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## London Art Week: rebranded and revitalised

Traditional collecting fields are adapting to new tastes and business models

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At last the London art trade has stirred. That part which constitutes the traditional core collecting fields — Old Master paintings and drawings, antiquities, sculpture, furniture and applied arts — has for years resembled nothing so much as an ageing lion licking its wounds, a beast no longer king of the commercial jungle and under threat from changing tastes and a diminishing supply of both works of art and new clients. Yet one of the stranger anomalies of this business is that it is dealers, not collectors, who make a market. They are the

tastemakers, and it is their role to adapt to changing tastes and new ways of doing business, to present the unknown or overlooked. And it would seem that the leonine London trade is attempting just that.



First came a flurry of grand new galleries opened by leading dealers in sculpture and antiquities — Daniel Katz, Kallos, Rupert Wace, Charles Ede and Ariadne Galleries. Then London's two oldest picture dealers, Agnew's and Colnaghi, changed hands and relocated, both with energetic younger directors at the helm. This month sees the inauguration of handsome new premises for sculpture and paintings dealers Tomasso Brothers and Trinity Fine Art, as well as the first London gallery for Turin's Benappi Fine Art. In the art market, confidence and visibility is all.

This month also sees the launch of a revitalised and rebranded London Art Week. The merger three years ago of various initiatives — Master Drawings London, Master Paintings London and London Sculpture Week — was long overdue, as was this shake-up. Behind it is a new board boosted by the drive and imagination of an ambitious forty-something generation. "We have undertaken a substantial re-evaluation of our aims and of how the London Art Week platform should operate," explains its chairman Lowell Libson. "It has proved an enlightening and creative process."

One innovation is to stage a second event week in December for participating dealers and auction houses, timed to coincide with the winter classic art sales.

For Libson and his board, accessibility — and quality — is key. While people continue to flock to London's museums and historic houses, the vast majority are unaware of the commercial galleries that offer some of the best free shows in town — and even if they were aware, would be too intimidated to cross their thresholds. But most dealers are in the business because they are passionate about the works of art they offer, and they are only too happy to open their doors and welcome in the curious.

Bruno Munari's 'Study for Ufficio Moderno Magazine' at Galleria Carlo Virgilio

One strategy is to stage public events at these galleries, giving people the confidence to walk in invited, as it were. This year promotes the experiential, by introducing wining and dining, talks and Slow Art Workshops — a new initiative which harnesses the expertise of auction house specialists, dealers and curators — which offer dealers the opportunity to share their knowledge in a relaxed environment.

There is an appetite for these kinds of events: several workshops are already subscribed three times over, and galleries have also been booked for corporate events offering guests something more than a glass of champagne.

Even so, Alex Toscano of Trinity Fine Art is under no illusions. "This is a tough moment to be sticking our heads over the parapet," she says. "No one knows what we are in for."

One curious challenge for these dealers is that their stock is often deemed expensive by their old clients and not expensive enough for the new. “It’s baffling, but we’ve certainly had clients who have been put off by a ‘low’ price,” says Dino Tomasso of Tomasso Brothers. The firm’s spacious new premises were planned to help contextualise sculpture collecting by evoking the sculpture galleries of Roman villas or English country houses. Their inaugural show, *Canova and his Legacy*, moves from a gem of a terracotta study of a head by the master to full-size 19th-century marble statues “that would make any kind of entrance hall a talking point and a place of beauty”.

Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo’s ‘A Centaur Carrying off a Female Faun’ at Stephen Ongpin Fine Art

As for the rest, expect to find anything from 5,000-year-old Anatolian idols (at Kallos), Egyptian bronzes (Wace) and Greek vases (Ariadne) to Spanish medieval and Renaissance art (Fogg), arms and armour (Finer), *maiolica* (Brun and Raccanello Leprince) and furniture (Burzio) — as well as monographic shows of Tiepolo drawings (Ongpin) and Morandi paintings of the 1940s (Robilant + Voena). Sotheby’s flourishes one of the last major Turners in private hands, “Ehrenbreitstein”; and Christie’s, 14th-century marble lions from the tomb of Charles V of France.

There is no doubt that a critical mass of events is essential to bring in today’s collectors, from home and overseas. This season also offers The Art & Antiques Fair at Olympia (June 26-July 2), Masterpiece in Chelsea (June 29-July 5) and the carnival atmosphere and more contemporary focus of the Mayfair Art Weekend (June 30-July 2). Art Antiques London, however, is no more. The art business really is the survival of the fittest.

June 30-July 7, [londonartweek.co.uk](http://londonartweek.co.uk)