

THE ART OF COLLECTING

For some exhibitors, rooms with a view

Benefits and challenges await in period rooms at the Park Avenue Armory

BY SHIVANI VORA

When speaking of art, be it museums or fairs, the environments in which works are displayed tend to reflect the style of the pieces themselves.

Look to the Pompidou Center in Paris as an example, a modern glass complex with high ceilings and an abundance of natural light that is a nod to the institution's vast contemporary collection.

With respect to fairs, Jenny Gibbs, executive director of the International Fine Print Dealers Association, the world's largest art fair for prints and editions, noted that many often transpired in characterless, white-walled venues such as convention halls. These get transformed into "temporary bespoke cities of art that mimic the style of the art," she said.

"Our fair showcases a broad range of eras from a 21st-century Gerhard Richter to a 16th-century Titian," Gibbs said of the event held this year at the Park Avenue Armory. "Each had a purpose-built exhibition area — the Richter



AMIR HAMJA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Not showtime

The armory's Company D room, by Pottier & Stymus, features carvings on mahogany and burlap with plaster that was installed in 1897 to cloak the original blue-stenciled walls.



JAMES EWING, VIA PARK AVENUE ARMORY

was shown in a classic white cube in our recent fair, while the Titian was hung on dark velvety walls that might have been at home in Renaissance Venice where Titian created this work."

TEFAF New York, also held at the armory, breaks from tradition, she said, with primarily modern and contemporary work showcased in a building designated as a National Historic Landmark. "Placing these modern and contemporary works in these historic 19th-century rooms can create some compelling contrasts," Gibbs said.

While the building's blank canvas of a drill hall is where the bulk of the 89 exhibitors command booths, 16 occupy the period rooms on the armory's first and second levels, said TEFAF New York's director, Leanne Jagtiani.

Covering 33 to 61 square meters (about 355 to 656 square feet), the rooms are rich with original details such as wood panels and floors, fireplaces and

wrought iron fixtures. Each is distinctive and was conceived by prominent 19th-century design firms, designers and architects such as Herter Brothers, Pottier & Stymus, and Albert Wagner.

The first floor, for example, houses the Veterans Room by Louis C. Tiffany, Associated Artists, a setting noted for its blend of Greek, Celtic, Egyptian, Persian and Japanese styles; the Colonel's Reception Room, also on the first floor and designed by Herter Brothers, features French black walnut wainscoting.

Jagtiani said the period rooms had been a topic of conversation among TEFAF's 19,000 or so annual visitors since the fair's inception in 2016. "Most are more immersed in the works than the interiors, but they do comment on the beauty of the environment that the exhibitors have created," she said.

Following are interviews with three owners or directors of galleries partici-

pating in TEFAF who shared their perspectives on their exhibits and how they interplay with the rooms. They have been edited and condensed.

GLADYS CHENEL

Owner of Galerie Chenel, an antiques gallery in Paris that is exhibiting in the second-floor Company D room by Pottier & Stymus, a setting with carvings on mahogany and burlap with plaster that was installed in 1897 to cloak the original blue-stenciled walls.

How does the period room setting differ from a traditional art fair booth?

It allows us to exhibit in a historically rich American setting. Our booths at TEFAF Maastricht and Frieze Masters London are created with a contemporary atmosphere. At TEFAF New York, the rooms provide a striking contrast between the dark wood-paneled walls against the ancient marble sculptures.

What is the benefit of exhibiting these works in this setting?

Exhibiting in the rooms offers a more intimate experience and refined atmosphere.

The sculptures play against the deep color of the mahogany and get wonderful light through the stained glass, and the high carving of the furniture plays against the volume and movement of our sculptures. The blending of histories is meant to construct a captivating aura for guests.

What are the standout works you plan to exhibit? Do any aspects of the room come into play in the display?

We will present Greek, Roman and Egyptian masterpieces dating from the second millennium before Christ till the third century after Christ alongside a rare selection of Pablo Picasso ceramics.

A wall of Roman architectural fragments, a statue of a Roman torso of Dionysus and a grand ceramic vase by Picasso will also be displayed. The grandiosity of the room plays in our favor and works like a temple with our sculptures. We pay tribute to this space by choosing to let it fully shine with our sculptures from another time.

JULIET BURROWS

Co-owner of Hostler Burrows, a New York gallery that focuses on Scandinavian design and art. The gallery will inhabit the second-floor Company L room, noted for its stuffed moose busts lining the upper walls.

How does the period room setting differ from a traditional art fair booth?

A traditional booth usually consists of two to three blank, white walls, which can be ideal for certain works and presentations. We relished the challenge of working with the period room and allowing it to set the tone for our material. Rather than erecting walls and trying to hide the period architecture, we embraced the moody richness and dark wood — and saw the drama that could be possible in staging our works as if they lived in the space.

What is the benefit to visitors' seeing works exhibited in this setting?

The way people experience the material in a historical setting; most fairgoers are accustomed to seeing art and design in a white box. Very few live in that sterile environment, so we see the advantage of creating an ambience that invites the audience in as if they are entering someone's home and discovering their works.

What advantages do you get as a gallery by using the room?

We prefer the intimacy that the room af-

fords. Rather than just passing a booth and looking from the aisle, the historic rooms beckon, and if one can create enough drama to compel visitors to enter, they tend to linger — there is more opportunity for privacy and prolonged conversation.

Can you share more about your presentation?

We will show two hanging "Glacier" chandeliers by a Danish duo named Egevaerk. These works are hand-carved from Danish ash and mimic the ice of the glaciers as it transforms. A textile work by Norwegian artist Kari Dyrdal will hang from the truss opposite the beautiful fireplace with its Tiffany-designed grate.

On the mantel will be a vintage glass sculpture, "Corona," from the studio of famed Swedish artist Edvin Ohrstrom. At the very back of the room between the two windows that open onto the armory floor below, we will place an original "Flora" cabinet by Josef Frank, an iconic piece of Austrian Swedish design that features vintage botanical prints.

ANDY ILWOO HUH

Associate director of the Page Gallery in Seoul, specializing in modern and contemporary Korean art. The gallery will occupy the first-floor Field and Staff Room by Pottier & Stymus, a Renaissance revival space with floral and geometric stencil work.

How does this setting differ from a traditional art fair booth?

As the building is a cultural asset, it is not allowed to touch or move anything in the room. The historic rooms are quite challenging since there are many restrictions. You can't change the design at the site at the last minute like a regular booth. Every plan requires both TEFAF and the Park Avenue Armory team's approval.

Given the limitations, what benefits do you see in exhibiting in this setting?

Even though there are restrictions, the gallery could deliver a deeper dialogue with the room, artworks and the viewers. To make the correspondence with the room and the works we present, we decided not to use the regular wall from the fair. We custom-made oak walls to match the room's original condition.

What are the standout works you plan to exhibit? Do any aspects of the period room come into play in the display?

We will present Korean artist Choi Myoung Young's solo presentation — he is one of the key artists from the Dansaekhwa movement. We will feature his early works from the '70s to recent works. It will be a small museum-like exhibition. He witnessed the turbulence of Korean history like the Korean War, which impacted his work.

Our presentation offers a collision and a correspondence of the diverse history of Eastern and Western at the same time, which would be impossible if we were in the regular fair booth.

Also, our room will be designed by Kuho Jung [an artistic director in Seoul] who wants Choi's artworks to breathe with the room naturally. His walls are meant to do that.

Showtime

Galerie Chenel's exhibition for TEFAF New York last year took place in the Company D room on the second floor of the Park Avenue Armory.