Art Facts

Women Artists Take Center Stage at TEFAF Maastricht

The priciest piece at the fair is a $4.5 million Wassily Kandinsky, a still seeking a buyer.

The TEFAF Maastricht fair at the Maastricht Exhibition and Congress Centre (MECC) in the Netherlands, February 2019. Courtesy of TEFAF.

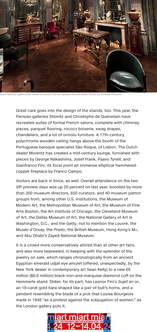
By **Claire Moshkati** | March 11, 2024

The particulars of Michael Moshkati, Hélène van Zeggelen, Lotte Wiel and Jacqueline van Wijk-Southern Dutch city "the biggest place of exchange for the wealthiest" (Erasmus) in the 16th and 17th Dutch Golden Age, Maastricht, Netherlands, Dutch art dealers," and of its preview on Thursday and Friday, the action backed up that claim.

All of the talk that first evening was about the sale of a painting by the Dutch artist Geesje ter Borch (1931–89), sister of the more famous "Golden Age" painter Gerard ter Borch, to the Rijksmuseum by the Amsterdam gallery Zeilinga & Robert. It is a posthumous portrait of her younger brother Moses, and the only work she signed. Its price: €3 million (about $3.3 million).

However, that was not the most expensive transaction of the VIP preview. That title belongs to Claude Monet's 1886 painting the Willows, Giverny, which was brought to the eight-day fair by the New Orleans gallery M.S. Rau, exhibiting at TEFAF for the first time, with a booth filled with works by the likes of Wegner, Mantel, Matisse, Picasso, and Renoir. (The price paid for the Monet remains undisclosed.)

The priciest piece on offer at M.S. Rau is a Degas pastel, Ukrainian Dancers (ca. 1895–98), that was last seen in public at the Paul Cassirer Gallery in Berlin. The gallery is asking €16.5 million (about $17.8 million) for the work, which depicts two dancers in Ukraine Dress. The gallery also is selling a Degas, Dancer at Rest, priced at €4.5 million ($4.9 million), which sold by the end of the weekend to a private buyer. One Dutch visitor remembered seeing it when it was belonged to his great-grandfather. Happily, it is now going to a museum.



Looking at art in a commercial context is entirely different from seeing it in a public institution. Here, you know that a work may not be seen again in public in your lifetime. Gazing at Berthe Morisot's 1889 Lire Allois at M.S. Rau—a view of a sunlitted filled garden in the South of France that somehow prefigures George O'Keeffe's plant paintings—I found myself hoping that it would not disappear into a private residence or a freeport vault.

There is no other art fair quite like TEFAF. First, there is its sheer scope: 7,000 years of international art from antiquity to the present, as well as design, and jewelry. Its roster includes 172 galleries from 22 countries, every object vetted by a committee of specialists ahead of time. Second, the sheer concentration of the Maastricht, (this year, about 70 works raised questions that could not be answered and had to be withdrawn, per the rules of the fair, similar to those offered Thursday.)

Then there is its setting. MECC Maastricht may be an unlovely exhibition hall, but each booth is transformed into what is in effect an encyclopedic museum, adorned with fabulous flowers (5,200 lilies, dahlias, hydrangeas, ranunculus, and orchids, arranged in billowing clouds.

Great care goes into the design of the stands, too. This year, the Parisian galleries Bineck and Christophe Gaillard commissioned recreated suites of formal French salons, complete with chimney pieces, parquet flooring, rococo boiseries, swag drapes, chandeliers, and a bit of ormolu furniture. A 17th-century polychrome wooden sculpting hangs above the booth of the Portuguese baroque specialist São Roque, of Lisbon. The Dutch-Indonesian specialist Galerie Ronsdorf, of Cologne, displays pieces by George Nakashima, Josef Frank, Charles Tyrwhitt, and Gianfranco Frix, its focal point an immense elliptical hammered copper fireplace by Francis Campo.

Visitors are back in force, as well. Overall attendance on the two VIP preview days was up 20 percent on last year's opening, with more than 300 museum directors, 650 curators, and 40 museum patron groups from around the globe (U.S. institutions, the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of the Arts Bosbos, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Guggenheim Museum of Art, the Dallas Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Frick, the British Museum). Hong Kong's M+ and Abu Dhabi's Zayed National Museum.

It is a crowd more cosmopolitan, attired than at other art fairs, and also more bejeweled, in keeping with the splendor of the jewelry on sale, which ranges chronologically from an ancient Egyptian emerald udjat eye amulet (offered, unexpectedly, by the New York dealer in contemporary art Sean Kelly) to a new 45 million ($6.6 million) black iron and marquise diamond cuff on the Hemmerle booth. Other, for its part, has Lorne Fox's Spark of Life, an 18-carat gold bare shaped like a pair of bull's horns, and a Boucheron necklace of pink and white gold, with emeralds, created in 1941 "as a protest against the subjugation of women," as the London dealer Kate Ellis.

