

TEFAF: a Collector's Private Museum

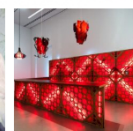
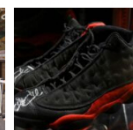
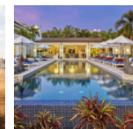
This is a reproduction of the painting 'The Descent from the Cross' by the Flemish Baroque master Peter Paul Rubens. The scene depicts the removal of the body of Jesus from the cross. The Virgin Mary, dressed in a red and blue gown, is shown in a state of grief, supporting the body of her son. To her left, an elderly man, likely St. Joseph, is seen holding the body. The body of Jesus is draped in a white cloth, with visible wounds on his back and hands. The background is dark, with a blue curtain partially visible. The painting is framed by a dark, ornate border.

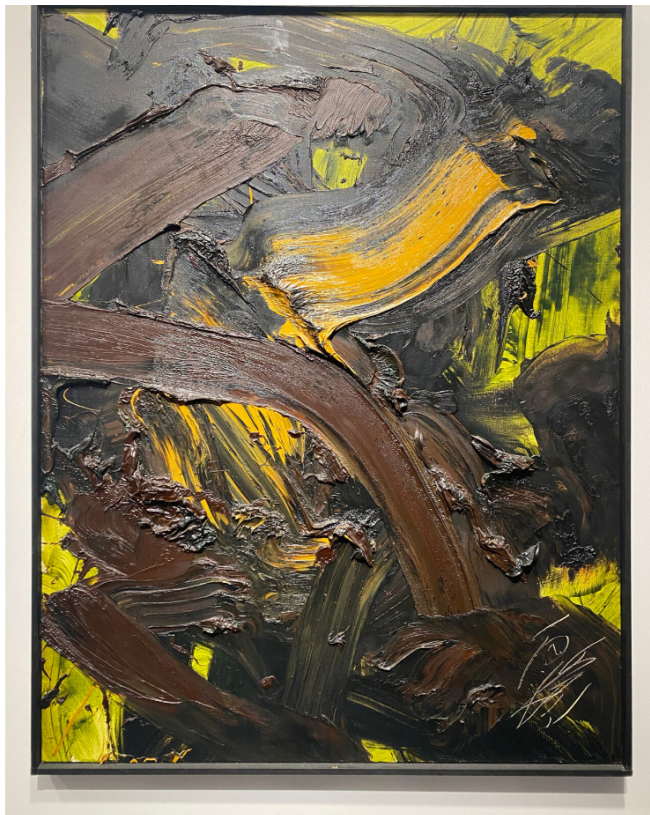
President of TEFAF's executive committee, Hidde van Seggelen commented, "This year's edition of TEFAF was a truly gratifying experience for the entire TEFAF community and there was a feeling of great positivity and energy. Our exhibitors offered a spectacular platform for the dialogue between diverse works spanning 9,000 years of human creativity, paying homage to the quality of the pieces they offer. TEFAF is a special experience for the collecting community who continue to be inspired, year after year, and we all look forward to 2024."

In addition, Masterpiece in London (a more fashionable fair of antique and modern art which by now has been definitely cancelled) rapidly followed the June Maastricht show. A summer of competing art fairs was unparalleled, but signs emerged of saturation, similar replicas and fatigue, not necessarily appreciated by seasoned collectors of Old Masters.



