

# The New York Times

## Following the Money, a Grand Old Art Fair Moves With the Times

Tefaf Maastricht is Europe's largest marketplace for old-master paintings and antiques. The problem is that most collectors nowadays want contemporary art.

By Scott Reyburn

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"Old Somerset House From the River Thames," which was offered at Tefaf Maastricht, priced at about \$8 million.  
via Charles Beddington

MAASTRICHT, Netherlands — How can we tell it's a real Canaletto?

"It's the way he characterizes the figures, just with a few squiggles," said Charles Beddington, a London-based dealer in old-master pictures, standing in front of a painting, "Old Somerset House From the River Thames," that he was offering at [Tefaf Maastricht](#), Europe's biggest and most prestigious international art and antiques fair.

"Like that dog," Mr. Beddington added, pointing to the cheeky detail of a hound squatting to do its business on the terrace of the mansion where Henrietta Maria, wife of King Charles I, once lived.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/19/arts/design/tefaf-maastricht.html>

That was one of the telltale details that persuaded Mr. Beddington, an authority on 18th-century Italian painting, to include this long-lost picture in his catalog of the 2007 exhibition, "[Canaletto in England: A Venetian Artist Abroad, 1746-1755](#)," at the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London. Before then, it was thought that the original Canaletto of this subject was a canvas sold in 1988 at Christie's in New York. But that picture is now considered to be a copy by another artist.

"That version doesn't have the dog," said Mr. Beddington, who added that the work available at Tefaf on behalf of its British owner was one of just three known paintings by Canaletto executed on mahogany panel. It was priced at six million pounds, or about \$8 million. Mr. Beddington said he was "working" on its sale.

The Canaletto is the sort of discovery that draws as many as 75,000 visitors a year to Tefaf. But the dealer-organized event, whose origins date to 1975, faces challenges. In recent years, old masters, the traditional mainstay of the fair, have fallen out of fashion; [sister Tefaf events](#) have been established in New York, at the risk of diluting the appeal of the European mother ship; and Tefaf Maastricht has struggled to attract and retain exhibitors that draw in contemporary collectors.

The success of the Dutch fair depends on the ability of dealers to come up with museum-quality objects that haven't been seen before. This year, visitors could admire a newly discovered painting by the 18th-century British artist Joseph Wright of Derby, shown by a London dealership, Lowell Libson & Jonny Yarker.

*[image removed]*

The work, "Two Boys with a Bladder," showing inquisitive children inflating a balloonlike membrane in front of a candle, is an addition to an admired group of paintings by Wright imbued with the Enlightenment spirit of scientific inquiry. Made in Liverpool in about 1769, it emerged from an English private collection and was, according to Mr. Libson, the last of the artist's "science" pictures available for sale. It was priced at £3 million to £4 million and sold to an undisclosed institution, Mr. Libson said.

"It's the kind of masterpiece you used to see here, but hardly see any more," said George Wachter, chairman of Sotheby's North and South America, admiring the way the innovative Wright had painted the bladder on silver foil to enhance its translucence.

Dealers at Tefaf did unearth other gems. The international gallerist Bob Haboldt had recently found an exceptionally well-preserved portable devotional painting of the Madonna and Child by Paolo Veneziano, a 14th-century artist, in a house in France. Remarkable for the originality of its gilding, this precious relic of medieval Venice was offered at 1.45 million euros, or about \$1.64 million, and quickly sold to a European collector.

*[image removed]*

Further down the price scale, the Berlin-based print dealer Nicolaas Teeuwisse brought a rare early 19th-century lithograph of a Brazilian rain forest by Johann Moritz Rugendas, whose pioneering South American studies were praised by the Prussian naturalist and explorer, Alexander von Humboldt. Priced at €12,000, the Rugendas piece was bought by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

*[image removed]*

And over in the Showcase section, devoted to up-and-coming dealers, Martin Doustar from Paris was offering an ancient greenstone funerary mask and necklace from the Olmec culture of Mesoamerica, dating from about 300 B.C. and priced at €250,000. The necklace comprised massive stone beads, weighing in total more than 20 pounds, intended to be worn by the dead in the afterlife.

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Dealers in ancient classical and ethnographic pieces can usually be relied on to bring the exceptional to Tefaf. Contemporary art has been more of a problem. Heavyweight dealerships such as Gagosian and Hauser & Wirth exhibited for a year or two, but not anymore. This year, for the first time, Tefaf managed to assemble a significant group of international galleries that regularly exhibit at fairs such as Art Basel and Frieze.



“Sleeping Hermaphrodite” by Barry X Ball was carved using 3-D imaging and robotics. Barry X Ball

Among the newcomers was Fergus McCaffrey of New York, showing boldly reimagined classical sculptures by the Brooklyn-based artist Barry X Ball. A piece by Mr. Ball in pink Iranian onyx called “Sleeping Hermaphrodite,” based on a Roman sculpture in the Louvre, caught the eye — it had been carved using 3-D imaging and robotics. The pink version was not for sale, but \$1.9 million will buy another in a stone of the client’s choice.

Big-league collectors such Ronald Lauder of the United States and Mimi Dusselier of Belgium were at the V.I.P. preview, which was probably a reassuring sign for the 14 new exhibitors reinvigorating Tefaf’s Modern section.

But, according to Heinrich zu Hohenlohe, a consultant at the London dealership Dickinson and a longtime exhibitor at Tefaf, it can take time to earn the confidence of buyers at Maastricht.

“The first year, they notice you’re here. The second, they notice you’re still here. Then in the third, they take you seriously,” he said.

But can contemporary dealers used to the bustle of Art Basel wait that long?