



Photography: Marc van der Chijs

## Dutch navigators on a fair course

The roots of *TEFAF Maastricht* remain strong, with quality works of art still key to its success

SPEAK to almost any dealer and they say that the biggest change since *TEFAF Maastricht* was launched in 1988 is the multi-national nature of the fair, *writes Alex Capon*.

This is something that has accelerated over the last decade as the fair has reflected the general trend toward globalisation at the top end of the art market. Today, dealers come from 21 countries aiming to sell to visitors who fly in from all over the world to the small city for one week a year.

But, go back 40 years, and fairs in Maastricht were much smaller and notably more 'Dutch' affairs, including the two original precursors

to *TEFAF* – the *Antiqua* and *Pictura* fairs. These events eventually merged in 1985 and morphed into *TEFAF* three years later.

That is not to say that these were unsuccessful – far from it – and *TEFAF* duly took on the key aspects of these events. And, despite the expansion in both the market and the fair's format, some of these particularly Dutch features remain at its heart.

Naturally, the presence of a core group of dealers from The Netherlands has always been an important part of the fair. While 37 exhibitors at this year's fair are on home turf, a number of leading



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Dutch dealers are also now based overseas, returning to show at the fair each year.

### National pride

In terms of the domestic dealers, one exhibitor who knows a thing or two about the 'Dutchness' of the fair is Robert Aronson of Amsterdam's Aronson Antiquairs.

A fifth-generation gallery owner specialising in Delftware, he has manned the family stand at every edition of *TEFAF* and stood at the *Antiqua* fair before that since 1982.

"I personally feel very proud of the fair," he told *ATG*. "Today's *TEFAF* grew out of two Dutch fairs and it became, and remains, the world's top fair. It's a real testimony to the Dutch vision of the dealers a generation before us. The mentality of dealers here is inherited from the earlier generation. It's still there – an enlivened sense of tradesmanship that is typically Dutch."

Mari Bies, owner of Eindhoven family gallery Kunsthandel Bies, is another longstanding *TEFAF* exhibitor who feels a sense of national pride in hosting such a major fair: "We are a small country but have always been strong in two things – we have great painters and great traders. For the last five centuries we travelled all over the world to buy and to sell – including the Far East."

In his 30 years of exhibiting at *TEFAF*, Bies estimated that he has sold Dutch works to buyers from over 25 countries. "Every year we meet new people from countries you don't expect; last year we sold a number of pictures to China, for example."

### Lawrence Steigrad Fine Arts, New York

#### What are you taking to *TEFAF*?

Among the pictures we are taking to *TEFAF* are approximately 20 Dutch and Flemish paintings. The majority date from the 17th century, with a few 18th and 19th century paintings and drawings as well.

#### Stand highlights

*A Young Boy with his Horse*, a fine example of the distinctive portraits by Dutch Golden Age painter Herman Doncker (c.1595-c.1656).

The subject of youths standing next to miniature horses is very rare but some

examples are known to have been produced in the north-west of the Netherlands, particularly in the town of Enkhuizen to where Doncker moved in the 1630s.

The life-size oil on panel from 1646 is priced at €250,000. A portrait of Elizabeth Capel Countess of Carnarvon by Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680) will also be on the stand priced at €295,000.

#### Will *TEFAF New York* affect the *Maastricht* fair?

The launch of *TEFAF New York* will certainly have an effect; some American collectors will likely decide not to travel to Maastricht in favour of the domestic alternative, but we do believe that attendance will remain high.

#### One line on *TEFAF*?

At *TEFAF*, we have found that all nationalities tend to buy Dutch pictures.



**Left:** Lawrence Steigrad and Peggy Stone, the husband and wife team who run the gallery.



## Aronson Antiquairs, Amsterdam

### What are you taking to TEFAF?

This year we're offering a selection of objects including works from two outstanding private Dutch collections. The collection of Nijstad family in Lochem was started by Abraham Nijstad but was developed into a magnificent group of Dutch Delftware by his son Hartog 'Harts' Nijstad and his wife Kitty in the 20th century.

In addition we have several highlights from the Morpurgo collection – compiled by four successive generations of a renowned Amsterdam dynasty in the antiques trade.

