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FAIRS

Inside TEFAF Maastricht's Fine Art and Design Wonders

At The European Fine Art Fair in the Netherlands, design galleries exhibit restrained maximalism and colorful minimalism

By Dan Thawley
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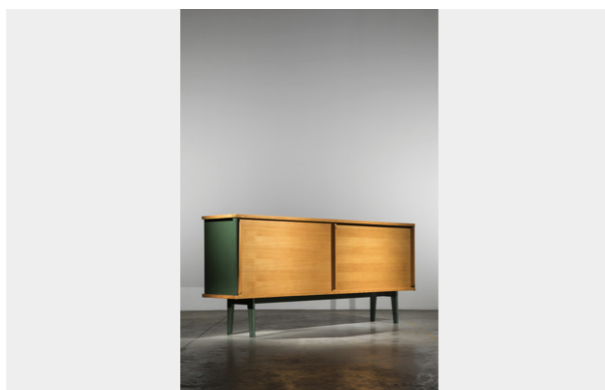


A view of the Jason Jacques Gallery booth at TEFAF 2019 with works by Shari Mendelson, Georges Hoentschel, Morten Lebner Espersen, and more.
 Photo: Sebastiano Pellion di Persano

Have you ever wandered around a historical house or national museum in awe of its treasures, the kind of objects so drenched in history (passed down over centuries or millennia) to be thought priceless? Imagine that same walk through the halls of [The European Fine Art Fair](#)—or [TEFAF](#)—in Maastricht, the Netherlands, and then stop imagining, because each of those objects is for sale. This is the reality of [TEFAF](#), the crown jewel of the international art fair circuit and a well-kept secret that was founded in the mid-1980s by a group of Old Master gallerists specializing in Dutch and Flemish paintings. These days a smaller, biannual edition takes over the Armory in New York in May and November, but it still pales in comparison to Maastricht's annual event, which sees more than 250 galleries sprawled through the carpeted allées of a nondescript convention center on the outskirts of the medieval town.

Though few visitors can resist the temptation of a portrait session in front of the Tom Postma-designed succulent hanging garden at the fair's entrance, all sense of novelty dissolves once inside the labyrinthine complex of booths—each humming with activity and varying degrees of hushed reverence for the objects contained within. Separated into a succinct grid of antiques and paintings, high jewelry, design, tribal art, and modern and contemporary art, one may argue that [TEFAF](#) has something for everyone, but the fact is this highly specialized fair is catering to the one percent—in both the intellectual and economic sense of the term.

Encompassing over 7,000 years of art history, the pieces shown here are museum quality, prized for their extreme rarity and trackable provenance that ensures collectors are offered only the best of the best. Each object is subjected to a stringent vetting program of global specialists, ensuring nothing enters these hallowed halls without having its authenticity verified. Among the more contemporary creations, from the 120-carat Nizam diamond necklace to sensual ceramics by Lucio Fontana, TEFAF promises anthropological marvels crafted for emperors and kings—the kind of existential memento mori that speaks to the very core of our human narrative. Certain displays could very well induce Stendhal syndrome, the kind of dizziness that any inquiry into prices could only increase. In short, TEFAF is a billionaire’s playground—host to the types of rarities that most museums cannot afford and, in some cases, have already sold into the market. It is an interior designer’s dream, too, as not only a viable source for the highest end furnishings and art pieces but the pinnacle of inspiration when it comes to translating the crème-de-la-crème into achievable design solutions for all sorts of spaces and budgets.



11 / 11



Photo: Courtesy of Laffanour Galerie Downtown, Paris

Navigating the dynamic space between the unrelenting demand for midcentury pieces and the fair’s traditional trade in brown furniture, design galleries looked outside of the box to show an elegant balance of restrained maximalism and colorful minimalism. Secessionist dealer Yves Macaux dedicated his stand to the ornately floral works of Belgian architect Gustave Serrurier-Bovy, a founder of the Art Nouveau, while Oscar Graf’s mix of decadent Carlo Bugatti seating with gourd-shaped Sèvres porcelain by Taxile Doat also tapped into the Art Nouveau via Arts & Crafts movements. Other French gallerists showed important pieces that were the fruit of artistic pairings: a Charlotte Perriand sideboard built on a Jean Prouvé base (at Galerie Downtown) was one, while a pair of Jean-Michel Frank screens painted by Christian Bérard (at Galerie du Passage) was another. The latter recalled the hybridization of art and design that so marked the 20th century, in the same way examples of flatware by Picasso, Cocteau, and even Josef Hofmann could be seen throughout the fair.

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