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The New York Times

Tefaf Shakes Things Up With Cross-Collecting

Some dealers at the European Fine Art Fair are mixing media, millenniums and mind-sets, trying for a collage effect.

Collaborations



"Portrait with Golden Mask," 2009, by Marina Abramovic from her stage performance, at Charles Ede/Sean Kelly.
Marina Abramovic; via Sean Kelly Gallery/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York; Rebecca Smeyne for The New York Times



"Male Head," possibly one of successors to Alexander the Great, Hellenistic, 2nd-1st century BC, at Charles Ede/Sean Kelly.
Rebecca Smeyne for The New York Times

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When the European Fine Art Fair arrived in New York and set up in Park Avenue Armory four years ago, it was enough to be exactly what it was: a fair that boasted European old master paintings and antiquities and catered to museum curators and high-end connoisseurs.

Several years in, Tefaf is examining its clientele and tweaking its game plan. Among many of its 90 vendors, “cross-collecting,” or assembling private collections of art from different eras and categories, is a trend now, and Tefaf has responded by including 7 collaborative booths on its upper floor. Here, modern or contemporary art is displayed alongside ancient artifacts or Renaissance works in jarring, imaginative and sometimes radical ways. (It’s long been a signature of Axel Vervoordt, the antiquarian, designer, and founder of his Belgium-based company.)

France grabbed the world’s attention when Notre-Dame cathedral caught fire in April. Cultural programming feels particularly French-focused this year, with a report on Sunday for plans on rebuilding Notre-Dame; a panel on early 20th-century French fashion; and the American premiere of “Decoding Da Vinci,” a film co-produced by the Louvre Museum commemorating the death of Leonardo 500 years ago — while in the employ of the French court of King Francis I.

For aficionados and collectors of Chinese and Latin American art, these works are the subjects of panels (though not much represented in the fair itself). The educational offerings, titled Tefaf Afternoons and Tefaf Coffee Talks, sound casual, but they are helmed by experts, the same way every object in the fair is vetted by specialists, including other dealers. At \$55 per single-entry ticket (\$25 for students), Tefaf is an investment, both in time and money, but the assumption is that you can afford it.

Collaborations

The collage aesthetic — juxtapositions of diverse and seemingly unrelated elements — has reached the art fair format. If you don’t mind the mixing of media, millenniums and cultural mind-sets, this is a good thing. A standout pairing is the contemporary art dealer [Sean Kelly](#) and the antiquities dealer [Charles Ede](#) (Booth 210). Among their smart displays are a photograph of the artist [Marina Abramović, her face covered in honey and gold leaf](#) to recreate a Joseph Beuys performance from the 1960s, next to a 2nd or 1st century B.C.E. Hellenistic head of a man, carved with parted lips and a bulging brow that suggests he was a powerful orator.

Next door, [Benappi](#), [Mehringer](#), and [Cortesi](#) (Booth 211) are showing mid-20th-century European modern painting with Spanish renaissance sculpture. The Peruvian-born, Milan-based artist [Jorge Eielson](#) (1924-2006), who stretched and tied portions of his canvases into knots, can be found behind a 16th-century walnut sculpture of the hermit Saint Jerome by [Juan de Valmaseda](#), suggesting wildly different approaches to dynamism in art.

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Decorative Arts



Detail of screen with Sakura (cherry tree), Hasegawa school, 16th/17th century, Japan, at Gregg Baker Asian Art. Credit...Rebecca Smeyne for The New York Times

Originally, Tefaf New York showed contemporary art in the spring and decorative arts in the fall. Contemporary art has clearly infiltrated this edition of Tefaf — a sign of its viral popularity — but furniture, silver and other decorative objects are well represented. A pair of 17th-century Japanese screens at Gregg Baker (Booth 353) feature a fall scene and a cherry tree made of blossoms created from crushed abalone shells. Burzio (Booth 336) has a hulking Italian table made around 1600 for the Alessandri family's palace in Florence. Lavishly inlaid with coral, lapis lazuli and marble, and with gilt wooden legs, the table is a none-too-subtle display of the family's wealth and power.

A wrought iron fireplace hood designed in the 1880s by Louis Comfort Tiffany for his East 72nd Street home, and then his Long Island estate — accented with distinct Japanese motifs — is at Lillian Nassau (320), while the French dealer J. Kugel (Booth 301) has a deliciously funky, mid-17th-century vessel by Hans Clauss of Nuremberg from a nautilus shell and gilt silver and featuring the Roman god of the sea, Neptune, grasping a seashell in his hand. Holding down the modern end, Anne-Sophie Duval (Booth 203) has a 1930 cream-colored leather armchair with ebony legs designed by Jean-Michel Frank, who combined raw materials with cool, classical lines to create a new minimal aesthetic.

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Visionaries



Detail of "Ignorance, Envy and Jealousy," by James Ward, 1837, at French & Company, Credit...Rebecca Smeyne for The New York Times

In an age when fantasy and [post-truth](#) serve as refuges from nastier realities, there has been a perceivable spike in visionary art. Tefaf is liberally sprinkled with masterful proponents of this trend, throughout history. A fantastic allegory of "[Ignorance, Envy and Jealousy](#)" (1837) by the British Royal Academy painter James Ward is at [French & Company](#) (Booth 312). Complete with snakes, monsters, a shimmering rainbow and Truth (a statuesque woman) dressed in white, the canvas, which once belonged to the Royal Shakespeare Company, might have been considered academic kitsch a few decades ago. In our era, however it looks like a deliciously hallucinogenic mash-up of [William Blake](#) and internet emojis. Dreams and hallucinations were also near and dear to Surrealism, and [Max Ernst](#) provided some of its strongest images. A 1939 painting by Ernst of poplar trees at [Galerie Thomas](#) (Booth 308) makes foliage look like fossilized megaliths.

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Notable Women



Germaine Richier's "Le Couple," 1956, in front of works by Jean Dubuffet, at Galerie de la Béraudière. Credit... Germaine Richier/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris; Jean Dubuffet/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris; Rebec

The hallway at the Armory is lined with color photographs by the Amsterdam-based photographer [Carla van de Puttelaar](#) of important women in the art world, including collectors, curators and other luminaries. A couple of female artists — not unknown, but certainly underrecognized — to look out for include the sculptor [Germaine Richier](#) at [Galerie de la Béraudière](#) (Booth 104) and [Agnes Pelton](#) at [Bernard Goldberg](#) (Booth 102). Richier's sculptures somewhat resemble those of Alberto Giacometti. Like him, she was a student of [Antoine Bourdelle](#) (who was, in turn, a student of Auguste Rodin). Richier's 1956 sculpture of a couple at Béraudière shows her technique of displaying brass with no patina, so it looks almost like gold.

In Pelton's diminutive canvas "[French Music](#)" from around 1917 at Goldberg, sprites and spirits swirl through the lower regions. Born to American parents in Stuttgart, Germany, Pelton (1881-1961) could be filed under visionaries: Her abstract paintings, many created in the California desert, tried to fuse color, sound and vision with occult shadings. The little work here serves as an appetizer to a

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retrospective, [organized by the Phoenix Art Museum](#), that travels to [the Whitney Museum](#) of American Art in the spring — when Tefaf arrives again.



Overview of Tefaf installation at the Park Avenue Armory

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