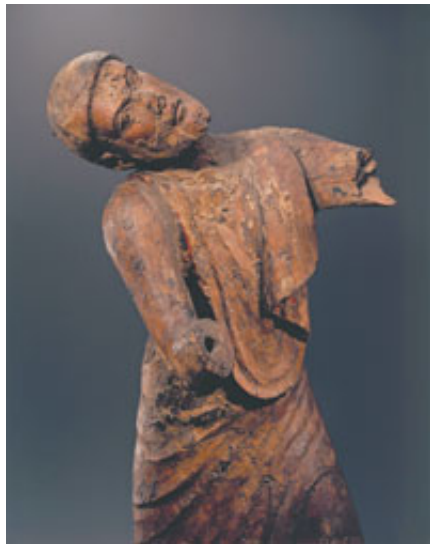


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Shock of the old

By Susan Moore

Frieze Masters offers a fresh perspective on historical art by highlighting the dialogue between the old and the new



Wooden statue of Joseph of Arimathea (c1230-1240), at Brimo de Laroussilhe gallery

One of the oddest things about the current art market is how many collectors do not realise that good – even great – “old” art is still out there.

I have met contemporary art collectors who are astounded to learn that it is possible to buy a Raphael drawing or an antique Roman statue. And what happens when they do can be remarkable. Christian Levett, the 41-year-old founder of the world’s largest commodities hedge fund, Clive Capital, discovered that he could buy classical antiquities only when he was sent an auction catalogue subscription list. Seven years later, in 2011, his collection had grown so large that he opened a museum in Mougins in the south of France to accommodate it.

Those who derive pleasure from looking at the art of the past find it hard to imagine that others would not enjoy it too, if only they gave it a chance. That chance, and the thrill of discovery, is what the new Frieze Masters is all about. What it offers is a fresh perspective on historical art by highlighting the dialogue between the old – at times the exceedingly old – and the new.

Around Frieze: Playground of holograms and homicides

“Frieze is known for the discovery of emerging artists,” says fair director Victoria Siddall. “We want to maintain that sense of excitement and buzz at Frieze Masters, and I think most people will discover something from a period that they did not know before.” The experience, along with provocative curated displays and a considered programme of talks and museum and gallery visits, may prove to be revelatory for many of Frieze’s committed contemporary art collectors and enthusiasts – if, of course, they come.

It is worth remembering just how deftly the Frieze organisers read the artistic zeitgeist a decade ago by organising an edgy, forward-looking contemporary art fair in London. No other fair had ever before been such an instant and overwhelming success. That success must have helped lure a stellar cast of more than 90 international exhibitors for Frieze Masters.



Frieze Projects, the not-for-profit programme running alongside Frieze London, is the brainchild of Frieze Foundation. This year the selection comprises five specially commissioned site-specific pieces from emerging international artists; Andrea Dibelius's Emdash Foundation, dedicated to the recognition of cultural innovation across artistic and scientific disciplines, is the official supporter of this highly creative sideline for the second consecutive year.

Curator Sarah McCrory has handpicked a selection of projects that create explorative counterpoints to Frieze's surging commercial atmosphere – almost anti-fair in their determinedly non-market-driven nature.

The recipient of the £10,000 Emdash Award this year, Cécile B Evans, has projected the historian and FT contributing editor Simon Schama into a guiding holographic "host" for the event, who flickers around the stalls throughout the day. Ash Cavusoglu's "Murder in Three Acts" uses a professional cast and crew to create a reflexive commentary on crime television and the functionality of exhibitions, playfully staging a scene during the opening hours of the fair.

The initiative, says Siddall, was prompted by dealers – some of whom were existing clients and will exhibit at both venues – and by artists. The first are only too aware that economic downturns tend to make collectors more risk averse and feel more secure with artists whose place in the canon is already assured. The second are interested in looking at the kind of historic art that is becoming increasingly relevant to today's practice.

Added to this was the growing evidence of crossover buying, with some contemporary art collectors, dealers and artists turning not only to certain kinds of Old Master paintings or drawings but also to antiquities, medieval sculpture and tribal art that has a particular resonance with modern and contemporary art. The richest trophy hunters are also choosing to cherry-pick the best from a particular period.