2023 WIN

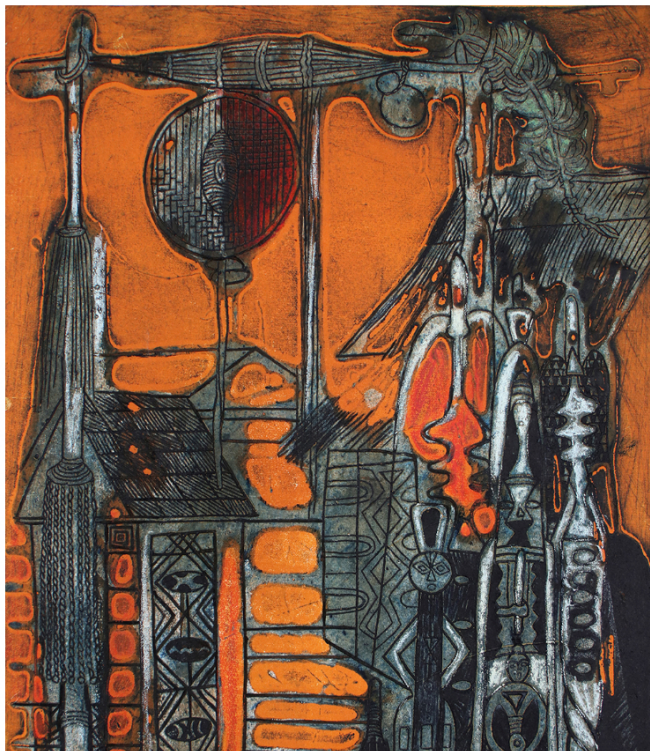




Kazuo Shiraga, Sei, 1991 (Fergus McCaffrey, New York, Tokyo)

The present TEFAF edition made us forget all these troubles. This year's 36th edition included 268 dealers, of which 13 were established galleries making their debut, and 10 younger galleries. The wide corridors and open spaces gave enough room for movement and relaxation, inviting critical conversations, and creating a cheerful ambiance, which was embellished with a sublime floral decoration at the entrance hall with silvery gypsophila and cascading pink florets throughout the entire fair.

Of particular interest is the proportion of dealers of Old Master paintings, sculptures, objets d'art or prestigious collectibles, on the one hand, and of modern and contemporary art on the other: the first group includes almost 150 participants, among them 50 specialised in Old Masters, plus around 20 more exhibitors of works on paper, prints, rare books, manuscripts, maps etc. and many antique dealers.



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Bruce Onobrakpeya, Atete Gwre, Ighoro-o, 1988 (Tafeta, London)

The second section uniting modern and contemporary art encompasses a group of 50 dealers situated in the centre of the East hall. The inclusion of modern and contemporary art is certainly beneficial not only commercially but also for welcoming a new and younger clientele, and last but not least for adding a new perspective on the Old Masters and 19th-century artists as well as making the more traditional visitors of TEFAF familiar with the present-day art.

Rebranding

The idea of rebranding old with new art, and vice versa, has also captivated auction houses. The remix model is certainly one solution, given the general slowdown and absence of potential consignors, and it helps, too, to expand into the primary market (albeit perhaps to the detriment of many galleries).

Two up-to-date examples: in May's upcoming Sotheby's New York Modern Evening Sale, the auction house will propose a unique painting by Rubens, *Portrait of a Man as the God Mars*, with an estimate of \$20 m–\$30 m. Besides, the present exhibition at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna confronts Georg Baselitz's naked figures with Old Masters, academic nudes by Rubens, Cranach, Titian and more.



Simone di Bianco, Head of an Idealised Man (Tomasso, London)

Of course, this edition of TEFAF makes it clear that it is no easy feat to lure half a dozen international high-end galleries of contemporary art to Maastricht, certainly within the context of the many contemporary art fairs taking place between Soul, Miami, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Madrid, Paris, Basel etc.

This year's contemporary section featured: White Cube and Lisson from London with

branches in other capitals, Sean Kelly from New York and Los Angeles or Continua from San Gimignano (Italy) with subsidiaries worldwide. These galleries were complemented by: Templon, Kamel Mennour, Karsten Greve (all from Paris etc.) and Fergus McCaffrey (from New York and Tokyo), the latter showing a stunning group of works by the Japanese female artist active in Berlin, Leiko Ikemura, as well as two staggering paintings by the Japanese abstract expressionist Kazuo Shiraga, an early member of the post-war Gutai collective (of 1991 respectively 1973, \$1.3 m and \$2.2 m).



Giovanni Lanfranco, Judith with the Head of Holofernes (Rob Smeets, Geneva).

