

The world of **TEFAF** welcomes you (Really. It does!)

What do you do when someone sets a drink down on your €50,000 sideboard without a coaster? Nanci Tangeman explores this and other cultural questions about the world of TEFAF, The European Fine Art Fair.

It was at a dinner party several years ago. One of the guests was talking about the 110,000 guilder (around €50,000) antique sideboard she'd purchased. She had just sent it off to Poland to have it refinished, 'because you can get great work done there for half the price!' I don't remember who this woman was. I do remember being stunned that someone would spend that kind of money on one piece of dining room furniture. I also remember wondering to myself, 'Why does a 110,000 guilder sideboard need refinishing?' Did somebody forget to use a coaster?

It's been a few years, and I have a few more dinner parties under my belt. Nowadays I'm probably more taken aback that someone would mention the price of her sideboard than what that price might be. However, I am still fascinated by a world where you can buy a desk that was once owned by Princess Marianna of Orange-Nassau or jugs that date from the third millennium BC.

And that is the world of TEFAF.

TEFAF is The European Fine Art Fair, held

annually in Maastricht, near the Belgian border. This year, over 200 art and antiques dealers from 15 countries will exhibit in an area the size of four football pitches. They will showcase between 15,000 and 25,000 objects with a total value to €840 million – a billion US dollars!

And everything at TEFAF is for sale.

There are those who already know about TEFAF and reserve their hotel rooms in Maastricht a year in advance. But those in the know are not the people who need to read this article. This article is for those readers who never envisioned TEFAF as an interesting day's adventure.

The world at TEFAF

TEFAF is a hybrid of several fine art and antiques fairs that sprouted in the 1970s. It is expected to draw 75,000 visitors to the Maastricht Exhibition and Congress Centre (MECC) from March 10 to 19 and is the top fair of its kind in Europe. This year, dealers will come from Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Canada, France,



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Fun and Fundamentals

How to get the most out of TEFAF – and still have a good time

The fundamentals

Maastricht is one of the oldest cities in the Netherlands. Some would argue that TEFAF draws one of the oldest (and stuffiest) crowds in the Netherlands. Anyone who has visited TEFAF with the right attitude knows this isn't true.

Even if you're not in the market for the €9.7 million Francis Bacon for sale this year, you can still enjoy one of the most extensive collections of art and antiques in the world. Here are some tips for getting the most out of TEFAF, while still having fun.

On the evening before TEFAF opens to the public, there is a private viewing. This is a great way to beat the crowds but, alas, entrance is by invitation of dealers and sponsors only. If you have a relationship with either, you may be lucky enough to snag credentials to this event and beat the crowds. In addition, banks and other businesses often sponsor events during the show. Bottom line: if you receive a special invitation, use it!

However, if you are one of the 75,000 ticket-buying guests expected to attend TEFAF over its regularly scheduled ten days without a special invitation, here are some guidelines to keep in mind.

First tip: The ticket price (€40) includes one catalogue. If you come with a partner, buy the special two-person/one catalogue ticket (€60). No need to lug an extra two kilos of catalogue around, no matter how delicious they are to drool over later.

And come early, but not too early, says Denise Hermanns of the European Fine Art Foundation. 'During the fair, people can buy their tickets from 10.30a.m., half an hour before the fair opens. There is always a little queue at the fair around 11.00a.m., but if you wait a few minutes, you can normally pass through easily.' Tickets can be ordered online at www.tefaf.com as well.

Hermanns also cautions visitors to plan enough time to see the exhibition. 'Reserve at least one full day to visit the fair. Two days is even better, especially if you want to visit Maastricht, as well. There is quite a lot to see at TEFAF so a few hours isn't enough!'

'I also recommend booking a hotel far in advance as many people from abroad visit the fair and need a hotel room,' says Hermanns.

'Our website provides information and links to preferred hotels in Maastricht and surrounding areas.' Don't worry. If you didn't plan far enough in advance for a hotel room, the fair is an easy day trip from anywhere in the Randstad.

The fun

So once you've secured your tickets, set aside a day or two, and possibly found a coveted hotel room, what's next? We've put together some different approaches to tackling the fair, certain to suit any personality:

The Smörgåsbord approach. Study the exhibitors beforehand at www.tefaf.com. Choose one interesting exhibitor from each of the 17 categories: a purveyor of rare travel books; clocks and barometers; jewellery; carpets and textiles; paintings, drawings and prints; 20th-century decorative art; classical antiquities; medieval sculpture... Visit all 17.

The New-Age approach. Walk into the pavilion and let the energy of the art draw you to it. Or just put on your raccoon eyes and search for shiny objects. Remember to eat and drink regularly and rest your tired feet. Champagne and coffee bars, plus pubs and cafes, are located throughout the massive hall.

The Museum-with-a-Price-Tag approach. Have you visited any museums in the past few months? What caught your eye? It could be very unexpected – an etching at Amsterdam's Rembrandthuis or Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes at Museum Ludwig in Cologne or one of the many sculptures in the Lange Voorhout sculpture garden last summer in The Hague. Chances are, there will be something similar for sale at TEFAF. Seek out the dealers and dream.

The Algorithmic approach. Before you enter, decide a random pattern of browsing and stick to it: visit every fifth booth or always travel clockwise or stop only at booths whose numbers are prime or sample one exhibitor for each letter of the alphabet...

The Good-Wife approach. Take your husband for a stroll by the Bulgari exhibit to see the 'necklace in white gold with colourless and fancy yellow pear-shaped diamonds (21.52 cts), colourless and fancy yellow round brilliant-cut diamonds (6.36 cts) and pavé diamonds (5.10 cts)' described in the catalogue, then say something



like, 'I love my little cubic zircon solitaire just as much.' Next, let him look at the Renaissance astronomical table clock, or the two-colour gold-mounted enamel clock by Carl Faberge, or even the Art Deco clock with a movement by Vacheron et Constantin. Men love that kind of stuff.

The Evil-Future-Wife approach. Just dating? Mess with your beau's mind and peruse the 'selection of beautiful and rare fancy yellow and white diamond engagement rings of the highest quality' at Graff's display. Ooh and ah appropriately.

The Ikea-on-Steroids approach. Still a little daunted by the prospect of perusing aisle after aisle of furniture and art? Think of it as the rich man's Ikea. If you're an Arts and Crafts aficionado, check out the Lethaby Kenton & Company armchair. Or for something more modern, a French Sandoz couch from 1962. No assembly required.

The Armchair-Traveller approach. Can't quite swing that Egyptian holiday this year? Buy your souvenirs right here at home – or at least admire them. How about a 14th-century Egyptian mask or a statue of an Egyptian engineer from around 2300 BC?

No matter what your approach, take the advice of fine art consultant Pennington: 'Be imaginative. Life is supposed to be fun, clever, and spontaneous. And remember, a day out with the grand is a chance to be grand without spending a lot of money.'

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Date: 14 March 2006

Includes:

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