Curators and museums have also played their part in encouraging a receptive audience by staging shows that mix art from different eras. The Kunsthhaus Zurich recently showed *Riotous Baroque from Cattelan to Zurbarán* while, for the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the artist Ed Ruscha has curated the current *The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas. Bronze* at London's Royal Academy demonstrates that great art is great art whenever and wherever it was made.

London's Luca Baroni seems to sum up the response of many of the fair's exhibitors. "I feel that this event offers the chance to show exactly what an Old Master, and indeed a Modern Master, is – to a completely new audience." He continues: "Every art fair I am invited to join offers me exactly the same market: collectors of Old Masters and 19th-century paintings and drawings. This fair is a real chance to find new clients." Some 68,000 visitors walked through Frieze's doors last year.

Fellow exhibitor Edmondo di Robilant of Robilant + Voena, which began to offer its Old Master clients contemporary works about eight years ago, adds that many contemporary collectors "may not understand that they can buy a very superior Old Master for prices that seem very affordable in relation to contemporary art". He adds: "We continue to do well with expensive works by big 'names' or 'brands'. God forbid that we should have to try to sell £100,000 works of art by second- or third-tier artists."

If truth be told, the Old Master market is not the easiest of fields. There are issues of subject-matter, let alone attribution and condition, which affect values considerably and may deter the casual

The Yangjiang Group, in conjunction with Yorkshire-based curatorial collective Grizedale Arts, will host a hub of food-related performance and discussion in a bespoke performance arena, while Joanna Rajkowska's plot of incense-emanating ground will serve as a fragrant reminder of the ephemeral.

Pop art pioneer Thomas Bayrle has crafted a visually arresting adornment to the Frieze entrance with a spectrum of coloured footwear and advertising segments. And DIS Magazine will flush the fair with its "post-internet" dynamism, shooting and documenting features amid the flow of spectators.

Frieze's Sculpture Park promises an artfully curated space for reflection in Regent's Park's English Gardens. Clare Lilley, director of programmes at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, has selected 17 public-scale pieces to represent a breadth of contemporary sculpture from established and emerging names. Hemali Bhuta has created a new piece in keeping with her cascading tubular hangings, and Damián Ortega's geometric, ladder-like structures promise to create cool, blanched pockets of space in among the garden's autumnal foliage.

For more progressive notes, visitors should look out for Michael Landy's witty "Self-portrait as Rubbish Bin", Jean-Luc Moulène's rainbow-coloured "Body Versus Twizy", and Yayoi Kusama's psychedelic "Flowers That Bloom Tomorrow".

Entrance to the Sculpture Park is free to the public

buyer. Most of its ageing client-base – though there is young blood – is knowledgeable, discerning and highly selective. If the market offers what the wealthiest among them want, the sky is the limit. For this group, the problem is the diminishing supply of high-quality material. The more critical general problem, however, is that there is a diminishing number among its traditional backbone of middle-class collectors who can afford to mop up the rest, as reflected in the meagre sales at last year's Florence Biennale. Those who can still buy will do so only if prices are adjusted to reflect this new reality.

It is interesting to note that dealers such as the Munich- and London-based Bernheimer Colnaghi spurned the recent Paris Biennale in favour of Frieze Masters. If it is a success, some believe the fair may deliver a critical blow not so much to the concurrent Pavilion of Art and Design but to London's Masterpiece fair in June. Others, such as Maurizio Canesso, president of the specialist Old Master paintings fair Paris Tableau, which stages its second event in November, believe that expensive, international fairs are not the way forward – and nor is attempting to lure the



A recently discovered watercolour by William Blake, 'Parental Affection' (c1790), at Lowell Libson gallery

crossover buyer: "Ours is business that involves a great deal of time and long research, and it takes people time to understand it just as it takes them time to understand the paintings." That said, on the opening night of the Paris Biennale, Frieze Masters exhibitor Moretti Fine Art was able to sell an extraordinary triptych decorated with unusually well-preserved 15th- or early 16th-century Venetian or Ferrarese pastiglia work representing scenes from the life and passion of Christ surrounding a central Cretan icon (asking price of €900,000).

*Frieze Masters, Regent's Park, London, October 11-14,
www.friezemasters.com*

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