

Collecting

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Treasure House Fair tries to build on debut's momentum

London | Dealers at the event will be hoping this summer's second edition will bring improved visitor numbers. By Susan Moore

For an event designed, built, filled and promoted in just three months last year, Treasure House Fair's mere existence was remarkable. Dreamt up in the wake of the surprise demise of London's Masterpiece fair, which occupied a similar plot in the grounds of the Royal Hospital Chelsea, the fledgling fair had only around 50 dealers, offering

everything from antiquities to modern design, but returns this year with 70.

It was not dealer numbers or visitor crowds which proved Treasure House's viability to fair director and co-founder Thomas Woodham-Smith. "Our greatest success last year was that the average visit time was around four hours. People came and enjoyed being there."

Participants included leading international dealers – among them Jean-David Cahn, Richard Green, Koopman Rare Art, Ronald Phillips, SJ Phillips, Adrian Sassoon and Wartski, who are all return-

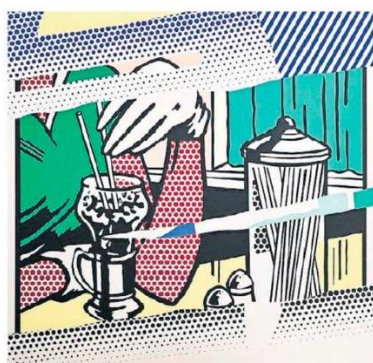
ing. Their ranks will be swelled by New York galleries À la Vieille Russie, SJ Shrubsole and Phoenix Ancient Art. The fair has also stretched from five to six days (June 27-July 2).

While commercial success often seems to depend on a roll of the dice – whether a dealer brings object A rather than B, or a collector turns right or left at the end of an aisle – most of the exhibitors contacted for this article reported decent sales. Fabergé, jewellery and objets de vertu dealers Wartski had one of the best fairs in its history, says managing director Kieran McCarthy.

Even so, Treasure House, owned by Harry van der Hoorn of Dutch fair-builders Stabulo, still needs to make up ground on visitor numbers and local engagement: by the end Masterpiece was welcoming 40,000 people over eight days; Treasure House had just over 12,000 in person in five days last year, with another 18,000 online, says the fair.

"Not enough people seemed to know about the event, or what it was," comments one exhibitor.

The owners of Masterpiece – MCH Group, which also owns Art Basel – had



Above: Roy Lichtenstein's 'Reflections on Soda Fountain' at Long-Sharp Gallery – Courtesy the gallery

axed the fair after financial losses arising from the pandemic and Brexit. Post-Brexit dynamics still apply and it is revealing that the US and Switzerland dominate this year's non-UK exhibitors. Dealers from these countries are used to dealing with the onerous paperwork their EU colleagues were once spared.

Woodham-Smith is fighting back to attract EU galleries. A deal with the art logistics business Momart allows international exhibitors to use the customs procedure known as Temporary Admission, which means no import duty or VAT will be payable, under a simple arrangement.

The fair and Momart will jointly meet this cost – 5 per cent of the shipping fee – and manage the paperwork. "This will take EU dealers back to the pre-Brexit position," says Woodham-Smith. Finalised too late to have much impact this year, he hopes the scheme will bear more fruit in future editions.

In response to a fair landscape dominated by powerful and expanding franchises (Art Basel has added Paris to its roster; Frieze, Chicago and New York), Treasure House has initiated a collaboration with a comparable independent fair. Helen Allen, executive director of the Winter Show in New York, has been appointed Treasure House's development director. "The two fairs share many dealers and have a similar feel, look and quality," says Allen.

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Right: 'Queen Mary II and Her Water Gallery' (2023) by Robin Best at Adrian Sassoon Courtesy gallery, photo: Sylvain Delbec



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She sees her role as advising on strategic development and building the visibility and audience of Treasure House in the US. Plans are afoot for a pop-up Treasure House at the Winter Show and a showcase for the New York fair in London, as well as projects with British and American decorators.

The New York fair has developed a notable following of young collectors across the US. "The notion that Gen Z and even millennials are not interested in traditional material culture is just not true," Allen says, emphasising the importance of providing a platform offering work with accessible prices as well as the very best.

Global outreach is also reflected in the strength of the Japanese art offering at this year's Treasure House and in the debut of the India-born, Oxford-educated contemporary art dealer Sundaram Tagore. In an unorthodox addition, there will be a not-for-sale presentation of the minimalist canvases and sculpture of Rashid Al Khalifa, an artist and member of the Bahraini royal family. He is expected to bring his own audience to the event.

London is a powerful positive for the fair. For returning Belgian tribal art dealer Patrick Mestdagh, "There are people who come to London who you just don't see in Paris or Maastricht [at the Tefaf fair]."

"I see Treasure House as a three-year development," says exhibitor Lewis Smith of Koopman Rare Art. "It is going to be better this year, and even better in 2025."

June 27-July 2, treasurehousefair.com

Right: 'Flat Torso' (1914) by Alexander Archipenko at Sladmore Gallery. Below: a 364-year-old Delft mug commemorating the coronation of Charles II at E&H Manners Courtesy the galleries

