



The 25th Anniversary of The International
Fine Art & Antique Dealers Show

By Wendy Moonan

Now celebrating its 25th anniversary in New York, the International Fine Art & Antique Dealers Show almost never happened. That may be hard to believe now, with its roster of more than 60 top international dealers, tens of thousands of annual attendees, an enviable social cachet as the “opener” of the fall social season in New York and its remarkable success in raising more than \$20 million for The Society of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center over the past 25 years.

In 1988, English fair organizers Brian and Anna Haughton were best known to Americans for their renowned International Ceramics Fair and Seminar, a small, select connoisseurs' show they staged every June in London. (I've been several times; it's terrific.)

Brian Haughton, a veteran London dealer in fine English and European ceramics from the 17th to the 19th century, created the fair in 1982 with his wife Anna, a veteran of Lloyd's of London. The Ceramics Fair, in its expanded format as part of the Haughton's show now called “Art Antiques London,” is a sacred date on the calendar for serious collectors. Every June porcelain and ceramics aficionados gather like pilgrims to reconnect with colleagues, learn about new scholarly research, attend lectures by museum curators and - bien sûr - shop for newly uncovered treasures from all over the world.

It was at that fair that an American collector suggested that the Haughtons do a second ceramics fair in New York. Overhearing this, Clare Le Corbeiller, then the formidable decorative arts curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, strongly suggested that it would dilute the Ceramics Fair in London if there was a second one in New York. “It was the best advice I ever got,” Brian says.

But the idea of doing an American fair lingered. “My eyes were always on New York, which didn't have an international fair then, and we felt that the city needed its own international show on the level with those in London and Paris,” he recalled. The Haughtons dreamed of creating a diversified fair with

American, British and European dealers of furniture, paintings, porcelain, silver, antiquities, jewelry and textiles. In 1988 the National Art and Antique Dealers Association of America, a prestigious non-profit members' trade association, was thinking of launching its own new show in New York. Learning of the Haughtons' interest in creating a new fair, a NAADAA representative flew to London to discuss collaboration. They made a tentative agreement and NAADAA then convened a meeting of its members in New York.

“At first we thought we didn't need another show, as many of us were already in the Winter Antiques Show,” Ed Munves of James Robinson recalls, “But once we saw the top quality of the foreign dealers who would be involved, we knew the show was going to be good.” To this day, James Robinson participates in both the International Show and The Winter Antiques Show (WAS).

There was real demand for a new show.

“No one who wasn't already in the Winter Antiques Show could get into it,” explains Becky Jones MacGuire, then a partner at the Chinese Porcelain Company in New York and a board member of The Society of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (more about that below).

The Haughtons set the fair date for September 21, 1989. “In the first 10 days after we announced the fair, we had 500 applications,” Anna says. Peter Schaffer, co-owner of A La Vieille Russie in New York, says, “It was an easy decision to apply. We knew the Haughtons because we had already participated in their porcelain fair and knew it was a very high class show.”

James McConnaughy, a partner in Shrubsole, the New York antique silver gallery who is the current president of NAADAA, says, “We decided to do both the WAS and the International Show because the International was very different and would have a different audience. Even now, we see people at one fair we don't see at the other. They have different personalities.”

Oddly enough, some of the best London dealers were initially wary of joining. John Hill of Jeremy Ltd., a London gallery selling fine English furniture who already knew Ed Munves, remembers “We thought at the time we might have to tread very carefully as we were encroaching upon their territory.”

He needn't have worried. “We were not only welcomed but positively pushed into the limelight in New York,” he says. “Who could forget Bob Ellsworth [the top private dealer in Chinese antiques], Ed Merrin [the antiquities dealer], the Chaits [Asian porcelain], A La Vieille Russie and the other New York dealers that were to become such close friends and supporters over the years? The show put the spring back in the steps of the European trade.”

Bringing the concept to a successful realization in the fall of 1989 was not an easy matter, however. The pioneering, indefatigable Haughtons faced real challenges: underwriting the cost to launch the fair, renting the Seventh Regiment

Armory, planning the show set-up (which involved dealing with unions and other unknown entities), producing the advertising, marketing and publicity as well as hiring florists, decorators and caterers – all in a new country. It was a huge investment of time and money. (Today, the Haughtons say the reason the fair runs so smoothly is they still actually spend the entire year planning it.)

