

WINTER 2011 ART FAIRS

Winter wonders

January's leading international fine arts and antiques fairs, from Brussels to New York and Palm Beach, have plenty to tempt collectors this month

WRITER SUSAN MOORE



1 Bowl, 1795
Qianlong, China
Porcelain, width 58.4cm
Cohen & Cohen at the Winter Antiques Show, New York

There is more to New York's Winter Antiques Show than Americana. Two thirds of the 75 exhibitors at this year's 57th edition (Park Avenue Armory, January 21–30) present everything from antiquities, medieval manuscripts, arms and armour to Old Master prints and drawings, classical Chinese furniture and Fabergé. Inevitably, perhaps, many of the show's outstanding offerings, if not precisely Americana, have some association with this great continent.

Canadian dealer Donald Ellis, for instance, unveils what he describes as arguably the most important Native American object to be offered for sale since the 1940s. It is a Yup'ik Eskimo mask from the estate of the Italian-American Surrealist artist Enrico Donati (1909–2008). Such masks may be considered the highest form of expression of Native American art. Certainly they exerted a profound influence on the Surrealists who escaped Paris to settle in New York in the 1940s. André Breton, Max Ernst, Roberto Matta and Donati, among others, all recognised their particular power and owned significant examples.

Never previously exhibited, the so-called *Donati Studio Mask* (Fig. 3; c. 1890–1905) was originally acquired by Adam Hollis Twitchell (1872–1949), who began trading along the Kuskokwim River in Alaska in 1905. Purchasing many of his masks directly from the natives immediately after the ceremonial dances he witnessed, Twitchell amassed an iconic group of 12 Yup'ik weather masks. When one last came on the market in 1984 it was acquired by Ernst Beyeler for his museum in Basel. This extraordinary mask would have

been used shamanistically to predict and control the weather, and is the last remaining in private hands. It is priced in excess of \$2m.

The weather mask also serves as a reminder of the often underappreciated fact that the cream of the crop on the art market is often handled by specialist dealers, and never sees the light of day at auction. While the lion's share of Donati's tribal art collection was sold by Sotheby's New York in May 2010, this and two other fine Yup'ik masks were offered instead to Donald Ellis.

Unveiled, too, is what appears to be a rare piece of Chinese export porcelain made specifically for the American market. UK dealer Cohen & Cohen presents an 18th-century punch bowl decorated with a sepia panel depicting a rustic view of the Bronx in New York (Fig. 1). Only recently identified, the simple landscape features a wooden bridge very similar to that built over Spuyten Duyvil Creek in 1769, and figures with the round-brimmed hats favoured in the New World.

Hirschl & Adler, meanwhile, presents Jacques-Emile Blanche's (1861–1942) portrait of the remarkable Chilean-born Eugenia Huici Arguedas de Errázuriz (Fig. 4; 1890). A fêted beauty, Eugenia knew everyone who was anyone in Paris, from Picasso and Cocteau to Stravinsky, but her legacy proved her singular taste for sparseness, simplicity and natural materials which had a profound effect on both interior design and fashion.

The Brussels Antiques & Fine Arts Fair (BRAFA) is one of the most singular events in the international fair calendar. It offers that increasingly rare commodity in an ever homogenising world: an international fair that



succeeds in retaining not only its own character but a flavour of that of its host nation. It also happens to be one of the most agreeable fairs to visit.

Partly this is a result of its manageable scale, although for this year's 56th edition (January 21–30) the exhibition space in the impressive halls of the historic Tour & Taxis marshalling yard has been expanded to

- 2 *Accumulation de Clubs de Golf*, 2001
Arman (1928–2005)
Polished bronze, 131×37×30cm
Edition of eight
Whitford Fine Art at the American International Fine Art Fair, Palm Beach
- 3 *Complex Mask (Donati Studio Mask)*, c. 1890–1905
Yup'ik; Kuskokwim Region, Alaska
Wood, pigment, sinew, vegetal fibre, cotton thread, replaced feathers, ht 86.4cm
Donald Ellis Gallery at the Winter Antiques Show, New York

- 4 *Portrait of Eugenia Huici Arguedas de Errázuriz*, 1890
Jacques-Emile Blanche (1861–1942)
Pastel on canvas, 162.6×97.2cm
Hirschl & Adler Galleries at the Winter Antiques Show, New York



include eight more stands, increasing the exhibitor number to over 130. The atmosphere here has more to do with Old World courtesy than New World money, for this is not the place to find the latest multimillion trophy but good-quality pieces for the serious collector. This is a fair that knows its audience and it plays to its strengths which are the traditional collecting areas of the region – be they medieval sculpture, tapestries, Asian and tribal art, 20th-century design or the art of the comic book. In the field of tribal art it excels.

This year, three new exhibitors further swell the ranks of the tribal art dealers. From Brussels comes Adrian Schlag, Nasser & Co. travels from New York while Schoffel-Valluet is based in Paris. They join the likes of Bernard Dulon, Pierre Darteville, Patrick & Ondine Mestdagh and Galerie Claes. The latter brings a striking half-man, half-animal Kete-Luluwa mask from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The 'primitive' art on display here is, of

course, not confined to the continent of Africa. Galerie Mermoz, for instance, offers distinguished Pre-Columbian pieces while Phoenix Ancient Art embraces antiquities ranging geographically from Mesopotamia to South-West Asia.

Other newcomers add lustre to the fair – among them Chinese specialist Christian Deydier and French decorative arts impresario Steinitz, plus a group of five exhibitors from Monaco. They join a rich vein of luminaries, including silver dealer Bernard de Leye (who promises a wine cooler by Odier), the influential Axel Vervoordt, antique jewellery dealer Epoque Fine Jewels and fine tapestry restorer De Wit, as well as modern art dealers Galerie Berès, Ronny Van de Velde and Galeria Manuel Barbié. A new BRAFA guide (listing hotels, restaurants, exhibitions and shows) is planned, to help visitors make the most of their visit to the city.

It is the 'snowbirds' flying in for the winter that attract the exhibitors at the international art and antiques fair in Palm Beach. This fair has been a real roller coaster of a ride over the last 15 years, and at its best it has ranked among the great fairs of the world. Under the name of the American International Fine Art Fair (AIAF), it returns to the Palm Beach Convention Center (February 5–13). This year some 55 dealers take a bow. Expect to find everything from Picasso, courtesy of Richard Green, to Epstein's bronze of Winston Churchill (MacConnal-Mason), a tranche of previously unseen work by the fashion photographer Herb Ritts (Holden Luntz) and a dazzling array of multicolour diamonds (Graff).

All three fairs present loan exhibitions. In association with Hammer Galleries, AIAF is displaying some 20 late works by Renoir; BRAFA draws from the eclectic 17th-century collections of the Museum Meyer van den Bergh of Antwerp, while the Winter Antiques Show's unprecedented collaboration with the Historic Charleston Foundation brings over 50 pieces of great Americana from the city's museum houses, plantation houses and private collections. **A**