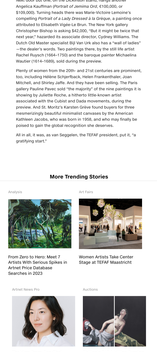
The standout in Kelly's booth is Kehinde Wiley's 2020 sweeper style portrait of two Black hooking a Victorian gentleman. Next to it is an actual sword, forged in England around 1800 and belonging to another celebrity, the British artist-musician Peter Finer.

Inventive juxtapositions of tangentially complementary works are quite a feature this year. Kelly has paired the Wiley with a painting by the Pakistani-American artist Shazia Sikander with a 17th-century Persian miniature, and Finer's sword with a painting by Hiro Khan entitled Great Is a Sign of Poverty with a 18th-century Samarai bowl bearing the same inscription.

Wiley has dealers of contemporary art in Los Angeles, Cuba, Gallery Continua, and Mennour, have become a stronger presence at TEFAF in recent years. It was specialists in older paintings causing a stir.

The most expensive work on offer is Wassily Kandinsky's Murnau, Landscape with Church (1910), a work that has never been before be presented abstraction. It was acquired last year by Mnchmer based Lendas Fine Art of Schwitz's London for £37.2 million (about $47.7 million). Its asking price is undiscovered, and as of Sunday night, it had not found a taker.

Elsewhere, there are museum quality works by a host of Old Masters, including van der Aet, Cranach, Fragonard, Hals, Teapolo, Tiepo (a rare 12-panel woodcut print). The Dandenong Gallery of Pharisaic's Army in the Red Sea, for which Manhattan dealer David Nuttin is seeking "about a million"), Turner, van Dyck, and Zurbaran, the latter an exquisite still life, priced at $2.8 million by Nicholas Hall, also of New York.



But the overriding theme of this TEFAF is works by women. "My first time in Paris," said Pierre-Olivier Sordet, of the Geneva gallery Rob Smeets. "It took me three years to arrive at this selection" of 17th- and 18-century works by Rosalba Carriera, Elisabe de Rosa (aka Annella), Clémence Sophie de Sermesy, Giovanna Garzoni (a seventeenth-century Italian painter who specialized in agates), Anastasia Mazhitova, and Leonor Fonseca, whose sympathetic, if disquieting portrait of Antonietta Gonsalvus (circa 1606), is among the most striking works in the whole fair.

Like her father, Pithus Gonsalvus (who was born of Guanche ancestry, and was sent to the Spanish court of Parma in 1547 and kept in it for years), and three of her brothers, Antonietta suffered from hypertrichosis, which causes the face and body to be covered in excessive hair. (It's thought that her father's marriage to a French woman, Catherine Raffelin, inspired Charles Perrault's fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast.") Fonseca depicts her with such sensitivity, though, that her condition seems almost incidental.

It is priced at €4.5 million (about $4.92 million), quite a few from the €1.25 million ($1.37 million) it realized at the French auction house Rouillac last year. Even so, its journey to TEFAF is not so sensational as that of the Pierdard Magdalene (circa 1650), which Maldani + Vienna is offering for $7 million. In August 2021, it came up for sale at an auction in Sarasota, Florida, with an estimate of $1,000–$1,000 and went for $129,150.

Thanks to radiography, stratigraphic, pigment, and inventory analysis, we know that Pierdard painted Magdalene between Gentileschi, who began it as a painting of Cleopatra originally her right hand clasped an asp, now it rests on a skull. Refitted and revalued, it attracted the interest of two museums even before the fair opened on March 7.

The "Van Gaal" exhibit at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, 2019. Photo by Arthur Rosenfeld.

Next door but one, on the Dickinson stand, hangs another Angelica Kauffman (Portrait of Jemima Dell, c.1780,000, or $1,100,000). Turning heads there was Marie-Victoire Lemoine's compelling Portrait of a Lady Dressed in a Dirque, a painting once attributed to Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun. The New York gallery Hirschl & Adler is asking $1.5 million for it. Lemoine, who had had part your "haunted by accusations of forgery," Carolyn Wilkins, the Dutch Old Master specialist Bijl Van Urk also has a "well of sellers" on the dealer's wants. Two paintings there, by the still little artist Rachel Ruysch (1664–1750) and the baroque painter Michaelina Wautier (1614–1689), sold during the preview.

Plenty of women from the 20th- and 21st centuries are prominent, too, including Hélène Delprat, Helen Frankenthaler, Joan Mitchell, and Shirley Jaffe. And they have been selling. The Paris gallery Pauline Pavec sold "the majority" of the nine paintings it is showing by Juliette Roche, a hitherto little-known artist associated with the Cubist and Orphism movements during the preview. And St. Moritz's Karsten Greve found buyers for three photographs by the contemporary German artist Thomas Ruff. Kathleen Jacobs, who was born in 1956, and who may finally be poised to gain the global recognition she deserves.

All in all, it was, as van Seggelen, the TEFAF president, put it, "a gratifying year."

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