Lisson proposes a selection of post-conceptual artists as a colourful organic-shaped painting by Joanna Pousette-Dart (\$200,000) and a plastic version of an abstract Mondrian-composition – in fact a copy of Mondrian's Broadway Boogie Woogie in the MoMA made out of Lego cubes – by Ai Weiwei (\$250,000, edition of 10).

Among the pleasing number of Italian galleries representing predominantly artists of the post-war abstraction generation, a spatial sculpture stands out, which is formed out of a brass sheet and a fine wire mesh by Fausto Melotti (€290,000) at Sprovieri (London). Mazzoleni (London, Turin) presents a canvas of a large post-futuristic sunset in an urban setting by the Turin painter close to the Arte Povera movement Salvo (€380,000). At White Cube a colourful concrete canvas (based on the visual translation of digital processes) of the Beijing-based painter and sculptor Liu Wei catches the eye (€350,000).

Tribal

The section of so-called 'tribal' art from the Africa and Pacific region is also rewarding. Many of these works, in primarily sculptures, masks, artifacts etc. rank within 20th-century art history, since they have decisively influenced artists of the Cubist and Surrealist movement (from Picasso to Giacometti). The increasing interest in tribal art among young collectors is certainly a consequence of this phenomenon. There is also growing attention for contemporary art by black artists or artists from a mixed-race background such as, for example, the Chicago-based artist, Theaster Gates, whose black tear painting stood out at White Cube.



Pieter Bruegel the Younger, Winter Landscape with Bird Trap (De Jonckheere, Geneva)

A sign of the vitality of contemporary African art is the work of Bruce Onobrakpeya (born

in 1932), a painter and sculptor from Nigeria: his powerful prints are sold at affordable prices at Tafeta (London). The recent restitution debate seems not to have impeded the market. In the first days of the fair there were no signs of reluctance among collectors. Among the impressive offers is an object at Bernard Dulon's gallery (Paris): a rare Kanak mask from New Caledonia (€110,000).

Asian art has its own highly cultivated audience, a group of art lovers which is very different, perhaps also more discrete and sophisticated than the collectors of tribal art. All these peculiarities or collecting attitudes are the vital ingredients which define the large cultural impact of the event and the high valuation of the fair internationally. Tenzing Asian Art (San Francisco) proposes sublime 14th-century Bodhisattva Maitreya from the Himalaya region (\$180,000) and a highly important Tibetan Tanka from the 12th–13th century, representing Buddha Vairocana (\$5.5 m).

Old Masters

The traditional fair of Old Master paintings and corresponding fields all reflect Western cultures. It was dominated by outstanding works coming mainly from Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium and, of course, from France. The leading dealers, in contrast to their colleagues specialised in modern and contemporary art, have fewer global branches (and therefore TEFAF has become an important international showcase) include among others: Richard Green, Dickinson, Tomasso, Daniel Katz, Benappi and Agnews, all based in London as well as Colnaghi. Robilant + Voena and a number of other Italian galleries also have their main gallery in London (maintaining their offices back home).



Albrecht von Horn, Nautilus Shell, ca 1650 (Kugel, Paris)

Other Italian galleries like G. Sarti or Canesso, have their base instead in Paris, which after Brexit has doubtless become an important centre of the art market; also installed here are the French dealer Kugel and Eric Coatalem. A few French galleries have for a long while maintained branches in New York and London and Paris like Wildenstein and Didier Aaron. Others operate from the continent, including Koetser (Zurich), De Jonckheere and Rob Smeets (Geneva).

Among their key works: a *Head of an Idealised Man* of the Venetian Renaissance by sculptor Simone di Bianco (Tomasso, €425,000), a unique posthumous *Portrait of Sinibaldo Gaddi* carried by a black page from ca. 1565 by the Florentine painter Maso da San Friano (Colnaghi, €1.3m) and a rare and thrilling painting on copper by the late

mannerist Venetian painter Carlo Saraceni, *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (Benappi, €1.3 m) – and a singular painting by the Parmesan Baroque fresco painter, active in Rome and Naples, Giovanni Lanfranco, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (Rob Smeets, €2.2 m).



