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For TEFAF, a New Year Brings a New Approach

With a new management team, the European Fine Art Fair in Maastricht is ready to welcome dealers and collectors to what a first-time exhibitor calls “the best that you can get.”

By Ted Loos
February 29, 2020



Colnaghi will be showing an ancient Roman marble depicting the head of a veiled woman among its wares at TEFAF. Credit...Colnaghi, photo by Arturo Sanchez

All art fairs have an array of selling points, which are necessary to get dealers and collectors to sign on, given how much the gatherings of galleries have proliferated. March comes amid one of the busiest seasons of the year for such events.

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But not every fair is described as “the Super Bowl and the World Series of traditional art.” The Los Angeles dealer Eric Weider, co-owner of Gallery 19C, used those words to describe the European Fine Art Fair, known as [TEFAF](#), in Maastricht, the Netherlands.

Only a combination sports metaphor will do for Mr. Weider, who is exhibiting for the first time this year at the fair, featuring more than 275 dealers from March 7 to March 15 at the Maastricht Exhibition and Congress Centre (preview days for VIPs begin on Thursday).

“It’s the best that you can get,” Mr. Weider said. “It’s an accomplishment just to be there.”

Though it is a venerable art world presence — the first edition was in 1988 — the fair has undergone significant changes in the past few years.

The biggest of them was its expansion to New York, beginning in 2016. Now, TEFAF has both spring and fall iterations taking place at the Park Avenue Armory. The expansion has required some organizational changes.

“The news this year is really our consolidation,” said Nanne Dekking, TEFAF’s chairman. “We now have one management team in charge of all fairs.”

“New York has been transformative,” Mr. Dekking added. “It actually tested us. You can have certain standards and procedures, but can they hold up when your company gets more complicated?”

The fair’s president and chief executive of the past five years, Patrick van Maris, announced in January that he was leaving the organization as of May; a permanent successor has not yet been announced.

Last year, the Maastricht edition introduced stricter rules for the vetting of artworks, intended to further strengthen a longtime point of pride for the fair.

The nearly 185 experts who gather for two days to examine and authenticate the objects are no longer allowed to have affiliations with auction houses or other businesses. Academics and other independent authorities drive the process, and the changes apply to all three TEFAF fairs.

“We needed the independence,” said Mr. Dekking, who was a central proponent of the new system.

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Reactions varied. “The dealers are on board, most of them understand,” he said. “There are always one or two exceptions,” he added, involving “calls in the middle of the night.”

One participant who has a unique perspective on the fair is Carlos Picón, who works for the longtime Maastricht exhibitor Colnaghi, a gallery with branches in London, Madrid and New York.

Though he is now a dealer, for almost 30 years Mr. Picón worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a curator of Greek and Roman works. He got used to being on the other side of transactions at the fair.

“The best way to lose a collector is to make them feel they are overpaying,” Mr. Picón said. “I’ve been a buyer for 40 years, so I know.”

On offer at the fair this time are two Roman marble heads in stone, both depicting women, priced “in the high six figures,” Mr. Picón said. One is from the late second century A.D., the other from the early third century.

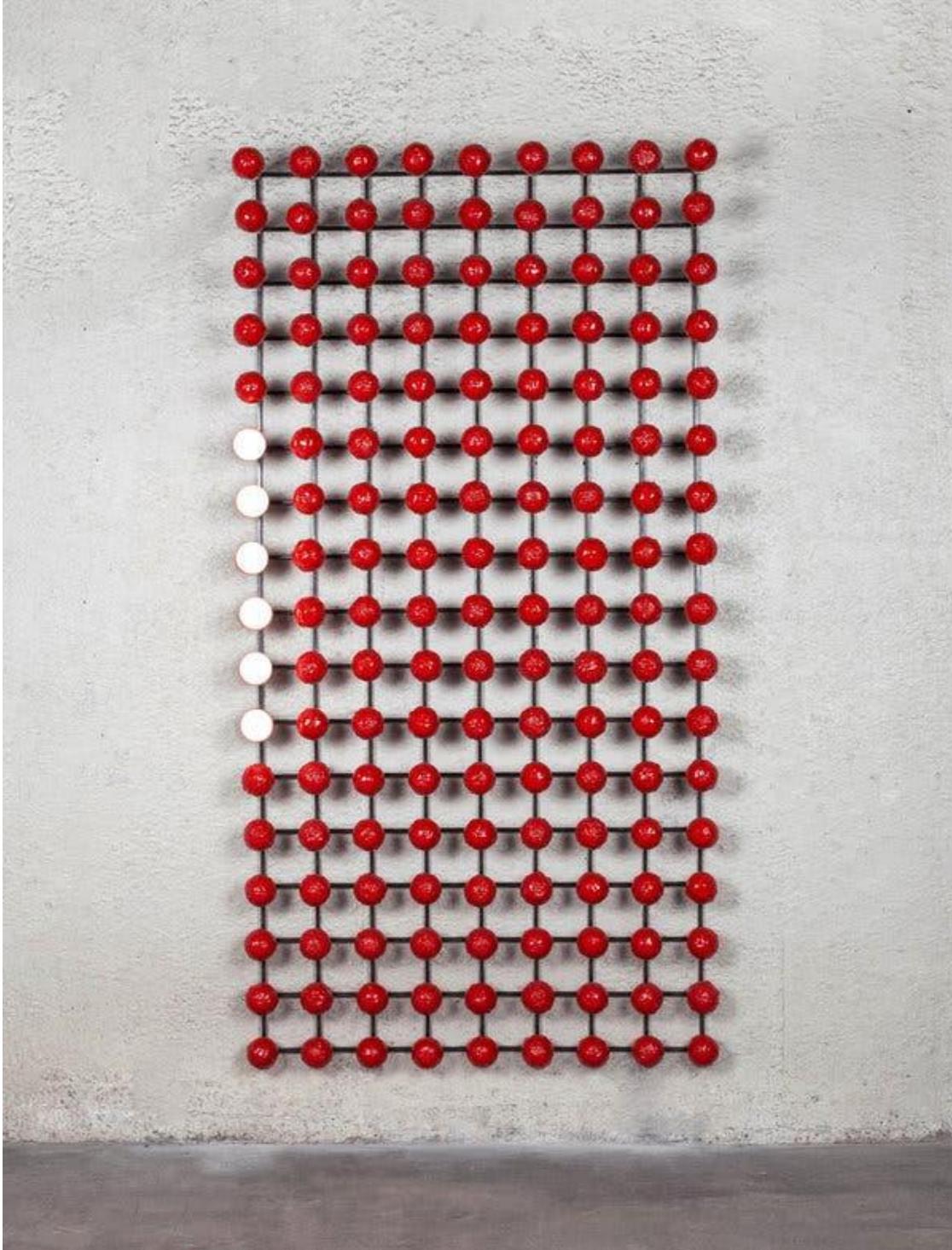
Among the booth’s sculptures (Colnaghi’s booth will also be stocked with paintings), the Roman heads are the most “exciting” offerings, Mr. Picón said. He will also have an array of smaller and less expensive antiquities, mostly Greek.

