enthusiasm, however, my personal collection is ephemeral, it is constantly in movement.

Anyway, as people say, « shrouds have no pockets » !

#### IS THERE ANY MATERIAL THAT YOU WON'T BUY OR SELL? ANYTHING THAT IS TABOO OR OFF LIMITS?

I try to be as sharp as possible about objects coming from South Asia which is already a huge geographical area.

So, on display in my gallery, you will seldom find a piece that does not belong to my « area of least-ignorance ».

#### WHAT ARE THE AESTHETIC ASPECTS THAT GUIDE YOUR CHOICES?

My choices are not led by esthetic aspects, they are all about the emotion that I feel when I am in front of a piece, as ugly as it can be. !







A piece of art is a window that opens onto the heart of the person who created it.

So, my way of choosing a piece or a person is the same, it is all about emotion

### YOU'VE BEEN ON THE MARKET FOR A TIME NOW. DO YOU SEE AN EVOLUTION IN THE HIMALAYAN TRIBAL ART MARKET?

Because Nepal, the main source for Himalayan tribal art, opened its borders only in 1951, this market is still very young and far from having reached its apex.

There are several reasons why more and more collectors have started buying Himalayan tribal art these days:

1/ The early desertion of ancestral rituals and the dryness of the climate have allowed the market to be fed with very old pieces (some wooden masks have been dated as 15th century by C14 tests).

2/ The isolation of Nepalese villages, separated from each other by steep mountain ranges, has led to an amazing variety of shapes and designs.

3/ Because local life is extremely tough and because the craftsmen can express their feelings without too many external influences or iconographic constraints, the resulting artefacts are, for most of the time, extremely moving, powerful and full of humanity

In the last 2 years, in Nepal, there has been a severe shortage of old tribal objects.

It seems that the best pieces are now in the Occidental world and that this corpus will not increase significantly.

The Himalayan tribal art market has reached a stage similar to when a famous painter passes away and when his collectors can figure out what the masterpieces are and how numerous they are.

Usually, if there is enough material to build important collections, this is the start for the market to grow.

The prices reached by several Himalayan masks in auction this year (around 50,000€) are probably the first illustration of this growth.

### DO YOU THINK A COLLECTOR FEELS MORE REASSURED WHEN HE BUYS AT AUCTIONS THAN FROM A DEALER?

Are people more reassured when they have an arranged or a love marriage?

In an arranged marriage you have experts telling you who you should marry and you discover your better half just before or during the ceremony.

In a love marriage, you can meet your beloved many times before taking a decision, you can have her in your house to see if she likes the place and you can get advice from a person that can be closer to you than a professional match maker.

Both can be successful but the approaches are different.

### DO YOU THINK THAT AUCTION HOUSES ARE A THREAT FOR DEALERS, WHO WILL FIND IT MORE AND MORE DIFFICULT TO MAKE A LIVING?

Auction houses are an amazing source of high quality objects for those who are good specialists and who like treasure hunting.

I think that they are a threat only for dealers who try to do business like auction houses, i.e. on a large spectrum of objects and through very formal relationships with their clients.



CAN YOU IMAGINE DOING ANYTHING ELSE FOR A LIVING? IS THIS A BUSINESS YOU RETIRE FROM?

No way, only Saint Peter is allowed to tell me when to retire!

IS THERE ANY OBJECT IN YOUR COLLECTION THAT YOU LIKE MORE THAN OTHERS?

Yes and it changes quite often, treasure hunting is endless and that is just fantastic!