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TEFAF New York Encourages Cross Collecting



Callum Innes's Exposed Painting Delft Blue / Violet, 2018 Sean Kelly, New York

A peak into one of the gallery rooms on the second floor of TEFAF New York Fall in the Park Avenue Armory reveals a large work by the contemporary artist Jean-Michel Basquiat in the shape of a cross on a wall within view of a dramatic, boldly colored 17th century oil painting of a Madonna and child by Giovanni Battista Salvi da Sassoferrato.

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Placing modern and contemporary works by Basquiat, Pablo Picasso, and Lucio Fontana alongside Old Masters of the 16th and 17th centuries is an experiment in collaboration for TEFAF New York to show that the old can live with the new. The fair, in its fourth year, opens Friday and runs through Tuesday.

The collaborations are also a clear attempt to show the relevance of antiquities, paintings, and decorative arts created before 1920 to an audience of younger collectors who may be more willing to mix things up.

“Thirty years ago, people collected in a very straight pattern,” says Patrick van Maris, CEO of TEFAF. “The fact is, the new collector is cross collecting. Of course, the element of decoration is there, but they also see that tribal [for example] meshes with contemporary art, and that tribal art actually has influenced contemporary art. To put things together in that historical context is very interesting.”

The collaborations also reflect TEFAF’s evolution as it’s sought to strengthen its presentation of modern works overall, particularly at Maastricht, its signature fair in the Netherlands, which takes place with about 275 dealers each March. While TEFAF Maastricht aims to present 7,000 years of art history, TEFAF New York, with 90 dealers, focuses largely on historic works of art, antiques, and design created through the first World War. A spring fair in New York features modern and contemporary art and design.

Van Maris views the six collaborative booths featured at the fall fair to be a form of storytelling. “It’s educating about the history of art,” he says. “That’s part of the DNA of TEFAF, to tell a story about art, and the art community.”

A strengthening of Maastricht’s modern storytelling occurred this past spring with the addition of high-profile galleries, including Zurich’s Galerie Gmurzynska, New York’s Pace Gallery, and London’s Simon Lee Gallery. The shift was led by Christophe Van de Weghe, owner of Van de Weghe Fine Art in New York, who chairs the fair’s modern section.

It’s no accident, then, that Van de Weghe is among the dealers who jumped at the chance to collaborate for the New York fair, pairing with Smeets, a Geneva gallery specializing in Dutch, Flemish, and Italian Old Masters of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Teaming modern works with Old Masters shows “that art is really timeless,” says Paul Smeets, owner of Rob Smeets Gallery and chair of paintings for TEFAF Maastricht. Works of different periods “can live together, [they] can create a dialogue,” Smeets says.

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Displaying both old and new is also practical, given that Smeets increasingly has clients who don't want to just buy Old Masters, they also want "a piece of antiquity and modern paintings," he says. Modern clients, including dealers, are also seeking him out, he says.

Next to the Smeets/Van de Weghe collaboration is a room developed by the contemporary gallerist Sean Kelly, of New York, and Charles Ede, a London dealer of antiquities.

Works in this historic Armory setting are carefully paired, with a Roman marble sculpture of Asclepius (god of medicine) placed before a geometric abstract by the Scottish contemporary artist Callum Innes. The Innes painting of rectangular blues, black and white, is created by using turpentine to wash away paint applied to a canvas, a form of taking something away that is echoed in the ancient sculpture.

"This is very much the way I think about objects and art and very much the way I collect," Kelly says.

"What we're trying to say is, you can live with this," says Martin Clist, managing director of Charles Ede. "The way these two work together is fantastic," Clist says, gesturing to the sculpture and the painting by Innes. While the gallerists say it's unlikely collectors who stop by will snap up both, they both like the idea and joke that "you never know!"

An irony in the pairing that Kelly notes is how the price of contemporary pieces is often several-fold higher than ancient works. A Sol Lewitt ink-on-paper drawing titled *Red Grid, Yellow Circles, Black Arcs From Four Sides and Blue Arcs from Four Corners*, 1972, is being sold for about \$150,000, while a terracotta Cuneiform Brick from at temple in Mesopotamian Nippur in 2046, B.C., is being offered for \$12,000.

Kelly says he loves the fact that cuneiform, the system of writing from ancient Mesopotamia, "is a language that we can only access as a visual pattern," while Lewitt's work of densely drawn lines is "equally a language that we have to conceptually accept. Together they exist on the same plane."

Van Maris says TEFAF's overall hope with both New York fairs is to entice the 17,000 or more visitors expected to stream through the

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Armory's doors this weekend to come to Maastricht, which he calls the "Valhalla" of art.

"This is a teaser," van Maris says. "We really want New York, and we really want America, to come to Maastricht. That's the mission."