The Finest Fair on Earth THE EUROPEAN FINE ART FAIR

BY ANDREW MYERS

Absolute consensus in the art world is as rare as accord in the U.S. Congress. It almost never happens. But one truth, nearly universally recognized, is The European Fine Art Fair (TEFAF) is the preeminent fine and decorative arts fair in the world, and the benchmark by which all others are measured.

Taking place annually in March in the picturesque town of Maastricht in southeastern Holland, TEFAF's breadth and depth is succinctly communicated through the eye-popping numbers associated with the fair's most recent incarnation, which took place last March18-27. This 24th edition consisted of 260 dealers from 16 different countries exhibiting more than 30,000 artworks stretching from the dawn of recorded time to the present, from ancient Egyptian artifacts to cutting-edge contemporary painting, with every piece vetted for quality, authenticity and condition by 168 international experts, a process taking upwards of 2,184 hours.

Cumulatively, the exhibitors' stands filled 333,680 square feet, and required over 200 people working 25 days around the clock to build and install. During the course of the fair, 73,000 people from 55 countries attended, among them representatives from 181 museums in 20 countries (including all the biggies, from the Louvre to the Metropolitan Museum to the Getty), and 154 private planes landed at the local airport. Even the number of fresh flowers, a TEFAF signature, is staggering: 22,500 carnations, 18,000 tulips, 7,500 anemones and ranuculus as well as 250 branches of magnolia—all of which were changed twice during the course of the fair by a battalion of florists who used, in total, 144,000 flowers during the course of the fair. And then there is the aggregate value of the works for sale, totaling in excess of €2 billion. While TEFAF is often referred to as an encyclopedic museum in which everything can be purchased, it's as much an art lover's Aladdin's cave.

As mindboggling as these numbers are, they tell nothing of how TEFAF grew from a small Dutch fair specializing in Old Masters paintings to its current, cross-categorical dominance. To understand this evolution better, we turn to the people behind the fair, key advocates TEFAF President Willem Baron van Dedem and exhibitor and Chairman of the fair's Executive Board Ben Janssens.

TEFAF PRESIDENT WILLEM BARON VAN DEDEM

A collector of Dutch 17th-century paintings for over half a century, the courtly, Dutch-born Willem Baron van Dedem underscores the benefits large fairs offer compared with other venues. "Auction houses present a haphazard amount of objects, whereas a good fair will give a far more extensive view of what is available on the market," he says, adding that at TEFAF this strength applies to all of its nine sections, ranging from paintings and manuscripts to jewelry and design.

Fairgoers, he explains, also have the ability to reflect on a prospective purchase rather than having to make split-second decisions, a dynamic van Dedem admits can be "very exciting" and which he has frequently experienced, but which is especially perilous to new collectors, who are more apt to be swayed by the momentum of the moment and, therefore, overpay for an object that "could have been had for a much lower price, if they had had time to compare and be advised."

Another auction house pitfall is the lack of guarantee regarding quality. "In my field—Dutch Old Masters paintings—the state of preservation and the amount of restoration are of the utmost importance—and while an auction, in my experience, will provide a condition report on request, it will not take any responsibility for condition."

Van Dedem finds individual galleries wanting as well. While they, like fairs, normally guarantee the authenticity, quality and condition of their wares, choice is decidedly limited, as is the ability to compare works in the same genre or by the same or similar artists—drawbacks generally shared with auction houses but from which large fairs are exempt.

As far as TEFAF's unique strengths are concerned, van Dedem points to its organization. Unlike many fine and decorative

arts fairs in the United States, Europe and Asia, TEFAF is owned and run by dealers—mainly dealers who currently participate in the fair—as opposed to an organizing company or corporation. "As there is no profit to be distributed to shareholders or entrepreneurs, any financial surplus can be reinvested in improving the fair." The benefits are profound, according to van Dedem, and often become self-perpetuating. One example he cites is TEFAF's "surprisingly" low square meter price for exhibitors (when compared with other major fairs), "which, together with its international reputation, makes it a must for a dealer to participate. TEFAF can thus be very selective when inviting dealers from a long waiting list, and can select purely on the grounds of quality."

