

B I L L I O N A I R E



THE ART ISSUE

EXPRESSION, FREEDOM, CHANGE

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(EARLY KHMER SCULPTURES). PHOTO:
DEF IMAGE ©THE FEUERLE COLLECTION



All Things Eclectic

The appetite for juxtaposing different ages of art could breathe new life into Old Masters.

by Tara Loader Wilkinson

Near the ruins of Berlin's Anhalter train station, deep inside a Second World War bunker renovated by the British architect John Pawson, is a special art collection. This is the home of The Feuerle Collection, amassed by Désiré Feuerle, a collector who ranks in the world's top 100. Over the decades he has amassed a juxtaposition of masterpieces by contemporary artists with ancient, spanning 200BC to 2016. Here you will find a 7th century Khmer sculpture alongside an iconic concave mirror by Anish Kapoor. It forms an exciting contrast and offers a new perspective.

Beyoncé and Jay-Z filmed the video for Apeshit inside the Louvre. It helped bring record numbers of visitors to the Paris museum.

“Having pieces of great quality from different fields and époques, next to each other, always enhances a collection,” says Feuerle, who is considered a pioneer of the cross-collecting genre. Time and patience, he adds, are key for creating a collection such as this. “The availability of masterpieces of past times are not too many to form a significant collection. For that reason, the right timing is very important. There are opportunities in our lives that are not there forever.”

Cross-collecting is not new. Look back at the houses of emperors and kings of the last two millennia, and the most important collections are scattered with old and new. Archaeological excavations have discovered sculptures in the gardens of wealthy Romans that show the fashion for displaying art from earlier periods mingled with contemporary works. The wealthy residents of Pompeii, doomed to be buried by Vesuvius, mixed works spanning the seven preceding centuries.

But the fashion for cross-collecting has seen a renewed vigour in recent years, a phenomenon breathing new life into the old and ancient art markets. The wave of newly monied emerging markets collectors from the Middle East, China, Russia and Latin America first began spending their fortunes on contemporary art at the top of the financial bubble in 2005-06. They are now coming of age. As these collectors become more sophisticated and knowledgeable, they are beginning to turn to older art, says Bruno Vinciguerra, executive chairman of Bonhams auction house.

“New collectors first gravitate to the most flamboyant names of contemporary art, the Jean-Michel Basquiats, the Christopher Wools, the Picassos and Monets. But as they develop a more refined understanding of the art market, they develop an interest

in Old Masters,” he explains. “While this generation has been a formidable force in the modern and contemporary categories in the last decade, now they have matured their understanding, and are moving into other categories.”

Vinciguerra points to the fact that the most famous contemporary artworks frequently derive inspiration in historic art. There is the famously nightmarish painting by Francis Bacon of Pope Innocent X, inspired by Spanish master Diego Velázquez’s portrait of around 1650. There is Jeff Koon’s recent *Gazing Ball* series, which reproduces Old Masters such as Gauguin, Pousset, Turner and Manet, each reflected by a large blue gazing ball in the centre. The iconic work by Antony Gormley, the *Angel of the North*, refers to winged mythological sculptures of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman times. Marc Quinn’s *Siren*, a solid-gold sculpture of fashion icon Kate Moss contorted into a ball, was inspired by the artist’s visit to a Tutankhamun exhibition.

These historic connections are inspiring buyers to look deeper into the past to broaden their collections, says Vinciguerra.

In popular celebrity culture, the practice of juxtaposing ancient and modern is bringing a new audience for old art. Last year, Victoria Beckham, a long-time cross-collector, collaborated with Sotheby’s to show works from the Old Masters evening sale in her Dover Street, London, store. Beyoncé and Jay-Z filmed the video for their 2018 song *Apeshit* inside the Louvre. It helped bring record numbers of visitors to the Paris museum. At a recent talk for its collectors in Taipei, Christie’s auction house explicitly flagged the relationship between Old Masters and fashion brands such as Alexander McQueen and Gucci. “By pointing out this fact, we aimed to help our audience to realise the hidden traces of Old



