

Interview...

A "BOLD STEP":

ROBILANT + VOENA ON MIXING FONTANA WITH CANALETTO

A little unusual amongst the stands at TEFAF, Robilant + Voena presented works by both Old Masters and contemporary Italian artists — merging the shared specialisms of its London and Milan galleries. Golden-brown Renaissance works were displayed alongside pieces by Lucio Fontana, Enrico Castellani and Agostino Bonalumi, with the stand examining the canvas as both the surface of an artist's work, and its substance. Art Media Agency briefly spoke to Co-Director Edmondo di Robilant:



Your stand at TEFAF is one of very few which has selected to merge Old Masters with modern Italian artists.

It's something we've been doing quite often at other fairs, though perhaps not in such a mixed way. Previously we've tended to have somewhat separate areas but, because we were strictly in the Old Masters section until last year, and have just moved here (the gallery's stand is located at the cross-section between Old Masters and Modern and Contemporary), we've felt able to mix a bit more. In the old days, you were allowed to bring three or four things which weren't specifically of your domain: we were always known as Old Masters dealers, and mostly stuck to this section. We took this bold step of mixing old and contemporary Italian, taking very high quality works from each period. People have been very polite about the stand — whether out of politeness or truth [laughs].

It's seems quite daring to pair a Fontana with a Canaletto — but there seems to be some coherence in the colours of the works, which somewhat find their echo in one another.

We're quite lucky in that we've got the Grechetto that's predominantly blue and red, along with a blue Fontana and a red Bonalumi. There's also a Scheggi that goes quite nicely. There's quite a nice nuance of colours, and that's probably why it works quite well. The Castellani is probably one of the best examples of his work out there, and the Bonalumi, which is from 1964, and is one of the largest, most complicated compositions he ever did — they're kind of at the top of their game for what they are.

And is this very much the curatorial approach you take in your London or Milan gallery?

Not really, no. In Milan we have Contemporary or Modern exhibitions depending on what time of year it is. If there are Modern sales, we exhibit modern stuff — if Old Masters, Old Masters. But we're on two floors in London, so will sometimes have modern upstairs and Old Masters downstairs — but we don't mix them quite so clearly. But here (at TEFAF), one wants to make a bit of a statement: you're in front of twenty other stands that all look the same, you've got to think of something that slightly sets you apart.

Circe
Giovanni Benedetto
Castiglione Grechetto
(1609-1644)

The Penitent St Peter
Giovanni Francesco Barbieri
(1591-1666)

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Have you had a lot of people at your stand?

Yesterday was super busy, with munchers and drinkers. But there were, amongst them, lots of clients. There were almost too many people yesterday. As far as I can tell — and I don't know if it's because we've changed places or whatever — but it seemed to me that there must have been at least — if not double the people of last year — certainly an increase of 30-40%. But I may have been wrong! They may have just been concentrated here and not going anywhere else — it will be interesting to see.

Do you have plans to take part in any other events?

Oh my God [laughs], there's Masterpiece, Frieze Masters, MIAT Milan, we've just come back from Miami where we did art and design, we do the Salon: Art + Design in New York, the Biennale in Florence — you name it. We've done the Biennale in Paris for years and years, but I'm going to dump it this year. It's been slightly overtaken by bijouterie, Chanel and Dior, so I'm sort of slightly fed up with it. ■

Edmondo di Robilant