On top of all that, the Haughtons wanted a charity partner for the opening night, just as they have for their London fair: “We feel a responsibility to give back to charity,” explains Brian. The Society of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, a blue chip women's volunteer group that has raised money to support the Center since 1946, was an obvious choice, but an alliance with it was far from a foregone conclusion.

Barbara Gimbel, then-president of the Society, remembers receiving a visit early in 1989 from Khalil Rizk, the popular New York philanthropist and co-founder of the Chinese Porcelain Company. At the time, he was on the “special



projects” committee at Memorial – often raising funds, at the last minute, for research projects that needed to be extended. As Barbara Gimbel now recalls, “I didn’t know him, but when he asked me if the Society would be interested in helping the show, I said yes IF we got the opening night party.” He promised to report back.

“Who could refuse THE leading cancer charity?” Brian recalls.

He had no idea how lucky he was. The Society was a perfect partner, a strong volunteer organization with enormous social cachet. “We approached the benefit opening night with enthusiasm and energy,” Barbara Gimbel says. “The Society loved it and so did the board at Memorial. It took us about six months to organize and it was a wild success.”

Never underestimate the abilities of the Society’s many volunteers; as the fair’s opening night proceeds go to the Society for funding patient care, research and education programs at Memorial, the dedication was exemplary. The list of opening night chairmen for the first year included such social lionesses as former Society board member Barbara Bush, Catie Marron, Dailey Pattee, Blaine Trump, Becky Jones (now MacGuire), Pat Buckley, Nan Kempner and Deeda Blair.

“Daily News columnist Suzy summed up the committee: ‘Hot dog ticket sellers all,’” Joan Sutton Straus wrote in her 1996 history, “A Legacy of Caring: the Society of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.”

And what hot dog sellers they were.

“Nan and Pat’s irresistible social allure, allied with the manifestly vital mission of MSK, made the opening one of the hottest tickets of New York’s fall season,” says social chronicler Christopher Mason. “That night, the best jewels and tailored gowns were on conspicuous display amid a splendid lineup of scrupulously vetted art and antiques. Attendance was de rigeur.” What made the opening a success was the combination of the Haughtons’ showmanship and the Society’s hard work.

The Haughtons upped the ante with the stylish décor of the Armory, a first. “If you are going to show important works of art at a fair, you want it to look smart,” says Anna.



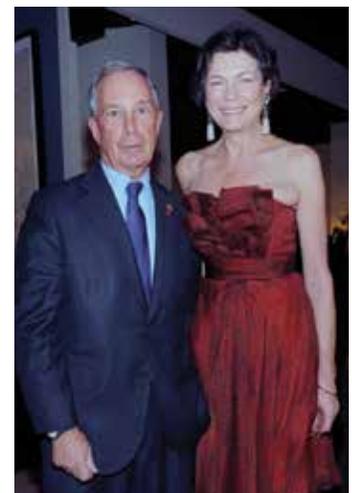
Above: Supporting the Society of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, 1993: Robert Woolley and Lily Safra, Gayfred Steinberg and Jean-Claude Ciancimino, Ann Bass, Pat Buckley and Nan Kempner, Paul and Daisy Soros

It was the first time at a fair that the Armory’s floor was carpeted, booths were tented in white muslin, an event planner of the stature of Philip Baloun did the flower arrangements and a top caterer like Glorious Foods provided hors d’oeuvres for the cocktail party.

This just added to the splendor of the pieces for sale: giant gilded Russian urns, Louis XV consoles, Italian palace chairs, English silver tureens and colorful Chinese Export armorial chargers. “It was exciting to see things from all over the world,” says John Loring, a popular society figure who was the longtime design director of Tiffany & Co. “It was like what one sees in The European Fine Art Fair in Maastricht without having to go.”

As London dealer Michael Goedhuis, a first-year and loyal exhibitor, recalled recently, “The Haughtons brought a world-class show to New York and raised the bar forever.”

“The fair changed the landscape; it established a new level of elegance,” Ed Munves remembers. “We were delighted. The show was a temptation to anyone who walked in and thought, ‘Well, I’m here surrounded by fabulous things. I’ll buy something.’”



