

Modern and Contemporary Art Flourishes at Tefaf New York Spring

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Galerie Gmurzynska's booth at Tefaf New York Spring. *ILLUSTRATION: COURTESY OF GALERIE GMURZYNSKA*

When you approach the Galerie Gmurzynska booth at Tefaf New York Spring you're drawn into a futuristic quasi-living room, elegant, but inviting, with a sunken circle in the middle featuring a salmon-colored bench—not to mention lots of amazing artwork.

The presence of a pleasing space to feature the gallery's classic modern works by Fernand Léger, Yves Klein and and Joan Miró, and to draw in crowds amid the fair bustle at the Park Avenue Armory, is one way Tefaf sets itself apart among the din of art fairs. Another is by having a committee of art specialists vet all the works that are shown.

The result is an environment that provides a “new home for galleries that are otherwise a smaller section in contemporary art fairs,” says Mathias Rastorfer, CEO and co-owner of Galerie Gmurzynska.

That distinction is important in a month that also features Frieze New York’s modern and contemporary art fair across the East River on Randall’s Island. Frieze, with 190 galleries from 30 countries as well as live performance and interactive works, runs from Friday through Sunday. Tefaf New York Spring, focusing on modern and contemporary art and design, runs from Friday through Tuesday, May 8, and features 90 galleries.



Yves Klein's "ANT 55,"1960. A work of pure pigment and synthetic resin on paper laid on canvas is featured at Galerie Gmurzynska. *ILLUSTRATION: COURTESY OF GALERIE GMURZYNSKA*

That the two fairs are running simultaneously is fine with Nanne Dekking, chairman of Tefaf, and Jeff Rabin, managing director of Tefaf New York, which also includes a fall fair focusing on fine and decorative arts from antiquity to the early 20th century. The fairs are also taking place on the eve of major spring auctions of impressionist and modern and contemporary art in New York, including Christie’s expansive sale of Peggy and David Rockefeller’s collection, which begins Tuesday night.

“It is great if there are great art fairs at the same time in one city because it attracts the same crowd,” Dekking says.

Another reason it makes sense is that art fairs arguably have grown in size and number because of the success of the auction business. Auctions create “a very pressured environment to buy,” says Dekking, who worked previously at the New York gallery Wildenstein & Co.

“There you had this beautiful building, and nobody ever felt pressured to buy anything.” When the gallery went to Tefaf Maastricht for the first time in 2004, he saw how the fair generated more competition among collectors to buy individual works on display. “There's no hammer, but the pressure comes from so many clients vying for the same works,” Rabin says.

Tefaf, once known as the European Fine Arts Fair, has existed in Maastricht, the Netherlands, since 1988. Maastricht features 270 dealers, but the limited size of the Armory prompted the decision to create two fairs, with the intention of covering “7,000 years of art” between them.

Although the spring fair is firmly focused on modern and contemporary works, there are galleries featuring antiquities, African and Oceanic art as well, an approach in sync with Tefaf Maastricht’s idea of emulating the way people live. It’s not unusual for someone’s home to have English furniture alongside antiquities and post-war art, Rabin says, so “the idea is to show all of those at the same time.”

The environment prompts galleries to mix up what they offer as well. David Zwirner, which is also exhibiting at Frieze New York, is featured near the front of Tefaf New York with five abstract *Homage to the Square* works by Josef Albers on a wall perpendicular to five serene still life works by the Italian artist Giorgio Morandi. While visitors to Tefaf New York will see pieces by current artists, like 2018 paintings by John Currin at Gagosian’s booth, much of the work displayed across two floors of the tulip-bedecked Armory is by more established post-war and contemporary artists, like Leger, Pablo Picasso and Alexander Calder.

VIP collectors as well as the media streamed into the fair on Thursday, and according to Dekking and Rabin, the crowd included some of the “biggest collectors in the world.” As Rabin said, “basically the list is here.”

And clearly they were buying. At Galerie Gmurzynska, Yves Klein’s *ANT 55*, from the artist’s estate, one of his earliest body-print paintings, is attracting “strong museum interest,” Rastorfer says. Meanwhile, Zwirner hit its stated range estimate of US\$75,000 to US\$2 million within a day, with the gallery reporting sales of two works by Morandi and two by Albers, one for US\$1.75 million and another for US\$750,000.