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PHOTO ESSAYS

Serenity and a Few Surprises at the TEFAF New York Spring Fair

There's something confident about this old-school European fair — the exhibitors let the game come to them.



Seph Rodney

3 days ago



Manolo Valdés, "La Moto" (2016/17), painted wood, 167 x 238 x 63 cm, at the Beck & Eggeling booth

One of the first things I noticed, meandering through [TEFAF New York Spring](#), was that the lighting was softer and moodier than at the last art fair I attended, the [Armory Show](#) back in March. There, the entire pavilion was flooded with sharp, white light, as if to keep all the salespeople up and alert, or as if the dealers and gallerists feared the power of shadows to potentially bedim the art. Perhaps the best way to describe the lighting at TEFAF is to say that it has “character” — that distinguishing quality that makes each booth feel like an extension of the temperament and concerns of the gallery owner, rather than just another well-appointed corner of the depot for a deposed French monarch’s garage sale.

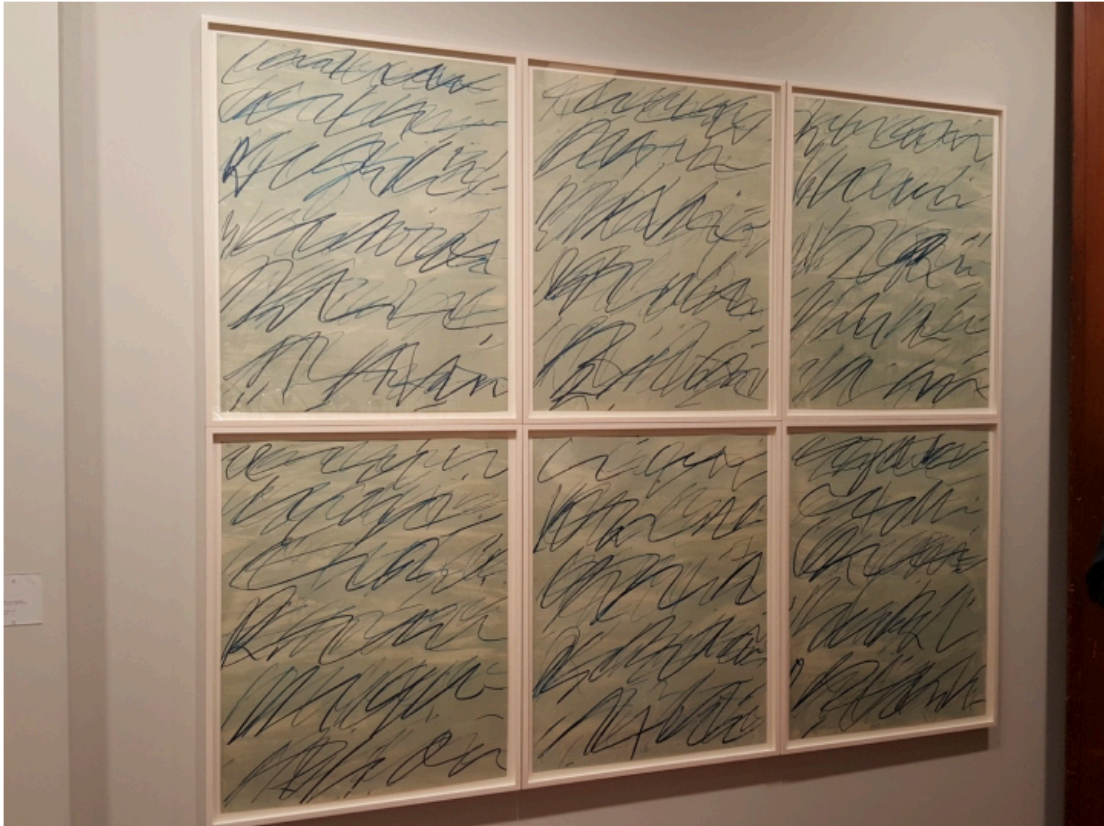


Alberto Burri, “Cretto L.A.” (1975), acrovynyl on Cellotex, 40.5 x 30.5 cm, at the Tornabuoni Arte gallery booth

