

EXPERIENCE

America's 'Only Truly Encyclopedic' Art and Design Fair Kicks off in New York This Weekend



By **Abby Schultz** Jan. 17, 2024 4:06 pm ET

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Eagle Clasping the Barrel of a Cannon, attributed to the Reverend Robert Smith Grier, circa 1850-65, being offered by Hirschl & Adler Galleries of New York. Courtesy of Hirschl & Adler/The Winter Show

The Winter Show opens this Friday at the Park Avenue Armory in New York for its 70th year by spotlighting its origins with an exhibition of Americana that includes several past exhibitors.

“The show’s backbone from its inception was heavily with American material,” says Helen Allen, the Winter Show’s executive director. “We’re very much looking forward to highlighting our colleagues that really represent the best of the best from that genre of Americana dealers.”

The exhibition, curated by Alexandra Kirtley—curator of American decorative arts at the Philadelphia Museum of Art—and designed by architects Frederick Fisher & Partners, will include furniture, art, and decorative pieces emblematic of America’s design history.

The featured objects range from a Queen Anne cherry highboy made in 1765-75 for a Connecticut family that’s being shown by Nathan Liverant & Son of Colchester, Conn., to a mahogany eagle clasp the barrel of a cannon from Pennsylvania, made circa 1850-65, and shown by New York’s Hirschl & Adler Galleries, which is exhibiting at the show for its 49th year. There are also paintings, including a portrait of Phillip Titus Heartt of Troy, N.Y., from circa 1815, being shown by Olde Hope Antiques of New York.



Galerie Léage, in Paris, is bringing a pair of pair of “à la reine” armchairs attributed to Louis Delanois, Louis XV period, France.

© photo by Thomas Hennocque

Yet the annual fair offers far more than Americana with a broad array of fine and decorative art, design, and antiques spanning the third century through to today, demonstrating “craft and craftsmanship” through the ages, Allen says.

“We are America’s only truly encyclopedic fair,” she says. “We have a phenomenal mix of everything from antiquities up through the present day in myriad different mediums. Whether you’re talking about sculpture or paintings or decorative arts, furniture or glass and ceramics—we really run the gamut.”

The Winter Show, which runs through Sunday, Jan. 28, has been an annual tradition since 1954 as a fundraiser for East Side House Settlement, a community organization serving the South Bronx and a slice of northern Manhattan. The fair has usually been held at the Park Avenue Armory, except for interruptions resulting from the pandemic and 9/11.

A distinction of the fair is a vetting process that involves every item on exhibition being examined for authenticity, date, and condition by more than 120 experts in 30 different fields of art, design, and antiques.

“Whether it’s Ormolu mounting (a gilding technique), or Chinese export, or 19th century paintings, or rare books, we’ve got experts in each field,” Allen says.

Dealers need to accurately describe each item on labels for visitors, and if they need to replace an item that has been sold, it must go through the same vetting process before it can be displayed, she says. The value of all this scrutiny should be evident within each booth on the floor.

“When you look at each one of these individual objects, it’s the quality of the craftsmanship and the quality of the artists’ production that really makes the works at the show particularly stand out,” Allen says.

The value of quality, craftsmanship, and collecting is being woven into programming and special events throughout the fair. Among these is a panel discussion on collecting Americana at 4 p.m. Friday that includes collector Joe Gromacki, a lawyer in Chicago, and a discussion at 3 p.m. on Saturday on, “A Collecting Dynasty: The Rockefeller Family,” moderated by gallerist Joan B. Mirviss, who has exhibited at the Winter Show for 44 years.

And of course, there are all the offerings from individual dealers to explore. Hirschl & Adler 49 years with the fair is impressive, and so is Ralph M. Chait Galleries’ 66 years, or the Old Print Shop’s 65 years, the latter two both based in New York. A La Vieille Russie, also from New York, has exhibited at the fair for 53 years. In all, 30 of the more than 70 participating exhibitors have shown at the fair for at least 10 years.

One of Allen's favorite things is that "each booth always feels like it's its own little universe."



Lillian Nassau gallery in New York is offering Augustus Saint-Gaudens' *Diana of the Tower*
Lillian Nassau/the Winter Show

Lillian Nassau gallery of New York is bringing a sculpture, Augustus Saint-Gaudens' *Diana of the Tower*, 1899, made from the original design of a gilt bronze weathervane for the tower of Madison Square Garden in 1891, while Peter Harrington of London will present documents and other ephemera that belonged to Winston Churchill in addition to a first edition of Herman Melville's *The Whale (Moby Dick)*, that was created before its first printing in America.

Red Fox Fine Art of Middleburg, Va., is bringing an 1820 painting by Ben Marshall, *Coursing: A Gentleman and Groom with Greyhounds*, that belonged to the collections of Andrew Mellon and Paul Mellon, while Milord Antiquités of Montréal, has a 1965 acid-etched and patinated brass *Eternal Forest Coffee Table* by Philip and Kelvin Laverne.

The Winter Show runs longer than most fairs, covering two weekends instead of one, to coincide with Americana auctions taking place at Christie's and Sotheby's in New York, and to provide plenty of opportunities for the curators, interior designers, and collectors that come in from all over the world, Allen says. Many dealers sell steadily throughout the run of the show, too, not just opening day.

It's also a fundraiser first and foremost, that engages a range of sponsors and event, design, and cultural partners, many who have worked on the fair for a number of years, a longevity that has made it "become more of a family affair," Allen says.

"It's not just that we're this wonderful fair featuring some of the very best dealers in the world, it's also because we're raising important funds to support the programs and the mission of East Side House," she says. "It helps promote that feel good factor."

The Winter Show runs from Friday, Jan. 19 through Sunday, Jan. 28 with varying hours of admission. Tickets for special events including an opening night party on Thursday, Jan. 18, Young Collectors night on Thursday, Jan. 25, and Connoisseur's Night on Friday, Jan. 26. All ticket proceeds directly benefit East Side House.