

*The Magazine*

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2011

# ANTIQUES



\$10.00

## Building a Masterpiece

London vies with Maastricht for the wow factor

The lanky Dutchman Harry van der Hoorn can create anything, or so it seems. It took van der Hoorn and his firm Stabilo, an international designer and builder of exhibitions, six days to install Masterpiece, the June 29 to July 5 megafair that is restoring London's allure as a summer destination for collectors while sending competitors scrambling to update events now as passé as Nancy Reagan red.

Masterpiece's signature feature is an almost 130,000-square-foot vinyl tent complex, or marquee as the British call it, whose photo-printed exterior mimics the adjacent Royal Hospital Chelsea, completed by Sir Christopher Wren in 1692 along the banks of the Thames in what is now the city's fashionable heart.

restaurants—replicas of the society hotspots Le Caprice, Mount Street Deli, and Harry's Bar—constitute attractions in their own right. Le Caprice was booking reservations even before the fair opened.

Even the most jaded critics, dealers themselves, were dazzled by the display, conjured from nothing to replace the little

classic features and cropped curls echo antiquity. A former antiques dealer, Masterpiece's chairman founded the fair with colleagues from Apter-Fredericks, Mallett, and Ronald Phillips, three gilt-edged purveyors of antique English furniture and decorations; the British luxury goods retailer Asprey, which has since withdrawn; and van der Hoorn.

If Masterpiece was in part inspired by TEFAF, which has drawn business away from London in the past decade, it has also sought to distinguish itself from its Continental competitor. TEFAF organizes its 260 exhibitors by discipline, a boon for the picture dealers who founded the fair but a perceived disadvantage for others. Masterpiece instead makes a virtue of miscellany, mixing disciplines and scattering its highest profile members around the



Led by Harry van der Hoorn, Stabilo International fashioned the exterior of Masterpiece's enormous tent complex with the image of the adjacent Royal Hospital Chelsea, completed by Sir Christopher Wren in 1692. Photograph courtesy of Masterpiece 2011.

One of five arcaded aisles that traverse the width of the hall, providing space for 152 stands overall.

A flotilla of lorry drivers delivered the forty-five trailers of material used to construct the colossus. Inside, the exhibition floor is wider than it is long, with a broad avenue running down its center that van der Hoorn, who also builds The European Fine Art Fair (TEFAF) in the Dutch city of Maastricht each March, says was inspired by Las Ramblas, Barcelona's famed promenade. One hundred-fifty-two generously proportioned stands face each other along five arcaded aisles that traverse the width of the hall. Soaring ceilings and broad expanses of white give the illusion of daylight where there is none. Pop-up

lamented Grosvenor House Antiques Fair, which folded in 2009 after seventy-five years. Likened by *The Economist* to "a shopping mall in an absurdly smart hotel," Masterpiece is nevertheless working. It added fifty-two new exhibitors this year, growing by about a third over its debut in 2010. Preview day attendance nearly doubled to five thousand, and general attendance was up 58 percent to 28,347. Sales were fair to good across the board.

"The world has changed. People do not want to buy in a cluttered, claustrophobic space," says Thomas Woodham-Smith, whose





floor, leaving visitors to wander, not always purposefully, at will. Each organizer claims that it has a better venue, TEFAF arguing that Maastricht's relative isolation makes it more rigorously mercantile; Masterpiece insisting that London, with its lively cultural calendar, is a more attractive destination.

Great size, lavish production, and high associated costs make both shows a numbers game. "The math of Maastricht,"

says Woodham-Smith, "is to get seventy thousand visitors in ten days. One percent of visitors, or seven hundred people, are serious buyers. No shop in the world gets that many buyers. The math of Masterpiece is to get twenty-five thousand to thirty-five thousand visitors, of which two percent are possible buyers because the local demographic is so strong over seven days, thus four hundred to five hundred buyers, a great opportunity for our dealers."

In a page borrowed from luxury-goods conglomerates like LVMH, Masterpiece's organizers have aggressively sought to combine mass and class, sexing up the show with displays by Rolls Royce, Jaguar, and even the LVMH brand Ruinart, a maker of wines and spirits. They banished the off-putting words "art" and the fustier "antiques" from their title. The effort is making Masterpiece more

appealing to a younger, after-work crowd, say exhibitors. But it dangerously blurs key distinctions between unique, handcrafted works of historical and artistic interest and branded merchandise.

"A lot of people have a problem with the word *antique*," confesses Woodham-Smith, a conclusion shared by Clare McAndrew in *The Role of Art and Antiques Dealers: An Added Value*, a new study published by the international dealers association C.I.N.O.A. Fortunately, Masterpiece speaks for itself. It ranges from ancient to contemporary works, stopping in the Middle Ages and Renaissance along the way. Resolutely British, this year it featured a major Francis Bacon oil on canvas and a Henry Moore bronze created in an edition of five for the 1951 Festival of Britain. The relatively tame Bacon, *Still Life, Broken Statue and Shadow* of 1984, was £9.5 million at **Portland Gallery**. Moore's *Reclining Figure* was £9 million at **Lefevre**. Modern British painting, from the St. Ives school to the Camden Town group, was a special pleasure at **Paisnel Gallery**, **The Fine Arts Society**, and **Agnew's**.

