

That's Entertainment!

BY ANDREW MYERS



“Lords, ladies, and gentlemen! Collectors of all ages! Consumers of all stripes! Come one, come all! Step right up to *Masterpiece London*, the newest, greatest art show on Earth!” With apologies to P.T. Barnum, *Masterpiece London* (June 29-July 5) was no circus. Rather, it was a novel fair platform — perhaps alternative, perhaps evolutionary, but certainly spectacular.

So how did *Masterpiece* differ from traditional fairs? Shakespeare’s Juliet famously asked, “What’s in a name?” then cited an especially aromatic flower to underscore the appellation’s meaninglessness. But in the high-stakes crucible of commerce and art, names are important, particularly when it comes to must-stops on collectors’ annual calendars. That’s why the moniker *Masterpiece London* matters. It’s no accident that words such as “fair” and “art” are absent. Nor is it by chance that “masterpiece” is an imprecise superlative paired with the evocative specificity of “London” as a cultural capital, major market, and global destination. The fair’s stated purview is, quite simply, “the best of the best from around the world,” and this includes not only art and antiques but also luxe collectibles — classic cars, wines, jewelry, and contemporary design among them. Judging by the buzz, the crowds, the exhibitors’ enthusiasm, and — most crucially — the sales, these ingredients made for a heady brew.

OUT WITH THE OLD

Having debuted last year with 120 dealers and expanded to 151 dealers this year, *Masterpiece London* is considered by many as heir to



PRINCE HARRY ADMIRES A MONET PAINTING.

PHOTO: LUKE SHERIDAN-OLIVER

the *Grosvenor House Art & Antiques Fair*, the venerable *grande dame* of the British trade that collapsed in 2009 after a 75-year run. The immediate cause was venue-related: the Grosvenor House hotel did not choose to continue to host London’s flagship fair (apparently having found higher revenues from June weddings and other seasonal events). But the truth is the fair had long since lost its luster, the victim of organizational inertia as well as shifting demographics and taste. Trouble was, only one sovereign can rule at a time. As one veteran fair-goer and art-world habitué (who asked to remain anonymous) exclaimed, “Grosvenor House was an old lady who wouldn’t die, but to have turned off the life support would have been seen as disloyal to the British trade. Once she was gone, however, a great opportunity opened up, and London has finally gotten what it needs and deserves: an international fair of the first caliber.”

The success of *Masterpiece London* was predicated on re-energizing the usual (and essential) art-world suspects of dealers, museum directors, collectors, and connoisseurs, then attracting new art-curious crowds and cliques, such as the recently cash-infused, increasingly cosmopolitan internationals who make London



MASTERPIECE LONDON’S TROMPE L’OIL FAÇADE

PHOTO: CHRIS ALLERTON



NOT EVERY ART FAIR HAS A WORLD WAR II-ERA SPITFIRE AIRPLANE FOR SALE.
PHOTO: LUKE SHERIDAN-OLIVER

March). And in both years the jaw-dropping result has been an exterior *trompe l'oeil* mimicking the adjacent red-brick buildings to do their 17th-century architect Christopher Wren proud, paired with an interior so bright and high-ceilinged that both flâneurs and three-inch-heel-wearing fashionistas want to keep exploring. Urban Caprice has deftly orchestrated chic pop-up restaurants and bars (Le Caprice, Harry's Bar, and Mount Street Deli), where visitors do not simply refuel but actually linger (a rarity at most fairs).

Entertainment has happened on several coordinated levels. Setting the tone for this year's atmosphere of optimistic, even whimsical, abundance were the seemingly endless length of Harry's Bar at the main entrance, the extravagantly avant-garde

their base. Nor were media-beloved boldfaces such as Oprah Winfrey, Tom Ford, Prince Harry, Uma Thurman, Elton John, and Vivienne Westwood discouraged; all of them made appearances at *Masterpiece* this year. To engage all camps, a three-pronged, integrated template has been deployed under the chairmanship of dealer Thomas Woodham-Smith, a strategy based on ease, entertainment, and education.

