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"Yesterday," by the American artist Danielle McKinney, which is being shown by the Marianne Boesky Gallery at TEFAF.
Photo: Courtesy of Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen/ Danielle Mckinney

TEFAF TURNS FROM THE CLASSIC TO THE CONTEMPORARY | The European Fine Art Fair is embracing the work by newer, younger and more modern artists.

BY FARAH NAYERI
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The European Fine Art Fair in Maastricht describes itself as a fair that spans 7,000 years of art history. For a long time, those 7,000 years mainly encompassed pre-20th-century objects: Egyptian figurines, Roman busts, African masks and Rococo clocks.

In the last decade, responding to a major shift in collecting patterns, TEFAF has embraced contemporary art in a big way. This year, a quarter of its more than 270 exhibitors are galleries of 20th- and 21st-century art.

They include the first-time exhibitor Marianne Boesky, a New York-based contemporary-art gallerist whose roster of artists includes Frank Stella, who died last year at 87; the artist and filmmaker John Waters; the Egyptian-born artist Ghada Amer; and the American painter Suzanne McClelland.

Why TEFAF? “It’s a fair that I’ve always been really intrigued by and heard amazing things about and never attended, so it’s been on my bucket list to get there,” Boesky, the gallery’s founder, said in an interview. “It’s not as big a lift as Art Basel, for example, in terms of expense, and it’s an audience that we wouldn’t otherwise be able to present this work to.”

Boesky said TEFAF’s much broader collector base and its deeply European identity made it “scary for us,” but added, “I’m in my 29th year of the gallery, and every day has required bold moves to survive in this business.”

Her gallery’s maiden TEFAF booth will feature eight new paintings by the American artist Danielle McKinney. They will be paired with watercolors and etchings by another American painter of atmosphere: Edward Hopper.



“Gloucester Houses (Houses on a Hill),” by Edward Hopper. Hopper painting will be paired with works by Danielle McKinney at the Marianne Boesky Gallery booth at TEFAF.

Photo: 2025 Heirs of Josephine N. Hopper / Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Boesky said she chose 43-year-old McKinney — a Black artist who started painting five years ago after beginning her artistic career as a photographer — because of her “reverence” for painting and for European painting.

Showing her alongside Hopper is not to compare the two, but to demonstrate that “these two artists are able to create a mood through color and light,” she said, adding that there were already more interested buyers than there were McKinney paintings headed for TEFAF (their price range: from \$60,000 to \$150,000).

Boesky grew up surrounded by art. Her father, Ivan Boesky — a Wall Street financier who served time in prison for insider trading in the late 1980s — was deeply interested in culture, she recalled: He collected the sculptors Alberto Giacometti (at one point acquiring an edition of the famous “Le Nez”) and Auguste Rodin, as well as the 19th-century painter Édouard Vuillard.

“He responded to very gutturally tough work, so he would come home with a really challenging Giacometti sculpture,” she recalled. “My mother would want to put it in the closet. And that was the only thing that I’d want to look at.”



Marianne Boesky is first-time exhibitor at TEFAF. “It’s a fair that I’ve always been really intrigued by and heard amazing things about, so it’s been on my bucket list to get there,” she said.
Credit...Graham Dickie/The New York Times

She became a primary dealer in 1996, with a mission to represent and nurture emerging artists. Today, her clients are wealthy art lovers who will spend the equivalent of “what they might buy a watch for, or a fancy coat” on a work by an emerging artist, she explained.

While some of her artists have stayed with her, Boesky noted, others — such as Takashi Murakami, Yoshitomo Nara, and Lisa Yuskavage — have moved on to bigger galleries. A few of her current artists — including McKinney — were being courted by bigger galleries.

One modern and contemporary gallerist who is a TEFAF regular is the French dealer Kamel Mennour. He first exhibited at TEFAF Maastricht in 2019. “It’s the only fair in the world with such an exhaustive offering,” he said, adding that he enjoyed having his stand “positioned across from an exhibitor of antique statuary, or of Japanese porcelain.”

TEFAF collectors spend not just one afternoon, but three or four days at the fair, and have “a much wider spectrum,” he said. “They stroll around and dig into very, very different things.” He noted that Mennour’s sales at TEFAF had “crescendoed” over the years and that the 2023 booth — a face-off between artists Daniel Buren and Anish Kapoor — did very well.

This year at TEFAF, Mennour is showing a small bronze Giacometti figurine, a gouache on paper by the American painter Joan Mitchell, and a sculpture by the Kosovar contemporary artist Petrit Halilaj.

The question is whether TEFAF's identity — as the only major international fair dedicated to antiquities, old masters and period furniture — is being eroded by its embrace of the contemporary.

Menour said the transition to newer art was “necessary for the health and survival of the fair, because otherwise, it would have become much too niche.”

Alexander Dorey Flint, a director at the White Cube gallery, concurred.

“I don't think that one damages the other,” said Dorey Flint, who is overseeing White Cube's booth at TEFAF Maastricht for the second year in a row.

He said he did not believe that TEFAF's scholarly profile and the “breadth of knowledge and expertise” of its exhibitors were “affected by the participation of further contemporary galleries.”

White Cube's booth at TEFAF Maastricht this year will feature paintings by Georg Baselitz and Tracey Emin (priced at about \$1 million each), and a work by the Vietnamese-born artist Danh Vo, which incorporates two fragments of ancient Roman marble statuary (priced at about \$400,000).

TEFAF's particular appeal is that “we meet a lot of new people,” said Dorey Flint: collectors from Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and other parts of Europe, but also “a large number of American collectors who travel in,” he said. Maastricht is “not geographically convenient for them to attend. The quality of what is there draws Americans to it.”

This is not a particularly prosperous time for the art market, which is in a two-year downturn. Sales at the world's three biggest auction houses in New York in November were down 40 percent from 2023 and 60 percent from the market peak in 2022.

A number of prominent names have shut down, including the Marlborough Gallery, a postwar art dealer; Cheim & Read; and Simon Lee.

Soaring inflation and operating expenses are very much to blame. Boesky said the cost of crating and shipping artworks had risen 30 percent every year since the start of the pandemic, making participation in art fairs — which typically cost her gallery \$150,000 to \$200,000 each — exorbitant.

Still, statistics show that of the \$65 billion in annual sales generated by the global art market each year, art dealers and galleries account for a 55 percent share. And they happen to do an increasing proportion of their business at art fairs. Menour described fairs as “a necessary evil,” because although his gallery was one of Paris's most visited, there was less visitor traffic at the four physical spaces he runs in the French capital, which host a regular rotation of carefully curated exhibitions.

Boesky had a similar assessment. She explained that in the post-Covid era, travel had certainly resumed, but clients were remote-working and not living in cities full time — so there were fewer New Yorkers going on Saturday afternoon gallery crawls, for example.

At her peak, Boesky recalled, she was doing 12 fairs a year, meaning an average of one a month. Now, she's doing half as many — including the three Art Basel fairs, and no longer including any of the Frieze fairs.

TEFAF is her newest addition to the mix. “We need to bring the art to people more than ever,” she said.