### Stand highlights

A pair of polychrome Delftware boys riding lions from c.1775 comes from the Nijstad collection, each measuring approximately 8in (20.5cm) high, priced at a five-figure sum.

Among the long-treasured objects in the Morpurgo collection, this blue and white plaque is attributed to Holland's most renowned painter of 17th century Delft faience. Measuring 10½in (27cm) high, it carries a low six-figure price.

### Are you optimistic about TEFAF 2017?

I'm sure this year will be as strong as ever. We have interest in our collections already, including from abroad, and we know certain clients will be turning up. It helps when you have a strong collection which you can promote in advance.

### One line on TEFAF

If we, as a nation [The Netherlands], fully understood what we had, there would be 17 million visitors to the fair.



**Above:** Robert Aronson, a fifth-generation dealer at the 135-year-old firm Aronson Antiquairs, with a blue and white Chinoiserie vase and cover, Delft, c.1670.

When it comes to Dutch Old Masters, Bies believes that if you have a great 'Golden Age' picture Maastricht remains the best place to sell it. "The original source of the *Pictura* fair was Dutch Old Masters and from that base TEFAF developed into a broader fair," he said.

"All the big dealers in Dutch paintings from London, Paris and New York will be here, so the fair remains the biggest showcase for Dutch art history."

Among the dealers who specialise in Dutch works but are based overseas is Lawrence Steigrad. He opened a gallery in New York with his wife and business partner Peggy Stone in 1989 and together they have stood at TEFAF Maastricht since 2006 (see box left).

Steigrad, who is the son (and grandson) of Dutch collectors, said the market for Dutch pictures at TEFAF is underpinned by a basic market truth: "Collectors want good-quality pictures in good condition, and they are confident that that is what they will see at TEFAF Maastricht. The expectation is that reputable dealers will offer them fine art, backed up by the proper research and solid provenance."

According to Aronson, what's true of Dutch paintings is also true of Dutch ceramics. He estimates that at TEFAF around 15-20% of his sales are to Dutch buyers but the rest are

international, especially north-west Europe (Germany and France) and also the east coast of the US.

Another Dutch expat, the London-based Oriental art specialist Ben Janssens, also said the bulk of his sales at TEFAF were to overseas buyers.

However, he also noted an important effect that the Maastricht fair has in terms of encouraging domestic buyers to enter the market. "The fair obviously has lot of Dutch visitors," he said, "but every year certain people become interested in the art and antiques directly thanks to their experience at Maastricht. They then become drawn into the market because of the fair."

This seems to reflect a theme shared by most long-time Dutch exhibitors – that the event acts like a centre of gravity, pulling in different objects and people into its annual orbit. Bies says: "Maastricht is not a very big city so why do all these people make the trip? It's one reason – there's so much quality on offer."

However, even if the direction of travel is ever more international, dealers still speak of "the distinctive Dutch feel" that TEFAF retains, something Steigrad said was "noticeable from the food to the interior". When you find yourself munching on a kroketten on impeccably designed stand, you'll know exactly what he means. ■

## Kunsthandel Bies, Eindhoven

### What are you taking to TEFAF?

A fine collection of Dutch 19th and early 20th century paintings.

### Stand highlight

An 1852 winter landscape by Andreas Schelfhout (1787-1870). Director of the gallery Mari Bies first saw the oil on panel as a young man in 1973 when it made a spectacular record of Dfl 417,600 (approx €190,000) at an auction in Amsterdam. Coming from a private Dutch collection – the same family who bought it at the auction – Bies has placed an asking price of €500,000-600,000 at TEFAF.



### Are you optimistic about TEFAF 2017?

The fair is always good for us, even though 2008-14 was a more difficult period due to international crisis. We've seen the market get stronger in the last two years and we go into the fair very confident.



**Left:** Members of the Bies family who run Kunsthandel Bies, the gallery founded in 1953 which is now owned by Mari Bies (centre left) and his wife Marian Bies (far left), their niece Saskia Groendijk (centre right) and Mari's brother Hans Bies (far right), who doubles-up as the firm's restorer.