If there is a popular aversion to antiques, it was not evident at such mainstays of the English trade as **W. W. Warner Antiques**, specializing in traditional English and Continental porcelain, or **Witney Antiques**, a dealer in fine English needlework. Both had



Occupying the tent's central crossing, Harry's Bar was one of three popular hotspots that provided refreshment for fairgoers.

Apter-Fredericks of London's stand.

Chandelier in the manner of Henry Holland (1745–1806), English, c. 1825. Courtesy of Ronald Phillips Ltd., London; Masterpiece 2011 photograph.





Clockwise from top left: Hamiltons Gallery was awarded "Stand of the Year" by its peers.

Desk-and-bookcase attributed to John Belchier (active 1735-1753), English, c. 1720. Courtesy of Godson and Coles, London.

View of the Bernheimer-Colnaghi booth. Masterpiece 2011 photograph.

Annunciate angel, Umbria, Italy, c. 1430-1440. Courtesy of Sam Fogg, Ltd., London; Masterpiece 2011 photograph.

bang-up shows. At the far end of the spectrum, **Gordon Watson**, a twentieth-century design specialist who stars in the new BBC4 television show "Four Rooms," which pits dealers against the public in a test of wit, quickly sold a 1995 Tracey Emin monotype that he bought from the British artist's brother.

Named "Stand of the Year" by the dealers, **Hamiltons Gallery**, which deals in twentieth-century master photographs and is run by London's dashing man-about-town Tim Jeffries, arrayed high-impact prints by well-known practitioners like Richard Avedon, Helmut Newton, and Irving Penn, and the emerging artist Cathleen Naundorf in a room set inspired by the seductive comfort of Jeffries's private office. The dealer said his intent was to demonstrate how photography can be incorporated into domestic interiors.

"Object of the Year" went, more conventionally, to **Tomasso Brothers**, who wowed with a massive pair of Florentine marble sculptures of about 1700 found in Yorkshire. On the disquieting theme of lions savaging a horse and a bull, the marbles were £1,750,000; two companion bronzes, £475,000.

Dovetailing neatly with London's Master Paintings Week from July 1 to 8, Masterpiece drew a contingent of Old Master picture



dealers, including the heavyweights **Bernheimer-Colnaghi** and **Noortman**, both new to the fair. The well-crafted Bernheimer-Colnaghi display limned the influence of classicism from antiquity to the present, pairing an early eighteenth-century architectural capriccio by the Italian painter Giovanni Paolo Panini with a 2005 color photograph by the German artist Candida Höfer. The trade has become increasingly special-



ized over the past three decades, something one might not guess from the trendy eclecticism of some displays. Commenting on the times, **Robilant and Voena** hung *Holy Family with the Young Saint John*, a painting of about 1620 by Bartolomeo Cavarozzi, along with David La Chapelle's *Negative Currency*, a series of enhanced color photographs of Chinese yuan and American dollars.

# The marketplace

Speaking of the Chinese, they did not attend Masterpiece in any number despite their increasingly dominant profile in salesrooms around the world. But two Masterpiece exhibitors—**Michael Goedhuis**, with outlets in London and Beijing, and **Pierre DuMonteil**, of Paris and Shanghai—are already anticipating the next great wave of show buyers. On the other hand, plenty of American voices were heard, including those of the handful of American dealers who participated in the fair. Among them was Tiffany specialist **Lillian Nassau**, in its first overseas appearance in its sixty-five-year history.

Europeans have taken the lead in mounting the world's most sensational antiques shows. Having raised the bar, Masterpiece is certain to influence American fairs, but how? Manhattan's best venue, the Park Avenue



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Armory, is too small to accommodate a "super event," as Woodham-Smith calls Masterpiece, and show business's brightest minds have already considered—and rejected—Central Park as a location for a temporary structure.

My prediction is that New York's top fairs will continue playing to their traditional strengths, staying small and cultivating intimacy while broadening datelines, introducing new collecting specialties, and adjusting their appearances with lighter, cleaner, more commodious presentations meant to appeal to younger audiences. They may explore broader partnerships with luxury brands, particularly with respect to their cafes.

Change is already underway in New York. The new **Pavilion of Art and Design** show, a Paris import with a dateline from the 1890s to the present, is planned for November 10 to 14 at the Park Avenue Armory. **The Metropolitan Show**, a remake of the American Antiques Show by the Art Fair Company, whose SOFA fairs promote contemporary design, debuts January 18 to 22 at the Metropolitan Pavilion.

Still one wonders what might happen if the Dutch, with their commercial genius, retook New York. Harry van der Hoorn is intrigued by the possibility of creating a show in Manhattan, but also skeptical. "After all, we traded New York for Suriname," he says ruefully.

#### Clockwise from top:

Lefevre Fine Art's booth featuring *Reclining Figure* by Henry Moore (1898–1986), created for the Festival of Britain in 1951. *Masterpiece 2011* photograph.

*Lion and a Horse* attributed to Giovanni Battista Foggini and workshop (1652–1725) c. 1700. Paired with *Lion and a Bull*, the monumental marbles shown by the Tomasso Brothers won "Object of the Year." Tomasso Brothers Fine Art, Leeds; *Masterpiece 2011* photograph.

Pair of ivory-veneered armchairs, Vizagapatam, India, 1800–1850. Courtesy of Amir Mohtashemi Ltd., London; photograph by Angelo Plantamura.

Robilant and Voena's stand. *Masterpiece 2011* photograph.

