

TEFAF MAASTRICHT

Special Report

The fair

A preview of what is in store

Tefaf Maastricht makes a Modern move

Despite ongoing management turmoil, there is a buzz around this year's fair, as it welcomes more 20th-century dealers to its traditional roster. **By Melanie Gerlis**

Tefaf is mostly sitting very pretty this year. Amid market uncertainty and a volatile environment for the industry's many fairs, the Maastricht stalwart has been going for nearly 40 years and is back in favour as one of the art world's favourite hunting grounds.

Its broad range of objects that stretch, organisers say, 7,000 years, creates a conversely niche event – there are not many art fairs that do what Tefaf Maastricht does – and the fair is gradually becoming the discerning choice for contemporary galleries with strong 20th-century secondary material. Meanwhile, the slower, more deliberate pace of today's art market seems to match Tefaf's sweet spot of Old Masters hits. What could be a better backdrop than Christie's sale of a Michelangelo drawing for \$27m in February?

Tefaf's own politics do not yet match the mood, however. Its latest leader, Dominique Savelkoul, came in last year promising a more stable direction as the fair's fifth managing director in four years and following a tumultuous period, including through the Covid-19 pandemic. Her tenure did not last the year though, so it is back to the drawing board to find someone to oversee this venerable event.

"It would be more ideal to have a settled team in place, but in the end, the team below [the managing director level] is largely unchanged and it is still a very well-run fair," says the London-based dealer Stephen Ongpin, a view echoed by many of Tefaf's exhibitors. Stuart Lochhead, the sculpture specialist who sits on the fair's small executive committee, adds that, while the management shuffles "haven't held things back", it is "essential to get someone in place who stays".

Business as usual

In the meantime, the show goes on. The fair, with its 276 exhibitors (including five shared stands), will follow the usual format, with all dealers still on its plush ground floor, and the mezzanine dedicated to museum partners, VIP lounges and restaurants including Michelin-starred seafood. There are tweaks to the floorplan, for example the Showcase section, for younger, emerging dealerships, is at the back of the fair after a foregrounding moment last year.

A loose theme this year is making sure that the medium of photography is "not just a bit part" says Will Korner, Tefaf's head of fairs. He highlights works by Robert Mapplethorpe (with Galerie Thomas Schulte) in this year's more centrally-zoned Focus section for solo stands, as well as a shared stand by the rare books dealer Daniel Crouch and the photography specialist Michael Hoppen, which matches antiquarian maps with



Staples at Tefaf Maastricht, such as this 17th-century Dutch painting, are being joined by more photography and other contemporary art for this year's edition

cityscapes by the contemporary Japanese photographer Sohei Nishino.

At the time of writing, announced highlights go back more than 4,000 years. Gisèle Croës has a Neolithic painted pottery jar from China, including a humanoid head as a handle, which dates from around 2200BC-2000BC (£120,000) while Charles Ede brings a statuette of a male official, made in wood in ancient Egypt's Middle Kingdom (around 2055BC-1911BC, €38,000). Also among the eight Ancient art specialists is London's David

Aaron, whose highlights include a delicately carved, rare Greek tomb stele of an unwed woman of marriageable age (see the Wishlist, p8) as well as a curiously calming Egyptian limestone baboon (664BC-343BC, £280,000).

Other gems include a collier (necklace) of eight tourmalines, including one at 68.85 carat, created by the Australian jewellery designer Margot McKinney for her debut at Tefaf last year. Titled *Bloem*, it has since been worn by Helen Mirren when the actress received her Cecil B. DeMille Award at the Golden Globe awards in