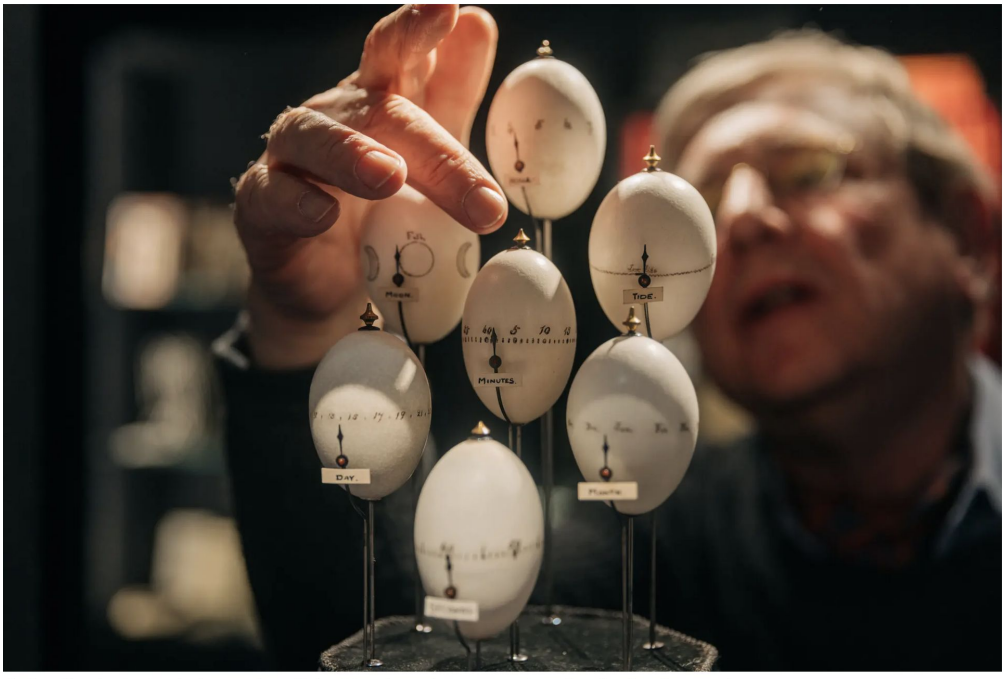
The New York Times

ART FAIR REVIEW

5 Paths Through the Winter Show, an Exhibition of Earthly Delights

The fair, with 77 exhibitors, is a mini-museum, featuring arts, antiquities and design objects, from old masters to art jewelry.



Charles William Croydon, "We Are Seven Duck Egg Clock," 1900, on view at Thomas Heneage Art Books at the Winter Show at Park Avenue Armory. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

By Walker Mimms

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Some museums are encyclopedic. Can art fairs be, too? In 2016, the venerable Winter Show at the Park Avenue Armory, which for 60 years was called the Winter Antiques Show, began admitting works made after 1969. Three years later, "Antiques" dropped from the name. Now in its 71st edition, this year's fair, a benefit for the East Side House Settlement in the Bronx, feels like a mini-Met in its geography and generous time span.

From a medieval English baptismal font with its original stucco intact **(Blumka Gallery, D7)** to a strangely jubilant gouache of a volcanic eruption in 1830 **(Hill-Stone, D3)**, the fair still leans on museum-grade objects that boast enough oddity to beckon the wallets of collectors. You've probably never seen a greater expanse of inlaid mother-of-pearl than in the shimmering veneers of two towering Spanish-colonial Peruvian cabinets. (For those, see **Zebregs & Röell, D13**, first-time dealers at the fair, visiting from the Netherlands.)