Mayor Michael Bloomberg with Diana Taylor at IFAADS.

Tony Victoria, second-generation owner of Frederick P. Victoria & Son and a first-year participant, says, "The Haughtons brought a much greater sophistication to New York. They made their beachhead here. It was quite a revolution."

"It was very gutsy of the Haughtons to launch the international fair" recalls the decorator Howard Slatkin, whose glamorous clients over the years have included Deeda Blair and Jackie Kennedy. "With the international fair, New York became a world class center for antique furniture and the decorative arts," he continues. "It really had a huge impact. It exposed Americans who didn't travel to a new level of quality and sophistication."

Not that everything went perfectly on opening night. That late September night was exceptionally warm and the Armory was not air-conditioned.

Joanne de Guardiola, a New York social luminary who has been on the board of the Society for 28 years, recalls, "It was 100 degrees in the Armory. Pat Buckley arranged for several fans to be delivered and in the late afternoon was plugging them in when a union guy came over and told her, 'You can't do that!' She simply said, 'I beg your pardon?' in that great voice of hers and ignored him. By the opening, she was standing there, perfectly dressed and made up, next to Bill Blass and Kenneth Jay Lane, welcoming everyone and exclaiming, 'Oh my God, I've been on my hands and knees all afternoon plugging in fans!'"



Carrying a price tag of \$14 million, Bernardo Bellotto's "Fortress of Konigstein," sold to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC and set a record price for a painting sold at an art fair. Painted between 1756 and 1758, Bellotto's landscape is one in a series of five commissioned by the Elector of Saxony, Friedrich Augustus II, for the royal collection in Dresden. The painting was sold by Zurich dealers Bruno Meissner and Konrad Bernheimer and was the centerpiece of Konrad Bernheimer's booth at the International Antique Dealers Show in October 1993.



This coupe was acquired by Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, PA from exhibitor Blairman & Sons, Ltd. at IFAADS in 2008. It is from the collection of Alfred Morrison (1821-97), was made by Charles Duron (1814-97) and exhibited at the Paris Exposition Universelle (1867). The Carnegie used it on their poster when they re-opened their Bruce Galleries for decorative arts. The coupe is now a key exhibit in the two-year touring exhibition 'Inventing the Modern World: Decorative Arts at the World's Fairs 1851-1939'.

And how did the Society get everyone to show up on such a boiling hot night. "Nan and Pat pulled out all the stops," Joanne says. "They got on the phone and called everyone. I've chaired the show five or six times. It's work. In fact, Karen LeFrak and I were the first chairs to go over the \$1 million mark for the opening cocktail party."

(Joanne is still remembered for one of the dazzling summer "pre-parties" she threw to drum up enthusiasm among her fellow Society members at her home in Southampton; as guests mingled around the pool, waiters passed trays brimming not with hors d'oeuvres but amazing jewels by show sponsors Harry Winston, Bulgari and Phillips.)

On the first opening night, the cream of New York society women was in attendance, including Blaine Trump, Veronica Hearst, Betty Sherrill, Nicole Limbocker, Julia Koch, Daisy Soros and Gayfryd Steinberg. Even Mario Buatta, chairman of the Winter Antiques Show, bought a ticket and came.

The Society chairs over the years continued to be resourceful. The four years when Nicole Limbocker was chair, as she recalls, "We decided to give private dinner parties at home after the opening night party for those who bought the \$500 tickets. In the beginning there were very few who paid that, and the 'free' dinner was a very good carrot. It really worked."

Another opening night chairman, Jamee Gregory, did the same thing. "The men

liked going to dinner afterwards, and it made the evening more festive," she recalls. "I wish they still had the dinners." The dealers, of course, were electrified by the glittering New Yorkers who attended, both Old Guard and New (including, over the years, Mayor Bloomberg, Martha Stewart, Oprah Winfrey and Barbra Streisand).

"The visitors came from the good, the gracious, the clever and the glitzy," recalls John Hill. "The Armory was full to the brim with beautiful women and elegant men."

"Most of the people we wanted to come lived within a few blocks," Anna says. "We knew it would be just so easy for people to drop in for an hour to see the show – or to come back three times."