This is the debut of the TEFAF New York Spring fair. Its progenitor is [TEFAF Maastricht](#), which the [New York Times](#) called “Europe’s biggest and most prestigious fair devoted to art, antiques and design.” TEFAF Maastricht weighs heavily toward the work of the European old masters. That focus is in evidence in New York, though it’s been updated to feature the most prominent artists in the mainstream story of the development of modernism, from expressionistic figuration to a kind of culminating abstraction. These artists repeat across the array of 93 exhibitors: [Cy Twombly](#), [Alberto Burri](#), [Pablo Picasso](#) (of course), [Donald Judd](#). Even the surrealists like

[Dalí](#) and [Magritte](#) get quite a bit of play (I struggle to understand how Salvador Dalí continues to be interesting to people who have seen modern and contemporary art past their teenage years). Nevertheless, because the fair has that tripartite focus on art, antiques, and design, it actually ends up being

more visually welcoming than other fairs, with their unblinking illumination and relentless hard sell. Here, there are pockets of jewelry and furniture, which give my eyes something to look at besides the mostly modernist painting and sculpture. There's something serene and dignified about the fair, at least on preview day. It feels unhurried. The exhibitors let the game come to them, confident that if potential buyers can be seduced by Twombly, they might also be seduced by [Ma Desheng](#).



Cy Twombly, "Roman Notes" (1970), six offset color lithographs, each print 71.5 x 102 cm, at the Galerie Bastian booth



Ma Desheng, left: "Ink Nude 2" (1987), ink on Chinese paper, 97 x 68.5 cm; right: "Ink Nude 1" (1987), ink on Chinese paper, 94 x 68.5 cm; at Rossi and Rossi gallery

I did find some standout pieces among the well-worn modernists, including Burri's "Bianca Plastica" (1967) at the booth of [Mazzoleni Art](#) and Magritte's "Paysage Marin avec Oiseau" (1961), a painting of clouds in the shape of a bird on a wine bottle, at [Keitelman Gallery](#). When I ran into [Jim Dine's](#) "Summer Tools" (1962) at [Richard Gray Gallery](#), I smiled and almost laughed at the way he cavalierly glued some tools and junk to a large, mostly untreated canvas; it's macho and silly at the same time. The ever-present mix of indigenous arts and European statuary reminded me that the two do share some similar concerns: what the human figure means and how to depict that meaning. The award for the most indulgent piece I saw easily goes to [Manolo Valdés's](#) "La Moto" (2016/17) at [Beck & Eggeling's](#) booth, which looks like a glossy but cracked sculpture of Micky and Minnie Mouse on a motorbike; it's ridiculous and owns its ridiculousness. I was surprised to find myself liking the Donald Judd piece "Untitled 78-5" (1978) at [Anthony Meier Fine Arts](#). I don't usually care for his work, but the object is so pristine, bright, and well placed at

care for his work, but the object is so pristine, bright, and well placed at TEFAF (with a wall mostly to itself), it does inspire a kind of awe, glistening like some holy grail. My favorite was easily [Jean-Michel Basquiat's "Red Joy"](#) (1984), brought by [Galerie Boulakia](#). The painting that kept unfolding with more meaning as I gave it time to do so.

Even if you, like me, are quite over the notion of mastery and more interested in finding art that's surprising in its makeup, there are some works at TEFAF's New York debut that at least deliver the surprise — in a context of comfortable, old-world aesthetics.



