

Around the Galleries

Treasure House Fair

Ambitions are high as London's newest fair returns this summer for its second edition, writes *Isabella Smith*



1. The Warwick Cup, c. 1852–53, Pierre-Emile Jeannest (1813–57), silver and marble, ht 75cm. Adrian Alan Ltd

When Masterpiece, the mainstay of London's summer fair season, was cancelled last year with little notice after 13 years of operation, co-founders Thomas Woodham-Smith and Harry Van der Hoorn were quick to enter the breach. The Treasure House Fair was organised in just four months by the pair – a remarkable feat by any standard.

'We did everything in a tearing hurry, and it's fair to say there were one or two oversights,' Woodham-Smith says, presumably referring to the maintenance issues that dogged the tent at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. 'But it's very different having a year to do something versus having four months. We won't get it all perfect, but we won't make the same mistakes as in 2023.'

Ambitions for the second edition are high: the fair has expanded by 30 per cent, up to a total of 70 exhibitors. The organisers pride themselves on quality control, with every exhibitor carefully vetted by an advisory board. 'That means that the process of expanding is very slow,' says Woodham-Smith, 'but at the

same time it's very controlled.' They are careful to stipulate that what they describe as the 'perhaps rather bling approach' of Masterpiece has been replaced with something more rigorous.

That's not to say that 'bling' is off the table entirely. This year's special exhibition comprises gemstones all weighing 100 or more carats, co-curated by the jeweller Robert Procop (previously head of Asprey in London), and first displayed as '100 Carats: Icons of the Gem World' in the vault of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. 'All these really unfeasibly sized rocks are going to turn up – obviously we'll have to have fantastic security. We hope it'll be both entertaining and enlightening.'

Joining the 2023 cohort are galleries including jewellery specialists S.J. Shrubsole and À La Vieille Russie, both from New York; antiquities dealer Galerie Cahn from Basel; and Maison d'Art from Monaco. It's an international lineup of which the pair are clearly proud. 'Even though there's Brexit or other turmoil around the world, both Europe and America like to do business in London,' Woodham-Smith says.

What are the founders most looking forward to at the fair? For Van der Hoorn, it's seeing the pregnant ichthyosaur promised by fossil specialist Stone Gallery and a panel holding 1,000 fossilised flowers. For Woodham-Smith, it's a rather more 'sybaritic' pleasure, as he puts it: oysters. 'To me, eating an oyster at Treasure House is like having a Proustian madeleine-type experience.' The pair are keen to emphasise the importance of enjoyment at such events – the fact that, though the curatorial approach may be serious, the overall experience should be fun, even frivolous.

When I ask what might come next for the fledgling fair, Van der Hoorn is emphatic: 'You have Ascot, you have Wimbledon and you have Treasure House. I hope in the future you will have Treasure House, Wimbledon and then Ascot.' Whatever happens next, it is sure to be an interesting ride. **A**

The Treasure House Fair is at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, London, from 27 June–2 July. For more details, go to www.treasurehousefair.com.