The Houghtons also announced the fair would be vetted, like the Biennale des Antiquaires in Paris and TEFAP in Maastricht. Vetting means curators, experts, academics and scholars in varied specialties are asked to tour the fair before the opening to "pre-certify" that the antiques are precisely as labeled, i.e., not fake, or too altered or overly restored. Pieces that don't pass muster are physically removed from the floor and stored for the remainder of the fair. In 1989 there had never been a vetted fair in the U.S. "It was a common practice at fairs in Europe," Brian explains. "It is a labor-intensive practice but one that is necessary to assure a level of quality and authenticity."

"They have a good approach to vetting, which is done on a very fair basis, so people trust what they buy," says Axel Vervoordt, a Belgian dealer who has been in the fair from the get go.

"They knew it was crucial for buyers' confidence," says Becky MacGuire.



"Vetting was very strict," recalls John Hill. "I remember the Dalva brothers [owners of the top New York gallery specializing in 18th-century French antiques] taking furniture to bits with a screwdriver when vetting and several museum curators giving us all the benefit of their expertise and knowledge." (Leon Dalva is still vetting the show.)

Peter Schaffer of A La Vieille Russie perhaps puts it best in his humorous aside: "One of the good things about vetting is that it protects Mr. and Mrs. Wannabe, who go to fairs, see a piece and 'want' it to be something important and believe it is – until they find out it isn't."

Among pieces that successfully passed vetting in 1989 were Chevalier's royal Beauvais tapestry depicting the king

of France on horseback in the parterre of the Chateau of Versailles; Peter Finer's ivory-inlaid late-16th-century German wheel-lock rifle that once belonged to the Earl of Meath; Koopman's silver-gilt coffee service by Odiot commissioned by Count Golovkine of Vienna in the early 1800s; Merrin's life-size Roman marble statue of Athena "after Phidias," c. 2nd century A.D., and A La Vieille Russie's gilded, two-handled porcelain vase from the Russian Imperial Porcelain Factory with a painting of the fleet by N. Kornilov, 1828.

Other ways the Houghtons wanted to impress upon Americans the seriousness of their fair? They arranged for a loan exhibition of Chinese snuff bottles from Burghley House in Lincolnshire, England. They offered scholarly lectures, including one on the Treasures of The British Royal Collection by Sir Geoffrey de Bellaigue, the Director of Queen Elizabeth II's collection, and another on mounted oriental porcelain in European collections by Sir Francis Watson, the former Director of the Wallace Collection

in London. Also one on the Challenge of Heritage: The Rosebery and Rothschild Collections at Dalemny, Edinburgh, by the Countess of Rosebery.

The first catalog also had academic articles by such renowned experts as Dr. Sigrid Barten, curator of the Museum Bellerive in Zurich (writing on Lalique jewelry) and Geoffrey Beard, chairman of the Furniture History Society in England. The inclusion of academic articles has continued.

Of course, the International Show has necessarily changed over the years. Some dealers have retired. Others have gone private. New specialties have surfaced and collecting tastes have changed. Axel Vervoordt concludes, "The fair has evolved, but there is always a good selection of dealers. The Haughtons are serious people and I believe in their management."

(Peter Schaffer says, "People used to love antique cufflinks. Then they didn't. Now you cannot hold onto them and prices have gone way up.") Certain things you would have sold 40 years ago you couldn't give away today. "You just get a feel for the market by being in the business for so long," Anna says.

Capturing the Zeitgeist of current tastes and times, Axel Vervoordt adds, "I search for universality in the things I bring. I like antiques that look timeless. They go with contemporary art, and we bring more contemporary art now. It's important for works to have a dialogue."

And the Haughtons have kept the fair going strong. "We are just as enthusiastic today as we were when we started," Brian says. "We love what we do. That is the secret of our success."

Axel Vervoordt perhaps has the final criteria for the true measure of a successful fair: "I always have a good year at the Haughtons' fair. Some years we almost sell out the booth."



Imperial tenth anniversary frame by Fabergé
A gift in 1901 from Grand Duke Michael Michailovitch to his wife, Countess Sophie von Merenberg, a granddaughter of Pushkin, on the 10th anniversary of their marriage.
A La Vieille Russie, Inc, New York