Jim Dine, "Summer Tools" (1962), mixed-media assemblage: oil tools, string, glue bottles, and plastic light fixture on canvas, 80 x 108 inches at the Richard Gray Gallery booth



René Magritte, "Paysage Marin avec Oiseau" (1961), oil on glass bottle, 34,5 cm at the Keitelman Gallery booth



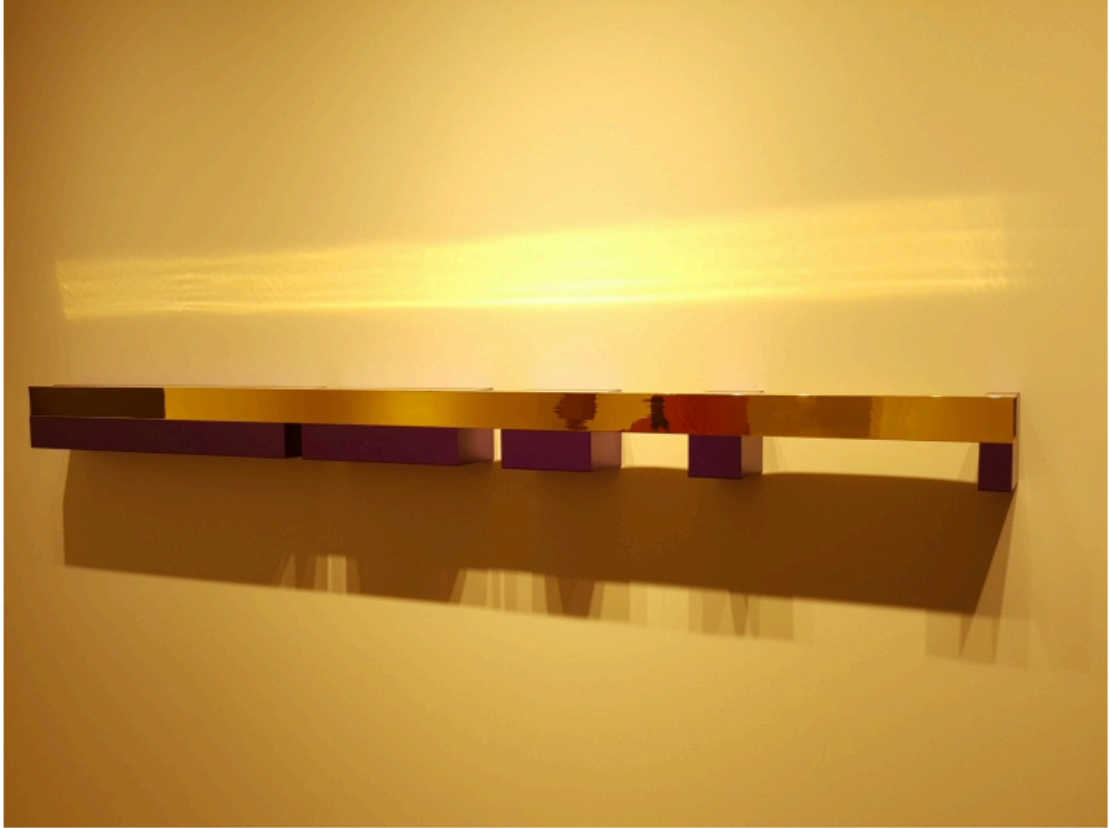
Alberto Burri, "Bianca Plastica (1967), plastic, acrylic, vinavil and combustion on Cellotex, 50 x 75,3 cm, at the Mazzoleni Art booth



A view of Tambaran Gallery's booth



A view of Galerie Chenel's booth



Donald Judd, "Untitled 78-5" (1978), brass and purple anodized aluminum, 12.7 x 190.5 x 12.7 cm at the Anthony Meier Fine Arts booth



Jean Michel Basquiat, "Red Joy" (1984), acrylic, oilstick, and Xerox collage on canvas, 218.5 x 172.5 cm at the Galerie Boulakia booth

TEFAF New York Spring 2017 continues at the Park Avenue Armory (643 Park Avenue, Upper East Side, Manhattan) through May 8.