The idea is that those items will attract younger collectors, ones with less disposable income and less time to devote to the practice. “The future of the field requires us to nurture the collector who is 45 years old, still doing business and feeding their children,” Mr. Picón said.

Having a special section for design also helps the variety and enticement factor, and this year it features five galleries. Mr. Dekking called the section “small but significant,” both for its own sake and for the fact that it brings a diverse set of collectors to the fair.

“The dealers realize, ‘Hey, these are new people in our booth now,’” Mr. Dekking said.

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Friedman Benda will be presenting "Wall Clothes Hanger From Casa Carezza, Padua" by Gaetano Pesce. Credit...via Friedman Benda and Gaetano Pesce; photo by Daniel Kukla

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One of the design dealers is New York's Friedman Benda, a specialist in 20th-century and contemporary design that is exhibiting for the first time at the Maastricht fair.

"I've wanted to do it for a long while," said the gallery's co-founder Marc Benda. "It's sort of the model for all fairs." Last year, the gallery made its inaugural presentation at the New York edition.

The Friedman Benda booth will focus on furniture and objects by three acclaimed 20th-century designers: Ettore Sottsass, Gaetano Pesce and Shiro Kuramata. The works include an example of Mr. Kuramata's "Armchair with Drawers" (1967).

Mr. Benda thinks that having those works exhibited at the same fair as pieces like Mr. Picón's ancient marbles is all upside.

"If I can show what I do next to old masters, it does service to my artists," Mr. Benda said. He stressed that there was a scholarly and educational component to his presentation.

"As a dealer, you make a choice: Do I bring what will sell, or what I want people to see?" he said. "And it's not always the same things."



Stuart Lochhead Sculpture of London will show a 14th-century late-Gothic marble of St. John the Baptist by the Italian artist Nino Pisano. Credit...Stuart Lochhead
Another first-time exhibitor, Stuart Lochhead Sculpture of London, is collaborating with the

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Hazlitt gallery of London and New York on a presentation inside a booth designed by the Japanese architect Yuichi Kodai.

Among the works from Lochhead is a rare, 14th-century late-Gothic marble of St. John the Baptist by the Italian artist Nino Pisano. Not far away will be an offering from Hazlitt, Giuseppe Cesari's "St. Michael the Archangel Fighting Lucifer" (1626-27). The two galleries first joined forces at TEFAF New York Fall last year, and they liked the results.

Mr. Weider of 19C will show "The Wave" (1869-70) by the French painter Gustave Courbet, among other works by Giovanni Boldini, Eugène Boudin and Georges Seurat.

"The seascape was one of Courbet's most important subjects," Mr. Weider said. He said they generally came in two types: "marines," or scenes of calm waters, and "wave pictures," depicting stormy skies and crashing seas.

The price for "The Wave" is "north of a million dollars, pushing two million," Mr. Weider added, given that it is "one of the most important examples in private hands."



Gallery 19C will show "The Wave" (1869-70) by the French painter Gustave Courbet.
Credit...Gallery 19c

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Mr. Weider said that, given the current popularity of contemporary work, part of his job was to connect the dots of art history explicitly when talking to collectors.

“I explain that the 19th century is the road to modern art,” he said. “Courbet was the original stunt guy. He was a loud, arrogant figure — the origin of the artist as counterculture.”

Mr. Weider added, “Here’s how we got to [a banana taped to a wall](#),” referring to the low-fi artwork that created a sensation at Art Basel Miami Beach in December, “The Comedian” by Maurizio Cattelan.

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