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## Biennale des Antiquaires Tilts Toward the Future

by Sarah P. Hanson, Art+Auction 11/09/14 2:07 PM EDT

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 [View Slideshow](#) View of the Galerie François Leage booth at the 27th Biennale des Antiquaires (Courtesy of the gallery)

PARIS — The Syndicat National des Antiquaires unveiled its Biennale des Antiquaires today, and in every (Jacques Grange-designed) aisle, phrases like “from the collection of the Duc de...” “just like one in the Getty...,” and “imperial provenance” were in the air. The well-heeled crowd in attendance at the VIP vernissage looked poised to receive the objects into similarly good homes.

Some dealers in Old Masters and other studious subjects demurred on first-day sales, noting that most of their collectors take a few days or up to a week to close a deal. Not so Hicham Aboutaam, president of Phoenix Ancient Art, who had already overseen several transactions in his bustling booth, to the tune of 15 million euros. “It couldn’t have been better,” he said with a note of disbelief. Two standouts included an Attic *kylix*, or wide wine-drinking vessel, from 490-480 B.C. painted with Antilochus’s departure in black (likely the hand of Makron on a ceramic pot by Hieron, who inscribed his name), and an improbably large sphinx ring wrought from a single block of rock crystal, circa Egypt’s New Kingdom Ramesside period, 1295-1069 B.C.

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More contemporary bijoux were newly prominent, with the fair welcoming such jewelers as Bulgari, Chanel (featuring a new collection dubbed “Café Society”), Dior, Graff, Alexandre Reza, Giampero Bodino, Van Cleef & Arpels, Sigelson, Cartier (with the most cavernous stand of all), and the Hong Kong-based fabulist Wallace Chan. His “Gabriella Rose” necklace was freighted with a purple sapphire of 164.39 carats. More than one dealer remarked that the expanded jewelry offerings had drawn a different crowd than usual, and were hoping for a bit of sparkle to rub off.



The eclectic staging by many dealers of antiques and Renaissance through 19th-century paintings suggests that they have paid attention to what works at competing fairs like Frieze Masters, where the goal is to get the collectors in the door and instigate crossovers. Even the venerable Steinitz — purveyors of gilded 18th/19th-century French furnishings — had enlivened their mobbed stand with a sprinkling of modern artworks, including a small Fontana.

The stand of Galerie Gradiva, launched in May by Thomas Bompard, formerly the director of Sotheby’s Impressionist and Modern department in Paris, was presented in conjunction with Galerie Hopkins and boasted a dramatic Louise Bourgeois spider of about six feet in diameter clinging to its main wall. By the time the VIP opening kicked off, it had sold, as had a fine, heretofore unseen work on paper by Joan Miró, for a seven-figure price. Unusually large in size at about 19 by 25 inches, the blue-daubed drawing was a birthday gift to Florence Loeb, the artist’s dealer’s daughter, on the occasion of her 7th birthday. Pointing out Miro’s modestly small signature, Bompard jested, “I’d be surprised if Picasso, say, had done the equivalent for a 7-year-old’s birthday.”

Asian and Middle Eastern items were moving briskly, judging from the red tags dotting the booths of Islamic specialist Corinne Kevorkian and Japanese and samurai art dealer Jean-Christophe Charbonnier. Gisele Croës, the eminent Brussels dealer in ancient Chinese artifacts, reported strong early sales, including a large bronze horse for 5.5 million euros, bound for “an important foundation,” and a handful of others to a Beijing-based collector new to the gallery.

Certainly China — the subject of a major publicity campaign organized by the ousted SNA president Christian Deydier — was on many dealers’ minds. “I try to choose exotic subjects,” said Paris-based Jean-Gabriel Mitterand, whose booth was given over to whimsical-functional works by the Lalannes, when asked whether the potential depth of Asian pocketbooks had been a factor in his choice of what to show. Of the staging, which featured copious amounts of tastefully faux bamboo, he added, “My idea was to bring a kind of terrace, like they have in Thailand.” He had sold two unique versions of a mini-size rhinoceros cabinet by François-Xavier Lalanne in copper for 250,000 euros each and had reserves on a suite of chairs, table, and giant mirror featuring a delicate gold bamboo motif by Claude Lalanne.

Among early 20th-century decorative arts, Galerie Marcilhac and Galerie Alain Marcepoil made strong showings, the latter with a booth featuring André Sornay's personal office — circular-swiveling desk, chair, and shelf-lined walls — in mahogany wood outlined with his signature tiny nails, presented at the 1937 Exposition du Trocadero. Oscar Graf's austere take on Art Nouveau yielded rare chairs by Josef Hoffmann and Gustave Serrurier-Bovy, as well as a nickel silver teapot with ebonized handle by Christopher Dresser that even in 1879 anticipated the forthcoming machine age.

Two Italians received tributes in multiple booths. There were Venetian waterscapes by Michele Marieschi, an 18th-century follower of Canaletto, at both Richard Green, of London, and Ana Chiclana, of Madrid. The other was Enrico Castellani, whose satiny-matte monochrome canvases with proturbant patterns were shown by both Tornabuoni and Dominique Lévy. The gallery's Lock Kresler noted Castellani had recently been discovered by South American buyers.

Kresler, the newly installed director of Lévy's forthcoming London outpost, confirmed that several of his top items had been snapped up by the time the fair opened to the general public, including a giant 1957 canvas by Pierre Soulages for an undisclosed price. It's a pity it will have to be removed from its spot on the eelskin-covered wall above Peter Marino's similarly striated bronze cabinet, but such are the small tragedies of a well-executed temporary booth.

*The Biennale des Antiquaires runs September 11-21 at the Grand Palais, Paris.*

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