Practicing law in San Francisco in the year 1990, Javier Peres began collecting African Art. 16 years later, the Cuban-born collector, dealer, and gallerist operates Peres Projects, a pristine gallery facing the wide avenue of Karl Marx Allee in Berlin's Friedrichshain district. His passion for collecting African works, like ritual helmet masks worn by Sande women, stemmed from an attraction to the formal beauty of African traditions from regions surrounding the Ivory Coast, and has evolved into a collection of more experimental sculptures from regions of Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Over time, Peres' personal collection naturally began to overlap with his work as a gallerist, in which he champions edgy and sometimes controversial contemporary artists, many working in traditional media like painting and sculpture. Peres Projects' current show, which opened Friday, June 10th, is the second exhibition of works from Peres' private collection of African art exhibited alongside works of contemporary Western artists. "Wild Style: Exhibition of Figurative Art encourages viewers to seek stylistic similarities between African sculpture from as early as 200 BC and Western works from the present day. An upcoming book, published with Skira, will include background information on the exhibition and will arrive this fall.

Inspired by early 20th century exhibitions like those at Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery, Peres is interested in exploring the contemporary possibilities of furthering dialogue between premodern sculptures and today's evolving painting traditions. It wasn't until the early 20th century that Western viewers began to consider African art as art—until then, sculpture like the ones at Peres Projects were considered ethnological objects. MMA's controversially titled exhibition of African Negro Art in 1938 was influential in this recontextualization. The exhibition responded to and fueled the budding dialogue between African art and Modernism, particularly for artists including Pablo Picasso, Constantin Brancusi, and Amedeo Modigliani.

"Like in those early exhibitions, in Wild Style, I have removed the premodern African objects from their original context in order to present them purely as art objects, using the same modes of presentation typical in contemporary art," Peres told The Creators Project. "This is not to say that the original uses and contexts of those objects are uninteresting or not important."

Peres' use of new context, together with the stark slate of freshly-painted white walls, builds new bridges between the two traditions. It's not the first time the gallery has staged such ideas. In summer 2014, Peres Projects presented "Group Show," an exhibition of Ndebele masks from the sixteen, all-female Sande society of modern-day Liberia and Sierra Leone. The masks were featured alongside the works of contemporary painters like Anass Yildi, Ito Aya, and Harmyn van Roek.

The exhibition positions a connection between the spiritual and metaphorical insignias of the masks with the paintings' affinities within the abstract movement, unifying hidden meanings into commonplace materials. Wild Style's turn to the formal feels significantly more in line with an open-ended shift.

Wild Style: Exhibition of Figurative Art is on view at Peres Projects in Berlin until August 8, 2016. Find more information here.