Abraham Janssen, *Saint Jerome* (Altomani & Sons, Milan)

Regarding Flemish and Dutch painting: the popular subjects of the Brueghel family of painters are impossible to miss, especially at De Jonckheere where there are many excellent examples of them as, for example, by Pieter Brueghel the Elder's son Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Winter Landscape with Bird Trap* (€2 m). A beautiful *Saint Jerome* by the Flemish Caravaggist Abraham Janssen enthused many collectors (Altomani & Sons, Milan), €400,000 – a fair price, given the fact that the painting has been sold in New York at Sotheby's, 14 October, 2020, for only \$100,000? Furthermore, a moving painting by Michael Sweerts from Brussels who died tragically in Goa (India), *Allegory of Touch*, (Robilant + Voena €1 m). Regarding Dutch painting of the 17th century the choice of first-class paintings was tremendous.





Southern Netherlands, Large Leaf Verdure with Pergola, Balustrade, Animals and Flowers, ca. 1550 (De Wit, Mechelen)

Among the champions is a recently rediscovered *Portrait of Johan Claesz Loo* by Frans Hals (Adam Williams Fine Art, Amells Konsthandel, New York, Stockholm, \$5.6 m), a sketchy marine painting by Salomon van Ruysdael, *Sailing Ship off the Coast* (Koetser, €480,000) and a splendid *Vase of Flowers with a Cornucopia on a Marble Table* (signed and dated 1742) by the Dutch female painter Rachel Ruysch (Haboldt, Paris, €300,000, ill). A hitherto unknown work by Jan de Bray from Haarlem, a member of a prosperous family of artists, found particular attention among connoisseurs, the poignant signed and dated *Portrait of Andries van Hoorn*, 1662 (Mendes, Paris, €100,000).

Rarities

The large section of French paintings, sculptures, decorative art including furniture was honoured with numerous beautiful paintings, many of them rarities, or recently discovered works: a gorgeous *Basket of Grapes* from ca. 1640 painted by the female artist Louyse Moillon, a very rare early industrial subject, *Visit to the Forge*, by Léonard Defrance from Liège and a hitherto unknown early allegory, *Minerva and Diomedes*, from the Swiss painter from Lausanne active in Rome in the late 18th century Jacques Sablet (Didier Aaron, €650,000, €100,000 and €300,000).

An outstanding French conversation *piece à l'anglaise* by Louis Gauffier, who was active during his short life in Florence, was particularly striking, *Orange Picking*, 1798 (Stair Santy, London, €2.5 m) and, likewise, an exceptional signed painting, *The Vestal* from the year of the outbreak of the French revolution by Jacques Louis David (Wildenstein, €6 m) as well as a most charming *Portrait of Adèle Papin Playing the Harp* from 1798–99 (Jean-François Heim, €450,000).



Kanak mask, New Caledonia (Bernard Dulong, Paris)

Time and again, there are interesting vignettes especially in the periods 1850–1900, for example, *A Storm on the Coast* by Jules Breton and a lovely *View of Canal Grande in Venice* by Corot painted in 1834 during his second journey through Italy (Gallery 19C, Dallas

by Sotheby's in 2007, setting the record for the most expensive painting ever sold, at €68,000 and ca. €1 m).

A part of the fair which should not be overlooked, includes artistic genera and media which are often inaccurately summarised as 'applied' or 'decorative' arts. It is a real advantage and asset of TEFAF that these many wonderful works are included. Consequently, the experienced collector could trace exquisite rarities, among them a *Nautilus Shell* by Albrecht von Horn from Augsburg, dated ca. 1650 (Kugel, €1 m) and, on the other hand, a tapestry from the southern Netherlands, an opulent garden scene, *Large Leaf Verdure with Pergola, Balustrade, Animals and Flowers*, ca. 1550 (De Wit, Mechelen, €235,000). Indeed, all unique artifacts, which will hopefully inspire the successful buyer to create his proper artistic environment, building his own precious *Kunstkammer*, a safe way to escape – at least for a private moment – from an ever more technologically advanced and anonymous world.

All images courtesy of TEFAF, the galleries and Jorg Zutter

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