

Art & Culture

economic recovery to its place in the world. Allowing religious differences to dominate political discussion seems a colossal waste of intellectual capital.

Romney will most likely end up as the Republican Party's presidential nominee. More profitable would be a debate about how he would govern and how Obama intends to lead the U.S. should he win re-election. That's a discussion worth listening in on.

Off the Web: Golden Spider Silk

V&A

Admission free

25 January - 5 June 2012

The V&A have put together an astonishing exhibition of such delicacy and intricacy, one almost questions its credulity. Imagine going out into the highlands of Madagascar, coming back to a workshop in the capital Antananarivo with two dozen female Golden Orb Weaver spiders, putting each one in a specially-designed harness, extracting the silk by agitating its abdomen, winding it onto bobbins

and then releasing the spiders back into the wild at the end of the day. Continue this process for five years, until 1.2 million spiders have produced enough warp. Each warp is made up of 96 strands of spider silk, and there are something approaching 500,000 individual strands needed. The end result is an extraordinary cape, in the form of an ecclesiastical chasuble, decorated with thousands of embroidered and appliquéd motifs, representing the spider in myth and metaphor. This, and a four metre long brocaded shawl, was made by Simon Peers, an Englishman living in Madagascar, with Nicholas Godley, an American who also worked for many years there, and were inspired by mid 17th and 19th century accounts of this forgotten art. The cape weighs just over two and a half pounds, and the lightness of spider silk has been demonstrated by placing a ball of it on a blindfolded person's upturned hand, with the recipient unable to register its presence. The reason that these two gentlemen wanted to create an article of clothing, rather than simply a wall-hanging, was because they liked the somewhat creepy notion that the wearer would be literally cocooned in silk, in the way a spider's victim would be. Simon Peers added that spiders have not only inspired poetry and legend, they represent some of man's innermost fears and nightmares. This shining golden cape, however, surely inhabits the world of dreams.

Don Grant



Yellow woven spider silk cape (detail) Simon Peers and Nicholas Godley at Peers workshop Antananarivo, Madagascar. 2011. © V&A Images



**Johnson
was at the
epicentre
of fashion,
culture and
popular
music from
the 1960s**

Lloyd Johnson The Modern Outfitter

Chelsea Space

10 St John Islip Street,

London, SW1P 4JU

Until 3 March 2012

Free admission

The coolest place in London in the 1970s was 406 King's Road, World's End. The coolest place on the planet on 24th January 2012 was 10 St Islip Street, next to Tate Britain, where Chelsea Space gallery was showing an exhibition celebrating Lloyd Johnson, the Modern Outfitter. The place was heaving with mods, punks, rockers, beatniks, hippies, 'arty' types, fashionistas, skaliwags and ne'er-do-wells. There were even more peeps outside admiring each other's Triumph and Norton 650s, Moto Guzzis and café racers, alongside customised scooters and a lone, pink Brompton fold-up bicycle. Cool, or what? Johnson was at the epicentre of fashion, culture and popular music from the 1960s until a few years ago, starting in a boutique in Kensington Market, known as Johnson and Johnson. It was a world of drainpipes, Flash 'arry ties, leather jackets, Chelsea boots, winklepickers and tumbling-dice socks, and the exhibition displays all of these, and more: textiles, shirts, jackets, sunglasses, waistcoats, suits, album covers, artwork, personal effects and ephemera from customers and collectors from around the world. His client list is like a name-dropper's wet-dream and says it all - Bob Dylan, Tom Waits, Rod Stewart, The Clash, Chrissie Hynde, Keith Richards, Jack Nicholson and Fred Astaire. And the Sex Pistols. And The Specials. Some list.

Some exhibition.

Don Grant