

DESIGN ROOM COLOMBIA et ARTESANOS DE COLOMBIA À MAISON&OBJET

HALL 5A - UNIQUE & ECLECTIC / STANDS Q145 & Q146 - R145

Colombia, ancestral techniques for the modern home

- From September 6 – 10 at Maison & Objet, in Paris, France, Colombia's display will combine the indigenous and traditional knowledge of handicrafts with six young innovators' universal approach to design.
- Accompanied by ProColombia, the delegation will be made up of Gres, Folies, VERDI, Del Portillo, Mónica Urquijo, and Artesanías de Colombia, as well as a selection from the *Manos a la Obra* project, promoted by the Atlántico department's local government.

August 2019. Oprah Winfrey posed for the April cover of her magazine, *O, The Oprah Magazine*, wearing a traditional Colombian *vueltaio* hat and a *mochila* made by indigenous craftsmen from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. In honor of the Colombia-France year, the legendary Paris-based trend-setting store, **Colette**, transformed into a local Colombian shop full of handicrafts such as mini purses, masks, and *chiva* figurines. The **Metropolitan Museum of Art** in New York is blanketed with Colombian tapestries. In short, Colombian interior design and handicrafts are becoming increasingly recognized and popular throughout the world.

Maison & Objet is one of the leading design showrooms; last year, over 100,000 people visited from more than 170 countries, such as France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and Portugal. This year's event will take place from September 6 - 10 in Paris, during which time Colombia—the second most biodiverse country in the world per square kilometer, after Brazil—will showcase its finest ancestral and indigenous craftsmanship techniques, along with six young innovators' designs, whose works are inspired by Colombia itself. In fact, Colombia boasts the most products with Denominations of Origin in the Latin American artisanal sector, according to Expoartesanías.

According to Artesanías de Colombia, the Colombian artisanal sector includes approximately **58,000 artisans**, primarily concentrated along the Atlantic coast and in the coffee region, as well as in the departments of Nariño, Boyacá, Putumayo, Santander, and Tolima—with a significant and representative group in Bogotá, as well.

“Colombia’s government, including ProColombia, strongly supports the Orange Economy, which encompasses the creative industries and already accounts for about 3% of the country’s GDP. This is why we created Design Room, a digital platform that supports Colombian designers. Likewise, we provide support by facilitating designers’ involvement in prominent world-class trade fairs such as Maison & Objet. This is because Colombian interior design and handicrafts are extraordinary examples of local culture and talent,” stated Flavia Santoro, president of ProColombia—Colombia’s government entity that promotes investment, exports, tourism, and the country brand throughout the world.

A commitment to innovative designs

VERDI is led by siblings Tomás and Cristina Vera. They are continuing their father’s commitment to producing completely handmade rugs—their motto: “weaving in nature.” They are inspired by Colombia’s natural landscapes, countless colors, and natural fibers. A process carried out by Colombian designers and artisans, VERDI is now a multidimensional study that combines traditional and contemporary design to create household items, fashion pieces, and works of art for those who appreciate aesthetics and are socially conscious.

Custom-made metal and *fique* rugs, as well as copper-threaded cushions are among the products in the company’s portfolio; its finest products will be displayed at Maison & Objet.

Tomás Vera, CEO and Creative Director at VERDI—a company that has reached 25 countries, including 8 in Europe—will participate in Maison & Objet for the second time, this time with ProColombia’s support. He stated, “In this fair, we aim to activate brand recognition and create business opportunities in a market that closely aligns with our essence.”

Vera added that, despite a great deal of competition at the trade fair, “Colombia can stand out as a world-class design provider, with innovative proposals and artisanal influences that set us apart. At VERDI, we are focused on mixing natural fibers and metals, something quite unusual and revolutionary in the market.”

