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Weaving a tale of social fabric

Bridget Cormack | The Australian | September 29, 2011 9:36AM

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Village scenes, 2010, by Self Help Enterprise. Queensland Art Gallery. Source: Supplied

FOR textile expert Mary Jose the divide between artisan and artist is a financial one.

"The only difference is artisans are paid worse than artists. Textiles are seen as a poor relation in the art world."

But she adds: "I think that it's changing."

On Saturday Jose will speak at the opening of *Threads: Contemporary Textiles and the Social Fabric* at the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane, which will feature 30 woven works from Australia, Asia and the Pacific, including a 22m Tongan barkcloth GoMA commissioned.

"Textiles always tell a story about the people [who] made them," says Jose, director of Adelaide textile shop Fabric of Life.

"They're often a part of the rituals of daily life."

Jose says the sale of one quilt, such as Village Scenes, pictured, by Self Help Enterprise in Bengal, India, can school a child for a year.

Social enterprise schemes that help artisans sell textiles can be a valuable support for women.

"[In India] sometimes they pay the women in saucupans and gold so the husbands don't spend the money," Jose says.