Ease has centered on physical location, environment, and amenities. The fair's launch took place on the grounds of the former Chelsea Barracks, but for the second edition it crossed the road to the grounds of the Royal Hospital Chelsea (longtime home of the *Chelsea Flower Show*). In both years the physical context was a bespoke mega-tent created by Stabilo International (which designs TEFAF Maastricht every

BERNHEIMER-COLNAGHI (LONDON) DISPLAYED A THEMATIC TRIO INCLUDING GIOVANNI PAOLO PANINI (1691-1765), *ARCHITECTURAL CAPRICCIO WITH FIGURES DISCOURSING AMONG ROMAN RUINS*, OIL ON CANVAS, 39 x 53 3/4 IN.; LOUIS-GABRIEL BLANCHET (1705-1772), *PORTRAIT OF GIOVANNI PAOLO PANINI*, OIL ON CANVAS, 38 x 30 IN.; AND CANDIDA HÖFER (B. 1944), *MUSÉE DU LOUVRE PARIS XIII*, 2005, C-PRINT PHOTOGRAPH, 97 1/4 x 78 3/4 IN.





GALERIE CHENEL'S STRIKING DISPLAY OF ANTIQUITIES
PHOTO: CHRIS ALLERTON

flower displays by Rob Van Helden, and the positioning of an original MT818 Spitfire (priced north of £8 million) at the entrance to Le Caprice. Then there were the champers-flowing preview for 5,000 guests (nearly double last year's turnout); a dancer-filled charity party for an eminently good cause (cancer, care, and kids); and what was billed as the "world's first-ever 'chamber soundscape,'" in which conductor Peter Manning, three string quartets, and one larger string group dispersed throughout the fair, playing some of the world's rarest instruments. These included the

only cello known to be made by Guarneri del Gesù (in 1731), and a Stradivarius violin. Not coincidentally, both instruments were for sale.

Finally, education has been tackled head-on through a partnership with the Wallace Collection, which had its conservators and curators giving daily lectures both at the fair and the museum (with a complimentary shuttle bus running between them). Sotheby's Institute of Art offered a two-day introductory course in the decorative arts with panel discussions and guided tours of the fair, while its postgraduate students gave daily tours. Less orthodox in the context of art and antiques fairs was a series of daily "lifestyle lectures" given by the representatives of various non-art exhibitors. These included Rolls-Royce Motor Cars (which showed — and sold to a Russian for approximately £400,000 — a Phantom Drophead Coupé made especially for the fair in Mazarine blue with custom-made luggage and a one-off jewelry box fitted into the glove compartment), as well as the recently renovated Savoy hotel, Ruinart champagne, the jeweler Vacheron Constantin, and Louis XIII cognac.

MIXING IT UP

Of course, the borders between ease, entertainment, and education are not firm, but permeable. While such fluidity applied to many aspects and offerings at *Masterpiece London*, nowhere was it more apparent than in the organization of its exhibitor stands. Rather than



DUFOUR MANUFACTORY (FRANCE)

LES RIVES DU BOSPHORE (THE SHORES OF THE BOSPHORUS)

C. 1812, JOINED SHEETS OF PAPER WOOD-BLOCK PRINTED BY HAND AND RELINED ON LINEN CANVAS (ONE OF A PAIR), 6 FT. 3 IN. X 7 FT. 4 IN.

(EACH PANEL)

CAROLLE THIBAUT-POMERANTZ, PARIS AND NEW YORK



POSSIBLY BRAZILIAN

A BLACK ARTIST COMPLETING A PORTRAIT OF A WHITE FEMALE ARISTOCRAT

FIRST HALF OF THE 18TH CENTURY, OIL ON CANVAS, 41 x 32 1/2 IN.

CARLTON HOBBS LLC, NEW YORK

was *Masterpiece London* generally. There were many disparate elements, but also unifying continuity where it was most essential: in the excellence of the pieces and in their presentation. In that sense, and in its showmanship, it brought not a circus to mind, but the title of the stage show in the Baz Luhrmann film *Moulin Rouge*: “Spectacular Spectacular.”