Del Portillo, led by Jose David Del Portillo, designs furniture made from combining locally-sourced materials. In the process, cabinetmakers, upholsterers, decorators, and weavers come together to create unique pieces, focusing on designing and transforming natural materials in a responsible way. Del Portillo has been selected as one of Latin America’s 10 leading new studios and designers by the *Código de México* magazine, and has been recognized in *AXXIS* magazine’s yearly publication three times, among other awards.

Designer **Jose Del Portillo** said that the main reason for participating in Maison et Objet is to increase brand recognition and expand their market on the Old Continent, with ProColombia’s support. “We will present eight pieces at the trade fair—including tables, chairs, and candelabras—that combine metal and wood,” announced Del Portillo.

Gres is led by Silvana Vergara and Catherine Jessurum, two architects who enrich spaces through textures and color balance. Geometry, mixing colors, and the

materials themselves are their sources of inspiration. They work with local artisan mothers who are heads of household. Some of the most noteworthy products in their portfolio were designed for hotels such as Santa Teresa in Cartagena de Indias and the Movich hotel chain.

Silvana Vergara, creative director and co-founder of Gres, stated, “The fact that we are participating as a group of Colombian designers boosts Colombia’s position in the industry. Maison & Objet is a great opportunity, since its world renown and puts us on the radar.” Vergara added that ceramics and rugs will be Gres’s two star products to be presented at the event and that “Colombian interior design’s market position depends on developing its own language, independent of its material nature.”

Folies, whose motto is “establish your legacy,” was created by Jimena Londoño and Eugenia Robledo, an architect and industrial designer, respectively. They are committed to creating pieces that combine time-related themes: inspired by the past, created with current materials and techniques, and aimed at avant-garde design aficionados. Their outstanding collaborations include those with Colombian fashion designers such as Olga Piedrahita, Kika Vargas, Carlo Carizosa, and Eloísa Studio.

Jimena Londoño, co-founder of Folies, explained that the furniture and household objects company is already becoming known in Peru and Panama; however, through their participation in Maison & Objet, they would like to also make themselves known in Europe, in order to reach new markets. “Other goals at Maison & Objet are to learn about current trends, compare our products with the existing offer, and make strategic partnerships with other companies,” said Londoño, who founded the company with Eugenia Robledo four years ago.

Mónica Urquijo has represented women’s social entrepreneurship for over a decade. Her talented team of weavers in Barranquilla offers a world-class product.

Barranquilla designer **Mónica Urquijo**, who has exported her designs to Ralph Lauren in the United States, Europe, and Japan for over 10 years, said that the main reasons for participating in the trade fair are “to raise awareness of artisanal and artistic craftsmanship, re-introduce the use of natural fibers, and continue to position our products, such as cushions, trays, and tapestries, in the European market.”

Ancestral techniques

Artesanías de Colombia is a non-profit organization linked to Colombia’s Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Tourism that has promoted the development of Colombian handicrafts, both domestically and internationally, for 50 years.

Felipe Rodríguez, commercial design coordinator at Artesanías de Colombia, has already participated in previous editions of Maison & Objet. This year’s objective is to access specialized niches in northern Europe. “While we cannot offer competitive prices compared to African produce, for example, Colombia does have significant potential in luxury boutiques focusing on quality over quantity, due to our high-quality raw materials,” Rodríguez said. Among Artesanías de Colombia’s star products to be presented at Maison & Objet are table settings and décor, such as dishes, placemats, fruit bowls, baskets, and vases.

Manos a la Obra – Atlántico department’s local government

Since 2016, with the support of the Atlántico department's local government, more than 100 artisans have worked to preserve traditional handicrafts while promoting personal empowerment and improving their quality of life. They have designed, created, and perfected unique everyday products using a sustainable approach. The artisans in this initiative use various techniques and materials, including palma de iraca, enea, and bejuco fiber weavings, ceramics, and forging.

Colombia and France's trade relationship

In 2018, Colombia's exports to France reached US \$177,472,127. In the same year, the Manufacturing and Other Industries sector exports to France reached US \$8,051,133—an increase of 115% compared to exports in 2017.