
OBSERVER

ARTS • ART FAIRS

The Winter Show Returns With an Encyclopedic Presentation and Its Signature Timeless Flair

Early sales and a diverse crowd point to the art world's enduring interest in historic material culture.

By [Elisa Carollo](#) • 01/24/25 2:29pm



The January 23 opening night was full of activity. [Matt Borkowski/BFA.com](#)

Celebrating its 71st edition this year, the Winter Show remains one of the oldest and most distinguished fairs, offering a quintessentially sumptuous Upper East Side experience. Staged in the opulent Park Avenue Armory—also home to other meticulously curated fairs like ADAA and TEFAF—the Winter Show sets itself apart with an encyclopedic range, spanning everything from Roman glass and Chinese ceramics to modern and contemporary American art, glass, ceramics and furniture. But beyond the spectacle, the fair serves a greater purpose: it is owned by East Side House Settlement, which has transformed it into an annual benefit event supporting its mission to provide critical services and resources to over 14,000 residents of the Bronx and Northern Manhattan.

Founded in 1954 by the community-based organization, the fair originally focused on Americana but quickly expanded to encompass a broader range of categories, growing ever more international—more so since current director Helen Allen took the helm in 2019. “We’re the only show really in America that’s truly an encyclopedic presentation: we do offer everything from antiquities through the present,” Allen told Observer in a quick call just a day before opening, as she darted around assisting exhibitors bringing in works and beginning installations. “Someone has described the show as a galaxy of colliding worlds, which I think is a perfect way to translate the experience of what the Winter Show offers this year.”

Running from January 24 to February 2, this year’s edition of the January art fair features 77 exhibitors from around nine countries presenting an extraordinary array of cultural artifacts, artworks, books, jewelry and other objects from 5,000 years of civilization. At the benefit gala opening on Thursday night, champagne bubbled as elegantly dressed attendees walked the aisles and admired a dazzlingly curated selection of rare and precious items. “Every booth is very distinctive and unique, and dealers research, collect and acquire all year round to bring these objects to the show,” Allen noted in our pre-opening chat. That meticulous preparation is evident across the fair, with objects surfacing on the market for the first time in years.



Held annually at the Park Avenue Armory, The Winter Show showcases a breadth of works spanning 5,000 years. Matt Borkowski/BFA.com

One of this year's standout highlights for antiquities enthusiasts is a gilt wood mummy mask from the Late Dynastic Period (circa 664–32 B.C.), presented by Hixenbaugh Ancient Art. This striking artifact is accompanied by an impressive selection of treasures from ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome. Among them are a Roman marble head of Silenus from the 2nd century A.D., tagged at \$150,000, and an elegant Roman marble statue of Aphrodite from the 1st century A.D., available for \$250,000.

Over at Blumka's booth, two exceptional medieval pieces command attention. First, a beautifully crafted copper alloy Lion Aquamanile, a German-made vessel with unmistakable Middle Eastern influences. Then, making its market debut after spending decades in the Blumka family collection, a remarkably well-preserved limestone Medieval Baptismal Font (circa 1175–1275) from England. The font, richly adorned with decorative bands featuring symbolic animals and roundels, still carries traces of its original polychrome, a reminder that medieval sculptures were often vibrantly painted.

For devotees of design history and decorative arts, Kunsthandel Nikolaus Kolhammer—a first-time exhibitor from Vienna—brings a rarity: one of only two known exemplars of a mantle clock designed by Josef Hoffmann in 1903, the founding year of the Wiener Werkstätte. Hoffmann, whose famous mantra “Ornament is a crime” declared war on the decorative excesses of Liberty and Art Nouveau, is in excellent company at the fair. Over at Bernad Goldberg Fine Arts LLC, another pivotal figure of the Vienna Secession, Koloman Moser, is represented by two brass reliefs of Muses made for the Wiener Werkstätte.

That same booth also boasts a mystical gem by Agnes Pelton, *French Music* (circa 1917), priced between \$20,000 and \$30,000. But the real showstopper is a powerful horizontal painting by Rockwell Kent celebrating the rise of American industry. This piece is based on his original 15-by-50-foot mural for the General Electric Pavilion at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York—a work that was tragically lost in a warehouse fire. What remains is this singular painting, in which Kent crystallized the grandeur of the original mural in a smaller format.



Tom Wesselmann's *Smoking Cigarette #1* (1980) at galerie gmurzynska's booth at The Winter Show. Photo Thomas Barratt

Among the few contemporary art pieces at this year's fair, an absolute highlight is a hand-painted wood sculpture of a cigarette by Tom Wesselmann. As Mathias Rastorfer, CEO and co-owner of Galerie Gmurzynska, told Observer, this is the first cigarette Wesselmann ever conceived and one of the very few free-standing sculptures that paved the way for his iconic wall reliefs of cigarettes and lips. Originally presented at the legendary Sidney Janis Gallery, Wesselmann designed the piece with a black rectangular base, allowing it to be displayed either standing upright or hanging as a three-dimensional relief. Now making its debut at the Winter Show, the work carries an asking price of \$900,000—arriving on the heels of a remarkable year for the artist, who recently gained renewed attention thanks to a major retrospective at Fondation Louis Vuitton.