ABOVE: THE FEUERLE COLLECTION 2015 © GILBERT MCCARRAGHER. MIDDLE: DÉSIRÉ FEUERLE IN FRONT OF ANISH KAPOOR, TORUS © THE FEUERLE COLLECTION. BELOW: INSTALLATION VIEW OF THE FEUERLE COLLECTION. KHMER DEITIES FROM 10TH TO 13TH CENTURY WITH CHINESE PLATFORM, HAN DYNASTY, CHINA, 2ND CENTURY BC — 2ND CENTURY AD. ©THE FEUERLE COLLECTION





LEFT: ANILA QUAYYUM AGHA, © SUNDARAM TAGORE.
RIGHT: ROMAN MARBLE HEAD OF VENUS DE CAPUA,
ROMAN, CA. 150 AD © SAFANI GALLERY





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: SNOWY LANDSCAPE, HILDING WERNER, CIRCA 1910 © ANTONACCI LAPICCIARELLA FINE ART/TEFAF. LE BAISER (THE KISS) AUGUSTE RODIN, CAST BETWEEN 1901 AND 1918 © BOWMAN SCULPTURE /TEFAF. CABINET THOMAS EDWARD COLLCUTT CIRCA 1875 © H. BLAIRMAN & SONS LTD/TEFAF. BRUNO VINCIGUERRA © BONHAMS



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Master paintings in our daily life, hence increasing the awareness and recognition of Old Masters within... younger generations,” says Cecille Wang from Christie’s Old Masters department.

The problem is that, even as their popularity grows, quality Old Masters are harder to come by. Sales of all Old Masters works (classed as art created between 1250 and 1820, often associated with European artists) were down by 31 percent in value year-on-year to US\$905 million, with the number of lots down by 21 percent, according to The Art Market 2019, an annual report published by Art Basel and UBS, authored by Dr Clare McAndrew. The market’s decline over 10 years is significant, with values at their lowest point, having fallen 9 percent in the decade from 2008.

The reason for this, according to McAndrew, is simple. “The Old Masters market has gone into decline because high-quality major works are in short supply, usually being tied up for years in private collections or museums,” she says in a phone interview. The less frequently a work changes hands, the lower its value. And as prices remain depressed, those lucky few owners are less inclined to sell. While the odd blockbuster comes up now and then, such as Leonardo da Vinci’s *Salvator Mundi*, which sold for US\$450 million in 2017 to a Saudi prince, sales are increasingly sporadic. There is a great ‘second tier’ of less-well-known Old Masters, often those who followed in the footsteps of the household names. But many buyers who would like to purchase an Old Master, often

don’t know what to look for, says McAndrew. With more online art and auction sites such as 1stdibs.com, the-saleroom.com and invaluable.com, this could change. Advances in technology, for instance, the use of interactive e-catalogues and 5D-immersive videos, could revolutionise the sales process. Swiss technology company Artmyn can scan artworks to capture tens of thousands of photographs with different light sources and spectrums. The process generates a 5D interactive file and a short immersive video containing more than 1.5 billion pixels: offering even feelings of texture.

“With the recent positive branding, and as these works become more visually accessible through technology, that could boost the marketplace for older sectors,” she explains.

Mindful of an imbalance of supply and demand, art fairs and galleries are upping their game. The practice of juxtaposition is being practiced more widely at art fairs, most noticeably at the European Fine Art Fair (TEFAF), one of the world’s most encyclopaedic art fairs where Old Masters sit next to jewellery and modern sculpture. This year, it refocused its line-up on dealers bringing fresh, undiscovered quality pieces to the fair, culling many of its stalwart attendees. At the Maastricht show this year was a never-before exhibited work at Salomon Lilian gallery, *Still Life of an Illuminated Manuscript* (c.1550), which has been in a French private collection since the 19th century.

And this year Masterpiece, the cross-collecting art fair, is expanding to Hong Kong, its first step outside of its home at the Royal Chelsea Hospital, London. Lucie Kitchener, managing director of the fair, cites the growing demand for older works from young Asian collectors. “Asian collectors often specialise in a specific category and may not yet have ventured into other areas. However, we have seen how collectors are often amazed at the range of artworks on offer, especially the young collectors. They are eager to learn and we help to expand their interest into other categories.” Masterpiece will bring a number of artworks to Fine Art Asia, a Hong Kong fair in October and, in exchange, Fine Art Asia will show some of its works at Masterpiece in June. McAndrew concludes: “People are moving away from the concept of everything having to be new. Now it’s more important to have an eclectic collection.” ◇