HIGHLIGHTS GALORE

Just as the fair breached categorical borders, so did its dealers feel free to explore an eclecticism in discipline and presentation. While Old Master paintings were said to be under-represented last year, the arrival of blue-chip galleries such as Noortman Master Paintings (Amsterdam), Bernheimer-Colnaghi (London), and De Jonckheere (Paris and Geneva) meant that was no longer the case. De Jonckheere showed its usual array of first-rate works by the likes of Lucas Cranach the Elder, Brueghel the Younger, and Abel Grimmer in an orthodox stand that would have been at home at TEFAF Maastricht in terms of quality and presentation (if not size).

But Bernheimer-Colnaghi mixed it up. In addition to a discrete section of Guido Mocafico’s photographs inspired by Old Master still lifes, a trio of works (Candida Höfer’s monumental Louvre photograph of 2005, Panini’s 18th-century *Architectural Capriccio of Roman Ruins*, and the only known portrait of Panini, by Louis-Gabriel Blanchet) demonstrated how the ideal blend of erudite theme (in this case, architecture) and careful juxtaposition can make an exhibition sing. “It simply works — the architecture of the Louvre, Panini’s genre, and Panini himself,” declared

grouping disciplines together — with Old Master paintings, photography, and 18th-century furniture dealers in discrete sections — *Masterpiece London* offered a purposeful mishmash. Collectors en route to a favorite dealer were thereby taken out of their comfort zones, their eyes encouraged to wander, while more casual visitors had their attention continually piqued by surprise. More than an approach, this is a conceptual cornerstone of the fair, and it could have spelled disaster. Indeed, I heard rumblings from older collectors, including the pointed comment of a septuagenarian dressed in a superb suit from Savile Row: “Lots of new faces and young people about, and some very *shiny* things.” These words were not uttered with pleasure. Conversely, I overheard a youngish wag say, upon learning that the fair’s royal patron was Princess Alexandra, “Is she *still* alive? Well, there *is* a lot of old stuff around here.”

Such barbs notwithstanding, the fair’s cross-categorical fertilization was both successful and impressive, as

EDUARD CHARLEMONT (1848-1906)

LES PAGES (THE PAGES)

1889, OIL ON CANVAS, 77 1/4 x 107 3/4 IN.

JACK KILGORE & CO., NEW YORK



Conrad Bernheimer. “Of course, having the right stock is key.”

Nor were modern and contemporary dealers hesitant to combine disciplines. Ben Brown Fine Arts, making its first appearance at *Masterpiece London*, augmented its abstract and figurative paintings and photographs with modern and contemporary decorative arts — a limited-edition chair from Ron Arad and a low table by Yves Klein still in production.

As for sculpture, intelligent “mixing” was evident at Galerie Chenel (Paris), which displayed fragments of ancient sculptures (mostly nude, and Roman) in a minimal, dramatically lit environment. Each piece’s beauty was literally enlarged by a generous-sized black-and-white photograph taken by Adrien Chenel and hanging nearby, a juxtaposition that forced viewers to look at the originals anew. “We’ve had the idea of doing this for a long time, but it took several years to accomplish,” said Olivier Chenel.

Photography was well represented by six international dealers (up from just one last year), with new exhibitor Hamiltons (London) winning the fair’s award for “Stand of the Year.” This victory had as much to do with owner Tim Jeffries’s selection of photographs (his favorites being Richard Avedon’s haunting portrait of Marilyn Monroe and the bobby and nurse from Irving Penn’s *Small Trades* series) as it did with the stand’s evocative, multilayered design, inspired by a collector’s studio and created by designer Jonathan Reed. “Education is definitely a part of what we do,” said Jeffries, “to help people look, to help them understand that photography can ‘work’ with anything, that it can hold a space, that it’s comparable to all other works of art.”

Antique-wallpaper dealer Carolle Thibaut-Pomerantz (Paris and New York) showed two handsome panels from the panoramic series *Les Rives du Bosphore* (*The Shores of the Bosphorus*) manufactured by Du-four early in the 19th century. Among her *papiers peints anciens*, she also incorporated a pair of sculptural (and comfortable) 1930s upholstered chairs attributed to Ernest Boiceau.

