



In with the old and new

Combinations of art from different periods proved very successful at TEFAF Maastricht, with sculpture also receiving renewed attention



Fig 1: Vincent van Gogh's *Tête De Paysanne À La Coiffe Blanche*, which was sold to a museum by Rau of New Orleans. €4.5 million

DECEMBER will bring the 49th anniversary of the first Pictura art fair, from which grew the mighty TEFAF at Maastricht. Of the 29 exhibitors, 10 were London galleries. Only seven were Dutch, which could only show 19th- and 20th-century works, as the Netherlands dealers' association wanted to monopolise Old Masters at its own established fair. This was also the reason for the choice of Maastricht as a location, as far from Amsterdam as possible. The rival fair soon faded and the ban on the Dutch selling Old Masters was quickly forgotten, as the southerly location proved

perfectly positioned to attract collectors based in several of the Continent's richest areas. Old Masters, particularly Dutch, became the bedrock on which Maastricht's pre-eminence was built.

Two of Pictura's founders, Richard Green of London and Borzo, then of 's-Hertogenbosch, were present at this year's fair, the 37th under the TEFAF banner. Borzo is one of the oldest galleries in the Netherlands and largely specialised in Old Masters, until, in 2005, it relocated to Amsterdam; now, its emphasis is on modern and contemporary art. Recently, it relocated again, but only a few



Fig 2: Sculpted furniture by Gloria Cortina shows off Charles Ede of London's ancient pieces to dramatic effect at TEFAF Maastricht

doors along the Keisergracht to an early-17th-century house once owned by the forger Van Meegeren.

Inevitably, the fair itself has evolved over the half century. This year, there were fewer Old Master dealers and fewer Dutch specialists among them than perhaps at any time since that very first outing. Like any market, art is governed by the rules of supply and demand, but they operate differently in the old and new fields. There are far fewer first-rate Old Masters in the wild, so to speak, and fewer collectors with the knowledge and funds to acquire them. The dilution

of cultural standards marches in step with the decline of religious and secular history in our education systems. This does not apply to late-19th-century and many 20th-century masters, but time does its work; the Impressionists and Cubists have themselves matured into old-masterhood and great examples are similarly scarce. Even the 13¼in by 10¼in *Tête De Paysanne À La Coiffe Blanche* (Fig 1) sold to a museum this year by Rau of New Orleans, which I thought very powerful, was not priced, at €4.5 million, as would have been a top-flight van Gogh.



Fig 3: A *Moribond*, or dying man, maquette by Théodore Géricault. Sold by Daniel Katz

With contemporary art, the case is rather different. There is an over-supply of both artists and would-be buyers, which means that the most powerful dealers are able to dictate which artists will be bought and who may be allowed to buy them. Terms and conditions may apply, but not necessarily standards. Partial and temporary solutions to these problems of supply are provided by the current preoccupation with diversity. A work by a pre-modern woman will have a premium on it, as she is deemed to have been 'overlooked', and contemporary dealers are also eager to have non-white and female artists on their books. Other solutions are to recover once-fashionable artists and genres and to persuade collecting neophytes that old and new art live together very happily.

In my TEFAF preview on March 6, I looked forward to the new 'Focus' section of collaborative stands, particularly that staged by Charles Ede of London with Sean Kelly from New York. It was even more effective than I had expected. Gloria Cortina's sculptural South American onyx furniture is beautiful and impressive (Fig 2), even if it takes up strong floors and found tables, and her rare ziricote wood benches and shelving made a perfect marriage with Ede's ancient Greek vases, all complemented by strong abstract paintings by Calian Innes commissioned by Mr Kelly. The latter continued the idea on his nearby solo stand, mixing old objects with contemporary art. An exceptional pairing there was a 10th-century Samanid earthenware bowl (Fig 4) of about 9½in diameter, probably from Nishapur, Iran, and a 2024 ink-on-gesso panel by Birmingham-born Idris Khan. The text on the first, which, densely repeated, made up the pictorial element of the second, was an apt thought for the fair: *al-hirsu 'alamatu l-fagri* or 'Greed is a Sign of Poverty'. This collaboration's success was evident when contemporary collectors made their way from it to buy from Ede, having not previously

considered antiquities. In all, Ede sold nearly half its exhibits.

Sculpture, which used to be pre-eminent among the fine arts, is receiving renewed attention from dealers and collectors, and—both old and new—it was one of the areas that impressed me most at this fair, my overall favourite being a 13½in-long plaster maquette for a Moribond, or dying man, by Théodore Géricault (Fig 3) sold by Daniel Katz to (I believe) a museum. Oddly, they did not buy a two-sided pen study for *The Raft of the Medusa* displayed beside it.

Considered as an art form, armour is not far removed from sculpture and Peter Finer sold his major piece at the first preview. It was a gilt close helm for tournament (Fig 5) attributable to Conrad Richter of Augsburg, who made the 'Golden Garnitures' for the Emperor Ferdinand I and his three sons in about 1555. Also sculptural was the Willow Tree Chair (Fig 6) by the Full Grown partnership, sold by first-time exhibitor Sarah Myerscough to an American collector at about £85,000.

Next week Drawn to Paris

Fig 6: The Willow Tree Chair sold by Sarah Myerscough. £85,000



Fig 4 left: A 10th-century Samanid earthenware bowl. With Sean Kelly. Fig 5 right: A gilt close helm by Richter. Sold by Peter Finer



Pick of the week

An artist new to me was Boleslaw Biegas (1877–1954), a Polish sculptor, painter and would-be writer who weaved between Symbolism, Surrealism and colourful abstraction. He was expelled from the Kraków art school and settled in Paris, building an international career. Vampires and demons provided one mystical strand of his subject matter and geometrical Cubism prompted a series of double-faced sculptures.

There was one of each of these at Maastricht, on separate stands. Stuart Lochhead sold his *Demon de la Sphère terrestre* (below right), which holds the Globe in its lap, to a Polish private collection. Lochhead had a good fair, his sales including an early cast of Giambologna's bronze *Striding Mars* to an American museum at \$4 million (about £3.17 million).

Oscar Graf, Parisian specialist in British, French and American furniture and design from 1850, had a Biegas double-faced figure, *The Beginning of Life*, at an asking price of €210,000 (about £180,000). It can be seen, holding roundels with embryos, in the foreground of a photo of the sculptor's studio (below left).



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