Equally cogent in van Dedem's eyes is his status as an informed outsider. "When fourteen years ago the previous president decided to retire and I was asked by the executive committee to take his place, it was obvious how a non-dealer familiar with the art world could, together with a large board of trustees, adjudicate any conflict of interest that might arise between exhibitors."

Pictured):

CHAIRMAN OF THE TEFAF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

BEN JANSSENS

Asian art dealer Ben Janssens, founder of London-based Ben Janssens Oriental Art, has been chairman of TEFAF's executive committee since 2007. But his TEFAF connection stretches back to the late 1980s.

After having been diverted from his study of law by the siren call of art, in particular Chinese porcelain, Janssens moved from Utrecht to London, studying applied art at the Victoria and Albert Museum before going to work in the Chinese and Japanese departments of the venerable auction house Spink & Son where, after several years, young Janssens persuaded the board of directors to participate in a then little-known fair located in a barely known town. "In those pre-Treaty days [The Treaty of Maastricht or, more formally, the Treaty on European Union] people hardly knew where Maastricht was, and the fair itself was a relatively minor event on the international calendar, insignificant in comparison with such major fairs as the Biennale in Paris and the Grosvenor House Fair in London."

Nevertheless, Janssens was "keen to do something in my home country, and I could feel the potential the fair had, even back then." Attributes that he noted in particular included a purpose-built hall (the Maastricht Exhibition and Conference Centre, or MECC, built in 1988), and Maastricht's location in a densely populated, extremely affluent corner of Europe, close to Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and France, with a highly educated and supportive public.

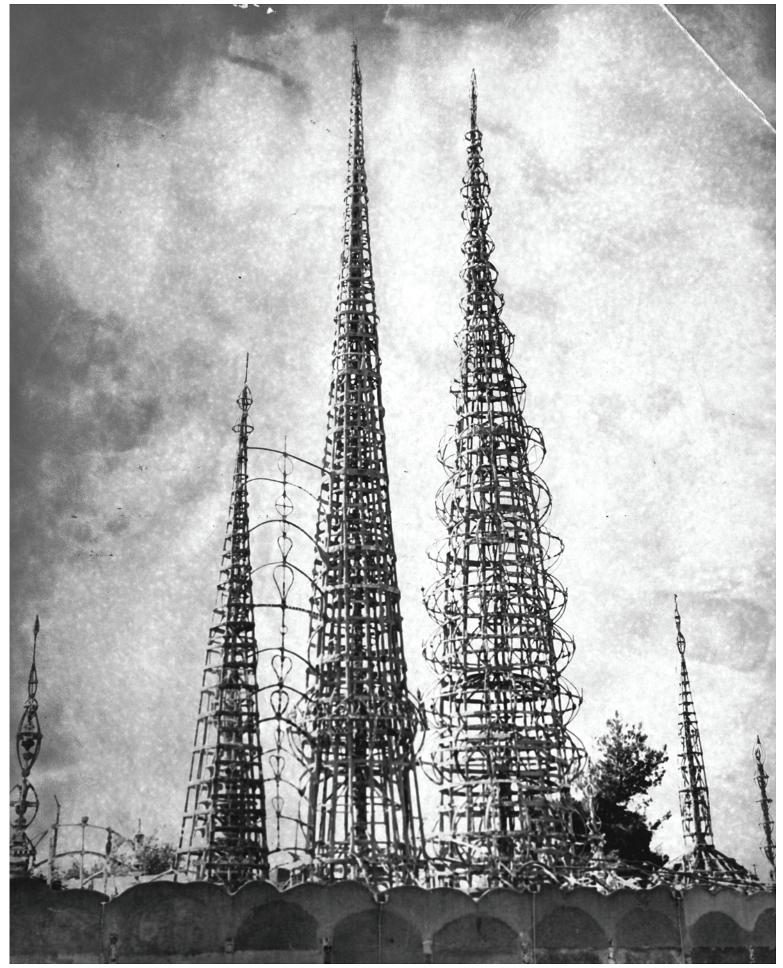
Leaving the auction house in 1992, Janssens co-founded The Oriental Art Gallery, a smaller-sized firm, before launching his own, current concern in 1997, its purview including Janssens' first love, Chinese porcelain.

