

MEET THE DEALER

Meet the Dealer: Donald Ellis Gallery at Frieze New York 2019

By Torey Akers
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Maximiliane Scheppach of Donald Ellis Gallery, Booth C39

Nestled in booth C39 of Frieze 2019 lives a quietly exciting spotlight on historical works by Native American artists, just the sort of underrepresented artistic legacy that should draw our collective eye on Randall's Island. This is Ellis' third time participating in Frieze, and the appointment-only venue's focus on expanding our cultural appreciation for this precious and overlooked genre proves a breath of fresh air in the flashy context of the fair. The work currently on view "places ledgers drawn by warriors in the Great Plains in dialogue with art by women," remarked gallerist Maximiliane Scheppach; she further explained that the carefully rendered "ledgers" in question are extensions of pictographic storytelling tools for recording significant acts of heroism and valour. After the systematic relocation of indigenous Plains people to government reservations and the coinciding destruction of wild buffalo populations, the practice of painting documenting such

moments on hide became increasingly rare. These more economical ledger drawings, dating to the 1860s, signal a turn away from the golden age of the warrior under colonization to depictions of domestic and ceremonial life, providing an invaluable record of the 19th century Native experience.

These pieces have been paired with carefully painted *parafleche* containers, a word derived from the French phrase for “turning away arrows.” These geometrically decorated rawhide vessels corresponded with the introduction of horses to the Plains, and the subsequent demands of a more nomadic lifestyle. *Parafleche* envelopes were exclusively made by Plains women, who were responsible for every aspect of production, from the cutting and stretching to the surface painting that made them so distinct. Pairing them with culturally male-coded ledger drawings is “not typical,” according to Scheppach, but the contrast encourages rumination on the necessity of community in the social imprint of art.

Donald Ellis Gallery has been in the business since 1976, serving collectors, corporations and museums throughout Canada, Europe, and the U.S.. Their emphasis primarily hones in on the art of Inuit, Yup’i, Northwest Coast and Eastern Woodlands cultures, and the gallery has exhibited in a number of prominent international art fairs, like the Armory, Frieze Masters London, and TEFAF Maastricht. Fun fact: founder Donald Ellis is a regularly featured appraiser of Native American art on PBS’s own Antiques Roadshow.