

Frieze tests cross examination

Event now in 13th year encourages dealers and collectors to choose regardless of period or culture

by Gabriel Berner

Faced with today's increasingly selective market, dealers and fairs are rethinking how they pitch and present works for sale – nowhere more so than at *Frieze Masters*.

The fair, which ran this year from October 15–19 amid the spectacular autumn colours of London's Regent's Park, has served as a barometer for the top end of the market since its debut in 2012.

While *Frieze Masters* has traditionally embraced a mix of disciplines to appeal to a broad range of collectors, under new director Emanuela Tarizzo that approach was given renewed emphasis, with cross-collecting very much the buzzword in the aisles this year.

"We're seeing growing interest not only from established collectors but from younger audiences as well," said Tarizzo. "They're open to looking, discovering, and responding to what resonates with them personally, regardless of period or culture."

Collecting across categories is seen as a steadier way to buy, more resilient to market fashions and a fresh lens through which to view art.

Dealers, whose interests often span art and antiques alike, are naturally attuned to this way of collecting and, particularly among the younger generation, buyers seem very much at home here.

The approach was visible across a number of the 137 galleries, with **Robilant + Voena's** pairing of Old Masters and post-war canvases and **Galerie Chenel's** mix of Picasso ceramics and ancient Roman marbles among the more striking examples.

Encouraging feedback, reflected in steady sales, contributed to a broadly positive atmosphere at *Frieze Masters* – one that contrasted with headlines in the run-up which had centred on the challenges facing both the market and the Frieze organisation.

Chief executive Simon Fox spoke of "severe headwinds", from geopolitical tensions and trade pressures to rising competition from Paris and New York, and a jittery contemporary market that loomed over *Frieze Masters'* bigger sister, *Frieze London*.

While big-ticket sales inevitably



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Selection of highlight sales from *Frieze Masters*

1. Dealers are mixing eras and price points as cross-collecting gains ground at high-end fairs such as *Frieze Masters*. **Charles Ede's** stand offered antiquities and 19th and 20th century works together with a colourful presentation of ancient Roman glass vessels, dating from the 1st to 4th centuries AD, with fresh flowers arranged by British florist Shane Connolly. The glass, priced from **£1000-10,000**, was one of the most photographed presentations at *Frieze Masters*, with 40 pieces sold.

2. Millennial dealers brought a fresh eye to presentation, mixing old and new and giving historic works a modern twist. On the stand of **Vagabond**,

this set of nine 15th-century Siena brocatello marble floor tiles, mounted on the wall like a piece of modern art, sold with a **ticket price of £24,000**.

3. *Fruit on a Blue Plate* by Sir Matthew Smith (1879-1959), one of several modestly priced drawings and watercolours on the stand of **Stephen Ongpin Fine Art**. It sold for **around £6000**.

4. **Shapero Modern** and **Shapero Rare Books** had success with their mix of books and pictures. The monumental 1977 print *Gargantua* by Joan Miró, hanging prominently on the left, was **offered at £85,000** and sold to a private buyer.



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gallery's director Charis Tyndall. Buyers snapped up 40 pieces of glass and 80% of the drawings.

Lower price points have become one way for the gallery to tap into the wider appetite for cross-collecting. Beyond *Frieze Masters*, the London gallery has been broadening its scope, hiring a specialist in 19th and 20th century works last year to attract new and younger clients through a more varied offering. In a recent interview, Tyndall said the move was paying off, noting that those who come for the paintings often leave with an interest in antiquities.

That appetite for antiquities was not confined to the entry level at *Frieze Masters*, however. Fellow ancient art dealer **Rupert Wace** described this year as "definitely the best opening to any of the *Frieze Masters*", pointing to a "noticeable" enthusiasm for cross-category collecting that generated several six-figure sales.

Antiquities have become a mainstay of *Frieze Masters*; their easy 'dialogue' with modern art a clear driver of their success at the fair.

Madeleine Perridge, gallery director at ancient art dealership **Kallos Gallery**, described the fair as "one of the most important international events for our market".

The gallery reported "a number of sales" to new and existing clients, including museum interest. "The careful layout at *Frieze Masters*, the minimalist design, and the diversity

took the headlines (see *News*, ATG No 2715), more affordable works were also in evidence this year and found ready buyers.

Antiquities gallery **Charles Ede** reported brisk business in lower-valued items, including an eye-catching presentation of ancient Roman glass vessels, complete with fresh flowers, priced from £1000-10,000, and a collection of sketch book drawings by the 19th century French artist Alexandre-Louis Leloir (1843-84), priced from £150-10,500.

"These more affordable exhibitions brought in a lot of new clients, many of whom were younger collectors just starting out, but also well-established collectors who wanted to put together a small but immediate collection," said the

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3 of artworks on offer really encourage cross-collecting,” added Perridge.

Away from ancient art, **Shapero Modern** and **Shapero Rare Books** reported a strong fair, their stand bringing a burst of colour to the aisles, with books and pictures mixed to lively effect. Joan Miró’s (1893-1983) *Gargantua*, a large 1977 print created with printmaker Robert Dutrou, was offered at £85,000 and sold to a private buyer.

Other sales included four prints by Alexander Calder (1898-1976), each priced at £8500, and a signed large-paper copy of *L’Art Décoratif Théâtral Moderne* by Russian avant-garde artist Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962) with an asking price of £27,500.

Fresh eye

Younger dealers are bringing a fresh eye to presentation, not just mixing old and new but giving historic works a modern twist.

Making its debut at the fair, **Vagabond**, the millennial-run gallery from Petworth with its Grand Tour sensibility, was a case in point. Founder Joe Chaffer, exhibiting in the fair’s *Reflections* section, said sales were consistent throughout, with his more “adventurous choices of inventory” proving particularly successful.

These included a set of nine 15th-century Siena brocatello marble floor tiles, mounted on the wall like a piece of modern art and priced at £24,000.

“The atmosphere was quite unlike any traditional antiques fair,” he said. “It was really electric, and the response to our presentation was overwhelmingly positive; it seemed to resonate with the broad demographic *Frieze* represents.”

Elsewhere, the fair’s accessible appeal this edition was evident at drawings

specialist **Stephen Ongpin**, whose gallery covers Old Masters, 19th-century and modern art. He reported nearly a dozen sales ranging from £2500 to £65,000. Among them was a small still-life watercolour by Sir Matthew Smith (1879-1959), priced around £6000.

He commented on the “great buzz and energy around the fair”, with nine purchases from the stand going to new clients in the UK, the US and Europe, while one drawing sold to an American museum. Ongpin was hopeful of turning post-fair follow-ups into further sales; something that has become increasingly common at art fairs today, he added.

Museums in number

Institutions have always played a significant role at the fair, but this year featured especially strong attendance, with *Frieze* reporting a record number of museum curators and directors on site.

Basel gallery **Dr Jörn Günther Rare Books** noted that the real success of the fair would become clear in the coming months, with two “important” institutions showing interest in its manuscripts.

The dealership also reported selling several miniatures to new clients, including a Nativity scene worked into an historiated initial *P* by the Veronese illuminator Domenico Morone (c.1442-1518), priced at €35,000, and a French 13th century pocket Bible, offered in the range of SwFr60,000-70,000. ■

