

## Tefaf Maastricht, While ‘Softer,’ Still Impresses

By SCOTT REYBURN MARCH 17, 2017



Franz Gertsch at Tefaf Maastricht in the Netherlands. For 30 years, it has been the world’s pre-eminent fair for art and antiques.

For 30 years, Tefaf Maastricht in the Netherlands has been the world’s pre-eminent fair for art and antiques. But in recent years, collectors’ tastes have shifted from the old to the new, and Europe has experienced terrorist attacks and political instability. Tefaf’s reputation as a destination event faces challenges, particularly now that the fair, run by a nonprofit foundation, has established smaller [spring and fall editions in New York](#).

New realities were plain to see and hear during the first few days of the Tefaf fair that opened at the Maastricht Exhibition and Congress Center on March 10. This year’s 30th edition, starting just days before [a fractious general election](#) in the Netherlands, featured 275 dealers specializing in works ranging from distant antiquity to the 21st century.

“It’s a little softer,” said Donald Ellis, a New York dealer in Native American art and one of 19 new exhibitors at Tefaf. “You can feel there aren’t as many Americans.”

An 18th-century Alaskan wood atlatl, or throwing board, sold to a New York collector during the first few hours of the Tefaf preview.

That said, Mr. Ellis sold his star piece — an 18th-century Alaskan wood atlatl, or throwing board — to a New York collector during the first few hours of the preview on March 9. Reminiscent of a Modernist sculpture, and one of just 11 known examples, it was priced at 200,000 euros, or roughly \$213,000.



Old master pictures, represented by more than 50 specialist dealers, remain the less-than-fashionable core of Tefaf. The key question for those exhibitors was the extent to which the well-received Tefaf fair of traditional art in New York in October encouraged or discouraged American museums and private collectors from visiting Maastricht.

Several dealers said that although curators from American institutions such as the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, were at the fair in the Netherlands, there appeared to be fewer private collectors.

“The driving energy of this market comes from America, but they don’t want to travel to Europe more than they need to,” said Edmondo di Robilant, a partner of Robilant & Voena, which has galleries in London, Milan and St. Moritz, Switzerland.

He said he was surprised to see the highly decorative 1860 Pietro Luchini painting “[La Sultana](#),” depicting an elaborately dressed Ottoman beauty and priced at €925,000, among the unsold old masters on Monday. Robilant & Voena sold eight paintings, with a total value of about \$6 million, at Tefaf in New York in October.

A still life by Bartolomeo Cavarozzi, an Italian Caravaggesque painter active in Spain, sold to a European foundation after being priced at €5 million.

The London gallery Colnaghi, re-energized by its recent merger with the Madrid and London dealers Coll & Cortés, was one of the few old master specialists registering

big-ticket sales. A rediscovered baroque still life of fruit in a basket by Bartolomeo Cavarozzi, an Italian Caravaggesque painter active in Spain, sold to a European foundation after being priced at €5 million. Colnaghi [had bought the painting](#), then-cataloged as being “in the manner” of the 17th-century Spanish artist Antonio de Pereda, at the Boston auction house Grogan & Company in October for \$817,400.

Colnaghi is associated with a continuing investigation involving the authenticity of an artwork regarded by other experts as a forgery. Three other Tefaf exhibitors are involved in lawsuits over authenticity issues. The presence of these dealers at [the fair](#) raised eyebrows in the [Dutch news media](#), but Tefaf did not address the issue in any official statements.

By Tuesday, Colnaghi had sold eight works. The gallery’s moodily lit presentation of recently sourced paintings and sculptures — and a lavish dinner for 200 clients at the nearby Michelin-starred restaurant Chateau Neercanne — showed how old masters could continue to find 21st-century buyers.

“It seems a lot more local this year,” said the London dealer Richard Nagy, a specialist in modern German and Austrian art, echoing the observation by other exhibitors that the Tefaf 2017 crowd was dominated by middle-aged European visitors. With few affluent Americans, Asians and Russians attending, sales were down for many of the dealers interviewed for this article.

It remains to be seen if this will also be the case after May, when Tefaf holds its inaugural spring fair in New York devoted to modern and contemporary art and design. Major international galleries such as David Zwirner and Hauser & Wirth, who do not currently exhibit in Maastricht, will be among the 92 participants in New York.

For the moment, at least, significant sales of postwar and modern art continue to be made at Tefaf Maastricht, albeit more sporadically. The Montreal dealership Landau Fine Art managed to find a French private buyer for the 1946 Jean Dubuffet figure painting “Henri Michaux, Acteur Japonais.”

The early Art Brut gem had been priced at about \$6.5 million and was bought by the Paris collector Michaël Benabou, co-founder of the flash-sale site [Vente-Privee.com](#), according to an exhibitor with direct knowledge of the purchase. The exhibitor, following art-trade protocols, spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid compromising future transactions with the collector. Robert Landau, founder of the gallery, declined to confirm details of the sale.

“I never thought it was a good idea for Tefaf to do New York,” said Mr. Landau, who will not be exhibiting in May in Manhattan. “Collectors don’t need to go to Maastricht if they can see it in New York.”

John Endlich, a dealer in Haarlem, the Netherlands, sold a collection of 200 Dutch silver miniature objects from the 17th century displayed in doll’s house. Yet the scale, diversity and quality of the 10-day fair that closes on Sunday continue to impress. The London and Leeds sculpture dealers Tomasso Brothers sold a signed and dated 1551 lime-wood statuette of Julius Caesar that is the earliest recorded work by [Giambologna](#). Priced at €1.5 million, it was bought by a Belgian collector.

John Endlich, a dealer in Haarlem, the Netherlands, sold a unique collection of 200 Dutch silver miniature objects from the 17th century, displayed in a new wooden doll's house. Priced at €1.75 million, it was proving to be the most-viewed exhibit at the fair, and was bought by an American collector who plans to lend it to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, according to Dick Endlich, a director of the gallery.

There is a case to be made that stronger offerings of contemporary art and Asian art could attract more international visitors to Maastricht. But the fair's works-on-paper section was sufficiently of-the-moment for Galleri K of Oslo to show monumental woodcut prints by the Swiss artist Franz Gertsch, whose 1976 painting "Luciano" sold for an auction high of 2.7 million pounds, or \$3.3 million, at a [contemporary art sale](#) in London this month.

These huge photograph-based prints are made entirely by hand by Mr. Gertsch, 87, using traditional methods and pigments in editions of 10 colors. A version of the six-foot-wide landscape "Winter" sold to a collector at the fair for 300,000 Swiss francs, or roughly \$300,000.

"Tefaf has changed exponentially over the years," said Johnny van Haeften, an old-master dealer in London who was exhibiting at his 30th and final Tefaf fair. "But it needs reinventing, regenerating. We need new blood."