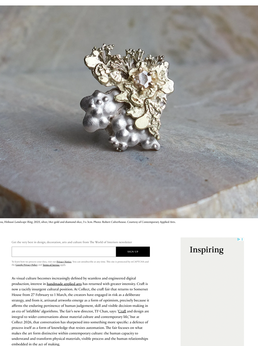
Inspiring Interiors

CULTURE

THE UPPER HAND

The leading craft fair Collect, under the direction of the writer and editor TV Chan, returns to London for its 22nd edition, bringing together 60 galleries and over 500 artists. In an age of AI infallibility, it is the human imperfections of the handmade that make these works so compelling

By Miriam Gibbman
23 October, 2025



Laura Nguyen, Hibiscus Landscape, Bing, 2023, ebony, fine gold and abalone shell, 21 x 9.6 cm. Photo: Robert Cuthbertson. Courtesy of Contemporary Applied Arts.

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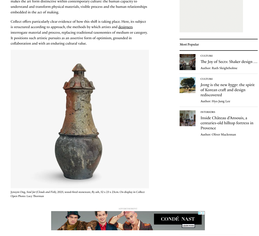
As visual culture becomes increasingly defined by seamless and engineered digital production, craftsmanship and material knowledge are reserved with greater intensity. Craft is now a jacobin insurgent cultural position. In Collect, the craft fair that returns to Somerset House in London from 22 to 26 October, the tactile, the imperfect, the slow, the intuitive, the strange, and from it, artistical personals emerge as a form of optimism, precisely because it affirms the enduring governance of human judgement, skill and visible decision-making in an age of algorithmic acceleration. Now in its 22nd edition, Collect, the fair that we are urged to order commissions about material culture and contemporary craft, has TV Chan as Collect 2026, that conversation has sharpened into something more specific: a defense of process itself as a form of knowledge that resists automation. The fair focuses on what makes the art form distinctive within contemporary culture: the human capacity to transform intractable physical materials, visible process and the human relationships embedded in the act of making.

Collect offers particularly clear evidence of how this shift is taking place. Form in spaces is structured according to approach, the methods by which artists and galleries interrogate material and process, replacing traditional taxonomies of medium or category. It positions such artistic pursuits as an assertive form of optimism, grounded in collaboration and with an enduring cultural value.



Jessica Ung, Nat Qi (Cloud and Field), 2025, wood-fired stoneware, 81 cm, 32.5 x 23 cm. Courtesy of Collect Open Photo Gray. Thomson

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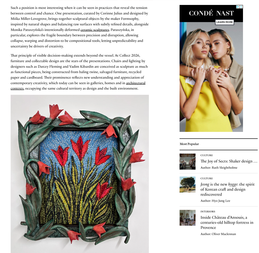
Such a position is more interesting when it can be seen in practices that reveal the tension between craft and the industrial or commercial. Kendal Ahmed's ceramic work, exhibited by Mikki Miller Lovegrove, brings together sculptural objects by the maker Formosaplay, inspired by natural shapes and balancing raw surfaces with subtly refined details, alongside Marsha Pascoulard's internationally delivered ceramic workstools. Pascoulard's, in particular, explores the fragile boundary between precision and disruption, allowing surfaces to remain and accentuate the compositional tools, exposing vulnerability and authenticity, rather than concealing it.

That principle of visible decision-making extends beyond the vessel. At Collect 2026, fantasies and inflexible design are the score of the proceedings. Chairs and lighting by designers such as Tuscey Fleming and Yadin Kihanda are conceived as sculpture as much as functional pieces, being constructed from folding verso, collaged furniture, recycled paper and cardboard. Their prominence reflects new understanding and appreciation of contemporary craftsmanship, which today can be seen in galleries, homes and in architectural settings, recognizing the same cultural territory as design and the built environment.



