



European Fine Art Fair Showcases Shaker Furniture



A re-created 19th-century Shaker interior at the European Fine Art Fair in the Netherlands: clockwise from left, a cupboard over six drawers; a side chair; trestle table; and a rocking settee.

LAFFANOUR-GALERIE DOWNTOWN & PHILIPPE SEGALOT

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Inside Art

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MAASTRICHT, the Netherlands — For a moment, as you peer through the window and see that plain wooden chest next to that plain wooden bedstead, you could be in New Hampshire 180 years ago, rather than in a 1990s exhibition center in the middle of the eurozone.

“I wanted the chance to show my colleagues the origins of modern design,” said François Laffanour, director of the Paris dealership, Laffanour-Galerie Downtown, who has re-created a series of 19th-century Shaker interiors in a booth here at the European Fine Art Fair, which opens on Friday and runs through March 22.

Better known as a specialist in revered 20th-century French designers like Jean Prouvé and Charlotte Perriand, Mr. Laffanour has spent the last three years or so collaborating with the New York contemporary-art dealer Philippe Ségalot to acquire a representative collection of about 30 pieces of Shaker design. This is now being offered for sale, alongside six not-for-sale loans from the Mount Lebanon Shaker Museum in Columbia County, N.Y. Prices range from \$9,000 for an oval box to \$300,000 for a circa-1850s red-painted cupboard over six drawers.

Mr. Laffanour said his slice of 19th-century New England communal life had been partly inspired by the dealer Helly Nahmad’s painstaking re-creation of a fictional 1960s Parisian art collector’s apartment that was the sensation of last October’s Frieze Masters fair in London.

“I wanted to surprise people,” Mr. Laffanour said. “Shaker is the perfect illustration of design corresponding with lifestyle and intention. All the decorative detail has been stripped away. I can see connections with the Bauhaus and Prouvé here.”

Mr. Laffanour is one of many dealers and collectors re-evaluating the art and design of earlier periods as the ever-rising prices of contemporary works are giving the art world cause for thought, if not actual concern.

On Wednesday, the European Fine Art Foundation, based here in the Netherlands, published its annual report on the international art market. Global sales by dealers and auction houses reached an all-time high of just over 51 billion euros, or about \$59 billion, in 2014, according to the report.

Postwar and contemporary art contributed 48 percent of that total, with auction sales rising to €5.9 billion, or about \$6.4 billion, a 19 percent increase over 2013. Just 20 artists accounted for 42 percent of the value of these auction sales, underlining how the world’s wealthiest 0.1 percent concentrate their buying on a sliver of trophy names.

“Some fear that this concentration of value in a narrow segment of the market puts the market at risk of becoming polarized by creating prices out of tune with values elsewhere,” the report said.

The annual European Fine Art Fair, or Tefaf, in the cavernous Maastricht Exhibition and Conference Center, is a good place to check the values of that “elsewhere.” The fair is the world’s premiere commercial event devoted to pre-21st-century art and objects. Last year, it attracted 74,000 people and curators from the J. Paul Getty, Frick, Louvre and Mauritshuis museums are regular visitors. This year, 274 exhibitors are showing works spanning 7,000 years, and the fair has been freshened up by a selling exhibition of sculpture by living artists, “Night Fishing: ‘Hands On,’” selected by the writer Sydney Picasso.

Tefaf struggles to attract top-notch international galleries specializing in 21st-century artists, but among classic contemporary specialists, the New York dealer Van de Weghe Fine Art has brought a 1986 Andy Warhol “camouflage” self-portrait, priced at \$11.5 million, and a fair newcomer, Cardi of Milan, is showing a 1967 white monochrome by the market darling Paolo Scheggi at €550,000, or about \$585,000.

“The background of Tefaf is much larger than other fairs,” said Cardi’s director, Paola Zannini. “Maybe they’re here to buy antiques, but you never know. Collectors of contemporary art do come to Maastricht.”

Old masters are the fair’s original strength, but in recent years the best historic paintings have tended to sell at auction to private collectors, pricing dealers out of the market. One of the few standout old masters at this year’s show is “Saint James the Greater” by the early-17th-century Spanish baroque painter Jusepe de Ribera. This moody half-length study of that apostle gazing heavenward had been bought by the London dealer Fergus Hall as a work by the studio of Ribera for just over \$400,000 at an auction in 2013. It is now accepted by scholars as a signed autograph work and is priced at 1.1 million pounds, or about \$1.7 million.

The 1851-52 painting “The Devout Childhood of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary” by Charles Allston Collins — friend of the painters John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt — is an even more spectacular discovery, being just about the only early Pre-Raphaelite school painting to have re-emerged in recent years. Retaining its original Millais-designed frame, and featuring a young Elizabeth Siddal as the model, the painting was made just three years after the foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and is offered by the Maas Gallery of London at €2.5 million, or about \$2.7 million.

The price of this Pre-Raphaelite rarity makes an interesting comparison with, say, the £2.5 million, or about \$3.8 million, paid on Tuesday for a 1998 Ed Ruscha “mountain” painting. That work, emblazoned with the slogan “I Can’t Not Do That,” was in the evening session of Sotheby’s three-day “Bear Witness” sale of the

collection of an unnamed person. (He was later identified by dealers as the Italian shipbuilder Guido Orsi.)

Mr. Ruscha is one of the most desirable contemporary names of the moment and this work, from a highly regarded series of such large-scale mountain paintings, sold above its £1.8 million high estimate.

Tefaf is bristling with rarities, ranging from the 10th-century “Liesborn Gospels,” exhibited by the Paris dealers [Les Enluminures](#), priced at \$6.5 million, to a 1915 charcoal drawing of an oncoming train by the rediscovered Ukrainian Futurist Alexander Bogomazov, marked at €85,000, or about \$90,000 with the London exhibitor James Butterwick.

But as long as the prices of instantly recognizable postwar and contemporary works keep rising, do these earlier rarities necessarily represent better value?

The Shakers would have had a view on this.