

Collecting

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New fair rises out of the ashes

Treasure House | After the shock cancellation of the Masterpiece event, two of its founding fathers are stepping right back into the market. By *Susan Moore*



needed to rethink itself. At the end there was a sense that some exhibitors were there because stands had to be sold. We are not obliged to be a certain size, and our approach is much more curatorial." The name says it all. "A lot of people don't like what we have called it," he concedes, "but everyone understands the concept of a treasure house." This is a fair predicated on quality: a concentration of top dealers in every field from antiquities to Modern art and design, with a little contemporary. There will be no frills in the form of loan exhibitions or lectures.

For this near-impromptu inaugural edition, the organisers played safe, setting out to sell and build just 2,500 square metres of stand space in the grounds of the historic Royal Hospital in affluent, cosmopolitan Chelsea — half the size of last year's Masterpiece. "Our idea is to make the fair luxurious but not excessive," says Woodham-Smith. Even with stands costing an average of £50,000, several considerably more, they could have filled the space one and a half times over, they say.

A third of exhibitors come from overseas — from Swiss antiquities dealer Jean-David Cahn and French Old Master specialist Perrin Fine Art to Americans Geoffrey Diner (mid-century Modern), Michele Beiny (porcelain) and SJ Shrubsole (silver) to A Lighthouse Called Kanata, which is bringing contemporary Japanese art. Next year, Woodham-Smith plans to do more to help EU exhibitors with post-Brexit paperwork and shipping, one of the problems which helped sink Masterpiece.

Van der Hoorn has designed an airy, modern pavilion "that will look like no other". (It will also be sustainable, with 95 per cent of materials reusable.) The 50-plus stands lining wide, curving aisles will be like the windows of a shopping street. "Exhibitors have been encouraged to create interiors that are dazzling and interesting," says

London is the city of Europe, even the city of the world," says Harry Van der Hoorn, whose company Stabulo builds art fairs around the world. "It is still the second most important global art market, and it needs a great interdisciplinary art fair." Such is his conviction that the 54-year-old has not only co-founded next week's new Treasure House fair in London, which rises out of the ashes of Masterpiece, summarily cancelled in January, but is also financing it outright.

Van der Hoorn and his co-founder, Thomas Woodham-Smith, who is also the new event's director, are both tight-lipped about what scale of investment that involves. Neither was looking to take on a fair. Both had been founding fathers of Masterpiece, in which MCH Group, owners of Art Basel, took a controlling stake in 2017 and which it

Above from left: 'Miyabi-Fire Vase' by Hiroshi Suzuki at Adrian Sassoon; an Attic volute-krater (c480BC), attributed to the Syriskos Painter, at Galerie Cahn; a hei-tiki Maori pendant at Galerie Mestdagh — © Sylvain Deleu, courtesy Galerie Cahn/Treasure House Fair

bought outright in 2022. Masterpiece's cancellation, after financial losses due to the pandemic and post-Brexit pressures, sent shockwaves around the art trade. The subsequent closure of the June Olympia fair because of increasing costs and a lack of dealer commitment presented the prospect of a London summer season without a multidisciplinary showcase fair for works of art for the first time since 1933.

"We were rung up by so many dealers asking us to step in and try to do something," the affable Woodham-Smith says. "The groundswell of enthusiasm among the trade was unheard of." Those first to sign up included some of the biggest names in the business — Richard Green, Ronald Phillips, Koopman, SJ Phillips and Wartski. Even so, the pair had precious little time to create an event.

Fortunately, both know a thing or two about art fairs. Van Der Hoorn's Stabulo builds globally for brands such as Tefal and Frieze. Woodham-Smith spent 25 years at leading London dealers Mallett before working privately as a "purveyor of the unexpected" and at Masterpiece.

"A fair just can't be the same every year," he says. "There has to be some arc of change or refreshment. Masterpiece



Above left: 'Women Winding Wool' (c1948) by Henry Moore at Osborne Samuel. Above: 'Toy Painting, Moon Explorer' (1983) by Andy Warhol at Galerie Gmurzynska. Left: Harry Van der Hoorn and Thomas Woodham-Smith. Far left: 'The New Home' (1908) by Walter Sickert — Courtesy Osborne Samuel, photo: Richard Shellbear, Vladimir Woodham-Smith, Galerie Gmurzynska/Offer Waterman/Treasure House Fair

'A lot of people don't like what we have called it, but everyone understands the concept of a treasure house'

Woodham-Smith, in the hope that "visitors will be captivated." They might also be reassured by strong vetting of objects, with larger committees made up of scholars and dealers who will have more time to assess exhibits.

Perhaps one of the most significant changes is staging the fair one week earlier, allowing American collectors and exhibitors time to get to the US before July 4. It is one of the reasons why the Swiss-based Modern and contemporary art dealers Galerie Gmurzynska, for one, chose to participate. "Many of our New York and Palm Beach clients will be in London that week," says co-director Isabelle Bscher. "There is a lot going on, and not only Ascot and Wimbledon." As furniture dealer Simon Phillips says, "There are also a lot of big [house] projects in the UK at the moment," meaning people need art and furniture.

For Van der Hoorn, it is the allure and infrastructure of a city that makes for a great and enduring art fair. While more blue-chip dealers are expected next year, he would rather expand the fair slowly than sacrifice quality. He is nothing if not ambitious: "In time," he says, "Treasure House has a good chance of being the best cross-collecting fair in the world."

June 22-26, treasurehousefair.com

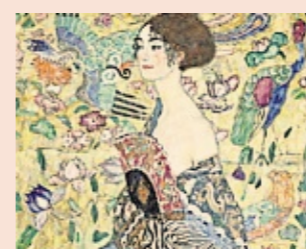


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