

Art Fairs

The Co-Founders of the Scrapped Masterpiece London Are Reuniting to Debut a New London Art and Antiques Fair

Thomas Woodham-Smith and Harry Van der Hoorn will introduce the London Summer Art Fair in June.

Colin Gleadell, February 7, 2023



The Royal Hospital Chelsea, 2017. Photo: Andy Barnham. Courtesy Masterpiece London.

The London art market has received a lot of negative press in the wake of a burgeoning Paris art scene and crippling red tape brought on by Brexit.

The most recent focus has been on the cancellation of two of the U.K. capital's largest, cross-disciplinary art and antiques fairs, Masterpiece London and the Art and Antiques Fair Olympia, due to a fall-off in overseas exhibitor applications. Masterpiece is also said to have been very expensive to mount, resulting in significant, seven-figure losses to its parent company, MCH Group, which also runs Art Basel.

So Masterpiece is no more. But into the breach has stepped two of the fair's founders, Thomas Woodham-Smith and Harry Van der Hoorn, to launch a new event this June, the London Summer Art Fair.



Harry Van der Hoorn, co-founder of the London Summer Art Fair, June 2023. Image courtesy The London Summer Art Fair.

Last week, Woodham Smith, an antiques dealer, and Van der Hoorn, owner of Stabilo International, the stand builder whose elegant designs characterize top fairs such as TEFAF Maastricht, Frieze London, and Frieze Masters, came to a deal with the historic Royal Hospital Chelsea. They secured the grounds—built in the 17th century by Christopher Wren on the banks of the River Thames at the request of King Charles II—where Masterpiece previously took place for the same time of year (June 22-26).

Like Masterpiece, the London Summer Art Fair will invite top dealers in fine art of all periods, furniture, design, sculpture, clocks, jewelry, and antiquities to bring the best and most fascinating examples it can find—only there will be fewer of them. A smaller, and therefore less costly, structure than before, will be designed to house, say, 60 booths as opposed to 140.

The standard of catering will still be very high, but perhaps not as extravagant as previously denoted by the presence of Le Caprice, Scott's, and Daphne's. The exterior, which previously aped the Royal Hospital's style will be simplified, and the entrance shifted to make for an easier walk for visitors, rather than a circuitous buggy ride.



Thomas Woodham-Smith, co-founder of The London Summer Art Fair, June 2023. Image courtesy the London Summer Art Fair.

“The new event”, said Woodham-Smith, “will still be glamorous and scholarly,” but leaner, more “fit for purpose.”

It's too early to say who will be exhibiting; the invitations are only going out today. But dealers of the caliber of furniture specialist Simon Phillips and Richard Green Fine Paintings are enthusiastic.

“There was genuine sadness among exhibitors when masterpiece was cancelled,” said Phillips. “It is very exciting to see that Harry and Thomas want to step in to preserve and promote the vast specialist knowledge in art and antiques that we have in this country and move forward to build on the tradition of Masterpiece.”

Most of all, there is a spirit optimistic endeavor in London, in spite of the economic setbacks. As Woodham-Smith said: “The London Summer Art Fair will be a post-Brexit and post-Covid fight-back for London.”