At TEFAF, Janssens has served as a member of the board of trustees since 1989 and as a member of the executive board since 2003, becoming chairman of the executive committee in 2007. Under his tenure, new initiatives such as TEFAF Showcase, a platform for young dealers; TEFAF Design, a section specializing in 20th century design; and TEFAF on Paper, a section encompassing prints, drawings, antiquarian books and manuscripts, and photography, have thrived.

He has also made great efforts to expand the number of dealers specializing in Asian Art. "We had 22 Asian art dealers at TEFAF this year, but this includes a number of more general dealers and also some of the specialists in our TEFAF on Paper section." Nevertheless, Janssens no longer feels that Asian art is underrepresented, although there are "disciplines within the field I would like to see represented, such as Islamic art."

Complementing his focus on Asian art and Asian art dealers, Janssens has made a concerted effort to attract Asian private and institutional collectors to the fair. As a result, their numbers reached a new high at the 2011 fair, and included the World Chinese Collectors Conference from Shanghai. This year, there will be two promotional events in Beijing and Shanghai, as well as one in Singapore.

Considering that in 2010 China emerged as the world's second largest market for art and the largest in terms of auction sales—both watersheds documented in the TEFAF-commissioned art market report, *The Global Art Market in 2010: Crisis and Recovery*, released at the fair last March—these initiatives seem deft indeed, part of long series of smart decisions at the right time that have crowned TEFAF king of the fine and decorative arts fairs. ☐



(Pictured):

The Artful Game Changer

PACIFIC STANDARD TIME: ART IN L.A. 1945-1980

BY ANDREW MYERS

Southern California, Los Angeles in particular, has a long history of producing entertaining spectacle. Come this fall, spectacular edification can be included as well. Launching October 1 and continuing through March, 2012, *Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945-1980* will bring together more than sixty cultural institutions throughout the region, Santa Barbara to San Diego, Los Angeles to Palm Springs—all to tell the story of the birth and growth of the L.A. art scene, the source of many of the most influential art movements in the second half of the 20th century, and how it became a unique and major force in the art world.

It is a story little-known, one of evolution and revolution and never before comprehensively told. It is also a cultural collaboration on a colossal scale, the largest ever undertaken by museums and not-for-profit organizations in the U.S., arguably in the world.

"Unlike exhibitions linked to a major event like the Olympics or the five-hundredth anniversary of 1492, or those coordinated under a fair or bienniale, *Pacific Standard Time* was organized among museums," says Los Angeles County Museum of Art CEO and director Michael Govan.

Through its scores of exhibitions and coordinated programs, *Pacific Standard Time* will highlight the artistic production of post-World War II Southern California through the social crucible of the 1960s and '70s, running an encyclopedic gamut: L.A. Pop Art to post-minimalism, modernist architecture and design to assemblage sculpture, the Light and Space installations to multi-media exhibitions and video art, pioneering Chicano, African-American, Japanese-American and feminist art movements to the work of artists' collectives.

The origins of *Pacific Standard Time* stretch back nine years to 2002, when the senior staff at the Getty Foundation—one of the four programs operating under the world's wealthiest arts institution, the L.A.-based J. Paul Getty Trust—realized the history of Southern California's creative explosion was in danger of being lost or destroyed. What began as an initiative to record oral histories and assemble or conserve archives throughout the region evolved into $10 million in grants from the Getty Foundation to cultural institutions of every size and character across Southern California, and hence into the phenomenon that is *Pacific Standard Time*. "What was really luxurious was money from the Getty for research—that made all the difference," says Ann Philbin, director of the Hammer Museum.

"We're very excited the Getty is spending more of its resources in L.A.," adds Govan, voicing a popular sentiment in the city.

Just as it has forged a new template for massive inter-institutional cooperation across the region, so has *Pacific Standard Time* strengthened the cooperation and coordination within the Getty itself. To better understand these changes, as well as to better appreciate the nature and organization of the Getty, we spoke with the heads of the Getty's four programs—the Getty Foundation, the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute and the Getty Conservation Institute.