

Made in Italy but open to the world: Florence antiques biennial's new director aims to draw an international crowd

More foreign dealers could help the fair attract a wider audience—with a little help from Jeff Koons

by LAURA LOMBARDI, CRISTINA VALOTA | 24 September 2015



Fabrizio Moretti, the director of the Biennale Internazionale dell'Antiquariato

For its 29th edition, Florence's Biennale Internazionale dell'Antiquariato, which opens this weekend (26 September-4 October) has a new secretary general: the young, but experienced, Fabrizio Moretti. The founder and president of Moretti Fine Art, with Old Master galleries in Florence, London and New York, he is also the youngest executive committee member for Tefaf in Maastricht and vice-president of the Associazione Antiquari d'Italia. Moretti asked dealers participating in the biennial to focus on works by Italian artists to highlight the fair's prestigious "Made in Italy" reputation. He says: "Italian art is still well loved in the world, even if it has to come up against new fashions and trends."

The emphasis on high-quality Italian art also applies to the foreign galleries whose numbers have swelled this year: 26 of the 88 participating dealers come from outside Italy. Among those returning are De Jonckheere (Paris and Geneva), Cesare Lampronti (London and Rome), Robilant+Voena (Milan and London) and Jean-Luc Baroni (London), who is showing a magnificent Giambattista Tiepolo, Portrait of Flora that was recently rediscovered in a French chateau. First-time exhibitors include Otto Naumann from New York and Jorn Günther Rare Books, one of Switzerland's most important dealers of books and manuscripts.

Moretti says: "I would like to reawaken the Florentine market and bring in an international clientele. If you go to Maastricht you only get the fair, whereas Florence attracts a type of tourism that potentially includes important buyers. I would like them to visit a biennial that is refined, magical and truly open to the world."

In line with this aim, Moretti has invited Jeff Koons to inaugurate the biennial and to present two sculptures at the Palazzo Vecchio, the city's town hall. Moretti says: "Koons is also a collector of Old Masters and it was therefore important to bring him to Florence. I think it's the first time that a contemporary artist of this level is inaugurating an antiques biennial." The

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Old Masters dealer also collects contemporary art and recently purchased a Gazing Ball sculpture by the artist.

Koons's presence aside, the works on show at Palazzo Corsini will not go beyond 1979. Modern art dealers Galleria Tega (Milan) and Tornabuoni Arte (Florence, Milan, Paris and soon London) are new this year, joining Sperone Westwater of New York, which has shown at several previous editions. "I imposed a limit on the date because I think collectors of Old Masters are also very interested in 20th-century art but in general they don't venture into more recent decades," Moretti says. "This is still the Biennale dell'Antiquariato".

Among the master paintings on show will be *The Glory of Saint Andrea Corsini* by Luca Giordano at Antonacci-Lapicciarella Fine Art, which is coming to the market for the first time since it was commissioned by the Corsini family in the 17th century. Bacarelli Antichità is presenting a sculptural highlight, *Peasant* by Romolo Ferrucci del Tadda, a white Carrara marble figure that was lost in the 18th century and only resurfaced in the early 20th century.

The provenance of each piece is guaranteed by a renewed vetting committee, which this year includes the German art historian Eike Schmidt, the newly appointed director of the Galleria degli Uffizi, as well as by the art crime unit of the Carabinieri. The event is supported by two new sponsors, Axa Art Insurance and the Florentine accessories brand Salvatore Ferragamo.