

International Drawings fairs and events

The root and branch out approach

Solid foundation of the Salon spring drawings fair in Paris inspires auctions to also blossom

Report by Anne Crane

FOR just over a week in early spring the modest drawing makes a bid for fame and fortune in the Parisian sunshine.

Locals and visitors to the French capital will have circled the date in their diaries and there is a resulting influx of collectors, curators and the simply curious who arrive to search out graphic art on paper from the master drawings to contemporary creations in the city's fairs, auction rooms and art galleries.

The roots of this graphic fest lie in the 26-year old *Salon du Dessin*. It is the success and pulling power of this small, select fair of 39 international dealers in Old Master and classic drawings that have focused everyone's attention and persuaded auction rooms and galleries to capitalise on the visitor influx.

As explained by Bertrand Gautier, one of the fair's founder members: "The *Salon* is one of those rare events where the salerooms have joined in on the fair rather than the other way round."

So, while it remains the fulcrum, events have expanded dramatically beyond the *Salon* to make Paris a destination for drawings events of all kinds during March.

The components of the *semaine du dessin*, as it is popularly named these days, cater for all tastes and all price points as our selected preview on the next four pages shows.

Salon du Dessin

How does an exhibition of just 39 exhibitors manage to punch above its weight in terms of world recognition? There are lots of factors that make the *Salon du Dessin*, celebrating its 26th edition from March 22-27, such a singular event.

The Palais Brongniart, which has been the home of the *Salon du Dessin* for half the fair's life, has limited space so the event cannot expand, but that is part of the attraction.

It creates the ambience of a specialist connoisseurial event where the majority of the visitors, many of them academics and curators from the US, UK and Germany, as well as collectors, are as knowledgeable as the exhibitors. That ambience is reinforced by the fair's symposium which features a roster of speakers, specialists in their field and the complementary loan exhibitions which shine a light on collections in particular institutions.

"It is the best fair in the world in its speciality," says exhibitor Bertrand Gautier. "The exhibitors and visitors know that. It is a challenge to stay at this level and we are very aware of what creates a particular dynamic."

Gautier is part of the eight-man committee of specialist Paris art dealers that organises the fair. The exhibitor roll-call is usually split 60/40% between France and other countries (from the US and other parts of Europe). It also has a high return rate with around 80% of the participants coming back year after year, a number of them showing straight after *TEFAF Maastricht*.

Asked how *The Salon* differs from Maastricht with its own popular works on paper section, Gautier reckons "the *Salon* is

the epicentre for a number of drawings events so that it creates an event to which people are prepared to travel".

And underscoring that all-important small-scale conviviality, he adds: "The *Salon* also has the advantage of being on a human scale. A visitor can make several visits to the stand and has the time to reflect."

Does he see new clients at the fair or are they regular customers? Both, says Gautier. His gallery customers visit the fair but "new clients come from all over because the visitor base is truly international with the exception of the Chinese, who are not that numerous despite their long tradition for drawings".

Many art world events take the form of gallery trials these days, including New York's popular *Master Drawings*, and a small drawings parcours is held for Paris galleries during March.

How does he see the future developing for these two strands of commercial presentation? "All the town marches in unison behind *The Salon*, which remains the central point for all these events: parcours, galleries, shops and museum," he says.

Gautier and the other 38 exhibitors, 23 from France and 16 from other countries in total, will be hoping to welcome their usual mix of collectors, curators and new customers this month. This year's symposium continues the David to Delacroix theme while a loan exhibition looks at the drawings collection of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

Further information on the *Salon* and drawing week programme can be found at salondudessin.com



TALABARDON AND GAUTIER

Specialising in 19th century French works, Bertrand Gautier and Bertrand Talabardon have a gallery on the rue St Honoré. This 14 x 6in (36 x 16cm) pencil, watercolour and gouache on paper, **above**, by the symbolist artist Gustave Moreau is one of their highlights at the *Salon du Dessin*. Titled *The Persian Poet*, it is priced at **€500,000-600,000**.

Drawing Now



© Antoine Charbonne

Drawing Now may not have as many years under its belt as the *Salon du Dessin* but it is no newcomer to the scene. This year will be its 11th edition and it has a growing audience.

The fair, which is staged in the Carreau du Temple, a former covered market in the 3rd arrondissement, packs in over 70 exhibitors chosen by a selection committee. They come from across France, around Europe and beyond, bringing, as the title implies, works on paper by contemporary artists.

The stands are simple and the works packed in, with around 2000 on show. However, there is a broad range in terms of style and price range at this popular event and plenty of material for those of more modest means or entry-level purchasers. On the lower ground floor there is an Emergency section where 20 galleries show work by new and emerging artists.

Drawing Now is a further boost for the *semaine du dessin* and, like the *Salon* at the Palais Brongniart, it acts as an extra magnet for some of the auction rooms, several of whom stage modern and contemporary works on paper at this time. Christie's also partners *Drawing Now*, mounting an exhibition at the Carreau during the run of the fair. The fair runs from March 23-26 with a private ticket-only opening on March 22.

drawingnowparis.com

Left: the Paris gallery Virginie Louvet is one of this year's exhibitors at *Drawing Now*, and its spotlight artist is Antoine Charbonne (b.1987). His works will include this large 2ft 4in x 3ft 3in (70cm x 1m) gouache on paper diptych, *Sichuan landscape*, of 2016.