Another standout in contemporary art is an unmistakable silkscreen by Andy Warhol featuring Renate Zimet, who, as it turns out, is the mother of the gallery owner at French & Company. This piece comes directly from their collection—price available upon request.

For the Baroque aficionados, New York dealer Robert Simon is offering a gilt bronze Lion sculpture attributed to the Italian master Gian Lorenzo Bernini—created as a model for one of his most famous masterpieces, the monumental *Fountain of the Four Rivers* in Rome's Piazza Navona. The original *modello*, gifted to King Philip IV of Spain in 1668, was later dismantled and dispersed after 1849, with its central portion now housed in the Spanish Royal Collection at the Galería de las Colecciones Reales in Madrid. After years off the market, this fragment—resurfacing at the fair—is being publicly offered at \$950,000.

The fair's historic emphasis on Americana remains strong with this year's special section, "FOCUS: Americana," curated by Alexandra Kirtley from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. This dedicated segment showcases an outstanding selection of American fine art, folk art, and antiques.



Lillian Nassau's booth. Lillian Nassau

Exquisitely crafted decorative arts are a major draw at the fair, with a particularly dazzling selection of Tiffany Studios glass presented by Lillian Nassau LLC. The highlight of this collection is an exceptional stained-glass window depicting a lush bouquet of peonies, available for just over a million dollars. The timing of this presentation couldn't be better, coinciding with a strong market for Tiffany's masterpieces. Sotheby's November marquee week saw the *Danner Memorial Window* fetch a record-setting \$12.48 million.

Jewelry has a significant presence at the fair, and even the most devoted art lovers will find ways to connect their passion with the extraordinary selection of jewelry brought by 20th-century masters at Didier Ltd (London, U.K.). Among the highlights: pieces by Alexander Calder and a stunning silver tiara designed for Rose Masson, wife of French artist André Masson. Meanwhile, Wartski (London, U.K.) delivers on the antique front, showcasing rare decorative objects, including a silver cigar cutter shaped like a carp by Carl Fabergé, alongside dazzling gold and gem-set brooches in the form of a dragonfly and a butterfly by Boucheron from the late 19th century.

For bibliophiles with a taste for the rare, precious manuscripts and books take center stage at the Les Enluminures booth. “In Her Hands: Women and Medieval Manuscripts” presents a meticulously curated selection of eight spectacular prayer books, shining a light on female patronage in the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance. As associate director [Tomas Borchert](#) explained to Observer, it’s rare to find prayer books definitively owned by women, but these manuscripts leave no doubt—their female patrons are depicted within their pages. Among the standouts are the 15th-century *Haraucourt Hours* and a French *Book of Hours* illuminated by the Master of Raoul du Fou. Beyond their luminous color palettes and intricate illuminations, both books feature remarkable portraits of their female owners—a detail almost never seen on the market, underscoring how deeply personal these works were to their original collectors. The *Haraucourt Hours* (circa 1480–1485), illuminated in Bruges for a female member of the Haraucourt family, exemplifies the lavish style of the Circle of Willem Vrelant, the leading illuminator of late 15th-century Bruges.

As for sales, the action started early. Just an hour after the opening, a few exhibitors were already putting red dots on their walls. At Robert Young Antiques, an irresistibly charming full-hulled Noah’s Ark model—complete with an entire procession of hand-carved animals, birds and insect figures from late 19th-century Germany—found a buyer in the \$25,000–\$30,000 range. “The piece is a rare survivor and a remarkable work from the European folk art tradition,” the gallery director told Observer. Also snapped up: an impressively hyperrealistic pair of mastiffs carved in stone to scale by a U.K.-based artisan in 1990 at Barbara Israel Garden Antiques.



A notable Noah's Ark Model showcased by Robert Young Antiques. Matt Borkowski/BFA.com

One might assume that the audience at The Winter Show would skew older, but opening night told a different story. The age range was notably diverse, with plenty of attendees in their thirties and forties mingling with more seasoned collectors. “The new generation that is coming up is very interested in historical material culture, both because of the quality of craftsmanship, but also because of the storytelling and the kind of the patina that these objects have,” Allen told Observer. “It’s interesting. We are even getting some major contemporary museums in New York reaching out for tours as they have patrons who really would like to be able to come.”

And why wouldn’t they? The Winter Show’s uniquely curated, encyclopedic presentations appeal to anyone who values quality craftsmanship and timelessness—qualities that have only become more precious in an era of overconsumption, where trends fade fast and even the hottest contemporary artists can vanish from our cultural consciousness when the hype wears off.