



Jean Prouvé with Charlotte Perriand, Brazza cupboard (two pieces), 1952. Sheet steel, aluminum sheet "diamond point" motif and wood handles, 208.5 x 183 x 61 cm. Photo: Courtesy Patrick Seguin.

by Martha Schwendener

NEW YORK, NY.- Tefaf New York returns to the Park Avenue Armory this year for the first time since the fall of 2019. The august art fair started in Maastricht, the Netherlands, and is often billed as “7,000 years of art.” This is the place where you can pick up deaccessioned museum pieces — or add one to your own museum. The current fair doesn’t focus on European old masters, which is one of Tefaf’s specialties. However, there is plenty of blue-chip modern and contemporary painting, sculpture and design. Unlike most fairs, this one also has vetters: expert curators and conservators who analyze the works, authenticating them, but also assessing the quality. In other words, when a dealer tells you something is “rare” or “one of the only examples” of a particular type, they have backup. The current fair includes 91 galleries from 14 countries, with 13 new galleries participating in this edition. Here are a few standouts.

MODERN MASTERS AND CONTEMPORARY UPSTARTS

Some booths are set up as mini-exhibitions of periods or movements. A knockout is the Yares booth (Stand 310), titled “Fields of Color,” which showcases large-scale canvases by late-modernist titans Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski, who absorbed the lessons of abstract expressionism and took them into the 1960s and ’70s, often with new materials like acrylic paint. Another fine presentation is London gallery Dickinson (Stand 208), on the second floor, whose exhibition “Visible

and Tangible Form” features geometric abstraction from the Bauhaus, concrete artists and op art.

New York dealer David Tunick (Stand 371) has a stellar lineup of prints by Edvard Munch and Picasso, some hand-colored and with unique signatures and markings. Tunick’s showstopper, however, is a 1917 self-portrait by Marc Chagall that was already attracting notice before the fair opened, and beautifully depicts Vitebsk, Russia, with the artist hovering over it as an observer of history. Similarly, Blum and Poe’s (Stand 305) presentation of Thornton Dial — an artist whose estate they are now representing. Dial’s hulking paintings here, made with found objects arranged into raw compositions, do not disappoint. Hanging around the corner at David Zwirner (Stand 347) is a collaged work on paper by Mexican artist Martín Ramírez, a modern master of the folk or self-taught variety. Beloved Italian minimal-still-life specialist Giorgio Morandi also appears in multiple booths, like Italian galleries Tornabuoni (Stand 327) and Galleria d’Arte Maggiore (Stand 354).

TEXTILES

Tefaf includes both art and design, but some of the objects straddle the divide between the two. Textiles and weaving are also competing with painting, in terms of art world interest, and there are some excellent examples of that here. Vedovi Gallery (Stand 323) from Brussels has a museum-quality work by Alighiero Boetti: an embroidery work, made by Afghan artisans, as was his custom, has links to information and systems theory — which he also thought of as magical and cosmic. Bernard Goldberg (Stand 357) focuses on early modernism and the work that caught my eye is a wonderful tapestry by Marguerite Zorach, who was best known as a painter. Called “Tapestry, The Snake and Bird” (1937), it was made by piecing together bits of wool and fabric.

ANCIENT AND ETHNOGRAPHIC ART

The difficulties in trading in ancient and ethnographic art are particularly acute at this moment, with repatriation surges — cultures around the world rightfully asking for their heritage works back — and the shady but thriving practice of dealing in objects made by unknown artists and craftsmen. That is why Tefaf’s vetting process is key. Parisian Galerie Bernard Dulon (Stand 351) has a robust collection of African art, particularly from Gabon, and Galerie Chenel (Stand 204) also from Paris, specializes in ancient art. A section of marble drapery on a first-century A.D. Roman sculpture Aphrodite has made the rounds of the museums, and is standing, bathed in light in their theatrical booth on the second floor.

Harking from an entirely different region and culture are the “ledger drawings” from around 1880, attributed to artist Cedar Tree at New York dealer Donald Ellis (Stand 373), which specializes in Native American art. Cedar Tree’s drawings, made with crayon and graphite on lined paper (hence the “ledger”), offer a glimpse into Southern Arapaho culture in the Central Plains of the United States. Depicting battles and perhaps ceremonies or rituals, they offer vital windows into Indigenous history.

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TEFAF New York: May 6-10, Park Avenue Armory, 643 Park Avenue, Manhattan, (646) 202-1390; tefaf.com.

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