In the realm of decorative arts, blue-chippers Mallett and Apter-Fredericks, both founding partners in the fair, displayed their British and Continental antiques in stands denuded of the usual paneling, parquetry, and carpets, a tactic that gave the objects plenty of room to breathe. The result was fresh and modern, but not jarringly so (as it can be when, say, a contemporary painting is simply “dropped in”). Both firms used the resulting energy well. Mallett hung an enormous hand-forged blue glass Venini chandelier c. 1960 over an equally large early 19th-century mahogany circular table with ebony marquetry and a set of 12 (yes, 12!) George III giltwood armchairs. Apter-Fredericks decided to spotlight decorative treasures, such as a pair of first-time-on-the-market 18th-century Bergère chairs that once held sway at both Althorp and Spencer House in London.

Twentieth-century design — with dealers such as London’s Gordon Watson, 88 Gallery, and Ciancimino, and Ann Autegarden (Brussels) — was especially strong here. And while a combination of styles, periods,



FLORENTINE, ATTRIBUTED TO GIOVANNI BATTISTA FOGGINI (1652-1725) AND HIS WORKSHOP, AFTER MODELS BY GIAMBOLOGNA

LION AND HORSE (DETAIL)

FIRST HALF OF THE 18TH CENTURY, MARBLE,
51 1/4 x 55 1/2 x 43 3/4 IN. (OVERALL)

TOMASSO BROTHERS FINE ART, LEEDS AND LONDON

and materials is customary in this arena, the skill with which these exhibitors engineered their stands must not be shortchanged. Gordon Watson was eye-popping with its round mirror with etched astrological designs and metal frame by Gio Ponti c. 1940, sofas and armchairs by Jean-Charles Moreux from the late 1930s, and a white marble table with four cylindrical legs by Angelo Mangiarotti c. 1970. So was 88 Gallery’s combination of paneling by François Franck from 1928, sofas and armchairs c. 1935 by Jacques Adnet, many tables in many materials by Ado Chale, and art by Marc Cavell.

Of course, some dealers opted to exhibit their works in canonical correctness. Carlton Hobbs, one of 12 American dealers at the fair, displayed a pair of rapturously beautiful George II rococo mirrors made for the first Duke of Northumberland, a red and white lacquered cabinet atop its original silver-gilt stand (once owned by Millicent Rogers), and a fascinating picture of a black artist completing a portrait of a white female aristocrat, dating from the first half of the 18th century and possibly Brazilian. Likewise, New York-based Jack Kilgore offered the monumental *Les Pages* (*The Pages*) that painter Eduard Charlemont showed at Paris’s 1889 *Exposition Universelle*, with its incredibly accurate (and tactile) depiction of sumptuous fabrics. Picture dealer Andrew Blackman (of Hastings, England) unveiled Anton Raphael Mengs’s rediscovered *Portrait of Pope Clement XIII*. “He looks like somebody’s grandfather, a nice man,” Blackman thought.

John Mitchell Fine Paintings (London) exhibited James Ward’s portrait of a horse bred for hunting, an image that captures even its saddle and stirrup calluses, all set in a beautiful landscape. Tomasso Brothers Fine Art (Leeds and London) won the fair’s “Object of the Year” award with its pair of monumental marble sculptures — *Lion and Horse* and *Lion and Bull* — attributed to Giovanni Battista Foggini (1652-1725) and his workshop after models by Giambologna. And in the world of BBF (British brown furniture), Edward Hurst (Salisbury) mounted a beautiful stand. Likewise, Hervé Aaron of Didier Aaron (Paris) showed his usual impeccable sampling of French 18th- and 19th-century antiques.

Lastly, there is the important matter of this fair’s timing. Not only did *Masterpiece London* coincide with *Master Paintings Week* and *Master Drawings Week* (both July 1-8) and complement the prominent auctions at Christie’s and Sotheby’s (Old Master paintings and drawings, as well as post-war and contemporary art), it also overlapped with the Wimbledon finals, seven miles away.

Game, set, match. Well played, *Masterpiece London*. Next year — round three. ■

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Information: Next year’s edition of *Masterpiece London* is set for June 28-July 3, 2012. Details are at masterpiecefair.com.