Kelly Hu, Fingerprint, 2022, wood, lacquer, wood and ceramic, 60 x 50cm. Mossman Gallery/Sensing Hill

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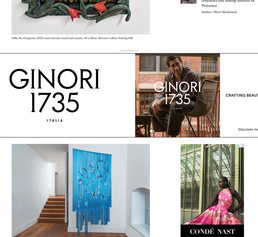
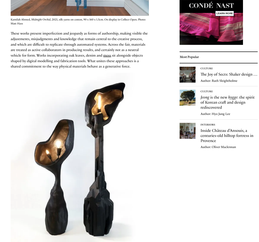


Kendal Ahmed, Midnight Orchid, 2025, ink, gouse on ceramic, 90 x 100 x 5 cm. On display in Collect Open. Photo: Mike Lovegrove

These works picture imperfection and jeopardy as forms of authorship, making visible the decisions and relationships that underpin creative production. Contemporary craftsmanship and which are difficult to replicate through automated systems. Across the fair, materials are treated as active collaborators in producing results, and certainly not as a neutral vehicle for form. Weaving and tapestry and leaves, denim and wool, in stringed objects shaped by digital modelling and fabrication tools. What unites these approaches is a shared commitment to the real physical materials behave in a generation form.



Yadin Kihanda, Black Nostalgia Chair 90 and 2, black paper, cardboard, organic glue, LED light equipment. Size 90 (H) x 51 x 50cm, Size 2, 2025 (T) x 9 x 6cm. Oh Kathrin Gallery

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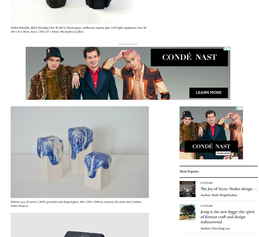
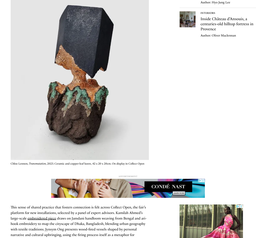


Helena Lay, Ex-print 1, 2025, porcelain and diagonal plate, 60 x 100 x 100cm, ceramics the artist and Caroline Pitcher Projects



Chris Lorenz, Transmutation, 2025, Ceramic and copper leaf, 40 x 35 x 20cm. On display in Collect Open

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This sense of shared practice that forms continuation is felt across Collect Open, the fair's platform for new installations, selected by a panel of expert advisors. Kendal Ahmed's work, for example, incorporates ceramic objects and textiles, drawing on her family's Indian heritage and on maps the cities/ge of Dhaka, Bangladesh, blending cartographic with textile traditions. Jessica Ung presents wood-fired vessels that depict personal narrative and cultural upbringing, using the firing process itself as a vocabulary for inheritance, adaptation and memory. The newly introduced Collect Open Saturday, supporting the artist-led and independent spaces underpinning further attention the fair's recognition that sustaining craft depends not only on the transmission of technical skills, but on widening access to its professional and institutional networks.

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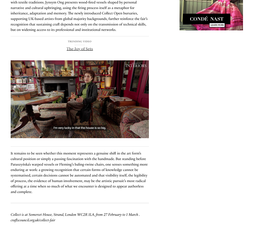

Tim Ivory, Study for Pink Blue Square in Orange

It remains to be seen whether this moment represents a genuine shift in the art form's contemporary relevance or a temporary recalibration. The craft boom of the pandemic has financially swayed vessels on Instagrad hiding various claims, one remain something more enduring at work: a growing recognition that certain forms of knowledge cannot be systematised, certain decisions cannot be automated and that realities verify the legibility of process, the evidence of human involvement, may be the artwork parent's most radical offering at a time when so much of what we encounter is designed to appear authentic and complete.

Collect is at Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 1LA, from 27 February to 1 March. collect.co.uk/collect-fair

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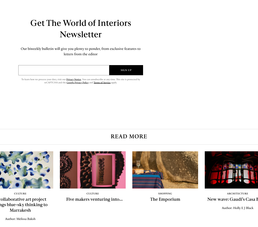

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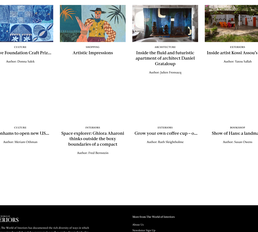

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