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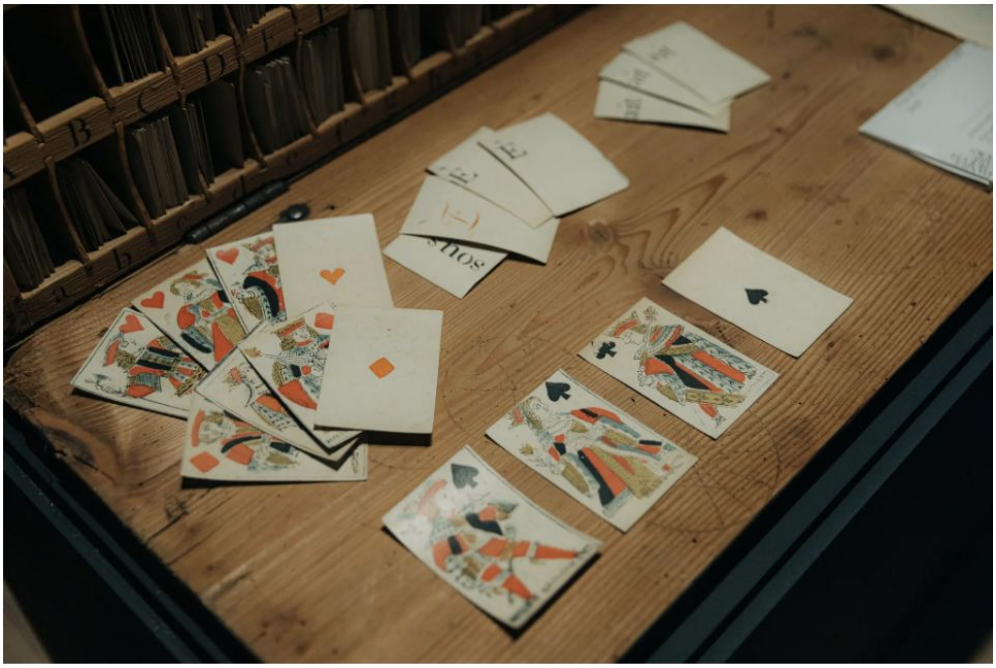
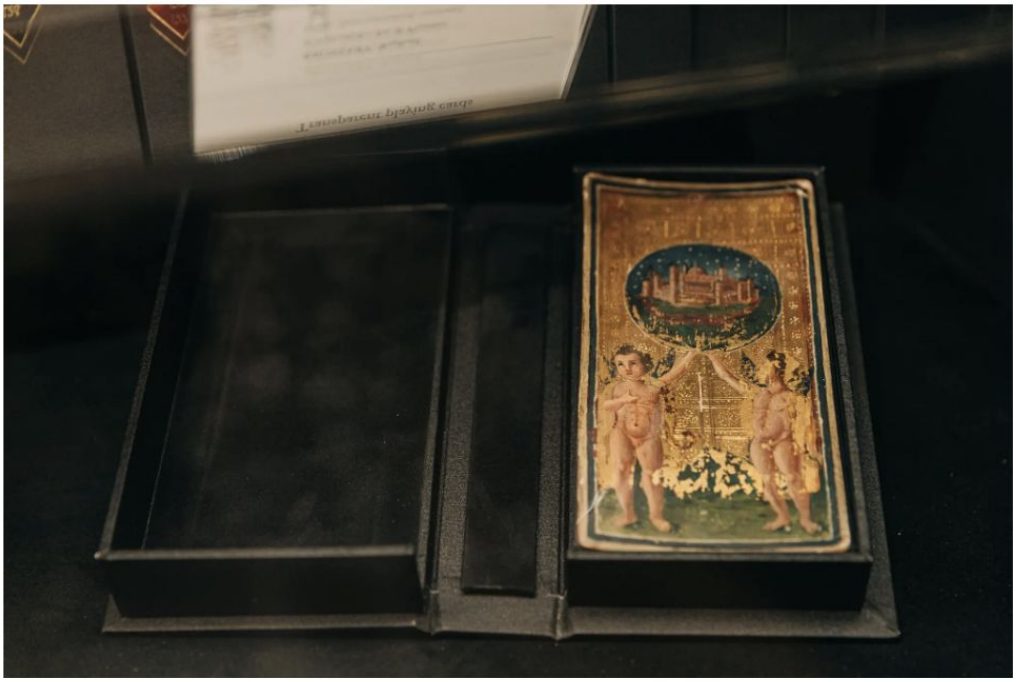
The weight of the past in this fair makes it all the harder to miss the present, whether it's a giant cigarette sculpture from the Oldenburg-infatuated 1980s **(Galerie Gmurzynska, E10)** or photorealism from last year **(Jonathan Cooper, D11)**. Some booths, like the fine sculptural porcelain and stoneware brought by **Joan B. Mirvis, Ltd. (E5)**, exhibit our century with a devotion more commonly associated with design fairs such as Salon Art + Design. Purists may balk, and may have a right, but some of these contemporary add-ons, especially the exquisite Japanese basketry at **Thomsen Gallery (C6),** help explain the longevity of certain crafts. And even for browsers, the best of these correspondences help tease out themes. Here are five:

Showstopping Masters of Play

For as long as the Winter Show has been running, the Belgian land artist Jean Verame (born 1936) has been amassing a collection of playing cards, claimed to be the world's largest in private hands. Offering his total collection "for a seven figure sum," **Daniel Crouch Rare Books (E15)** has brought some highlights, and the booth may be this fair's biggest draw. Memorable improvisations include an Apache deck from the 19th century, with sword, bell and button forms painted into rectangles of rawhide, and a deck of Paris metro tickets painted over by Alexis Poliakoff in the 1970s. Well represented are *tarocchi* cards, long before the 1700s occult-ified them into *tarot*. One from Renaissance Italy, in which two cherubs lift a bubble of "The World" into a field of gold, might have been cut from an illuminated manuscript.



Daniel Crouch Rare Books has brought a rare example of the "bureau typographique," an experimental flashcard kit designed for children in late 18th-century French. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times



Il Mondo, "The World, " 1500, at Daniel Crouch Rare Books. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

True to this fair's form, furniture dominates Verame's collection. On view are two of the four known *bureaux typographies*, portable flashcard trunks from 1780's France based on the educational philosophy of John Locke. Resembling postal sorting desks, these wooden hutches hinged out into desktops so that children could arrange and learn from the printed cards arrayed above: geography, grammar, etc. The flashcards themselves, many repurposed from the royals in French-suited decks, are appropriately regicidal for that Revolutionary decade.

Our Creature, Our Selves

This fair is also a bestiary, with many of its animal objects ready to serve. When the owner of a silver carp by Fabergé, circa 1908, squeezes the bulging glass eyeballs, the guillotine mouth chomps the end of a cigar (**Wartski, E13**). A miniature and remarkably fulsome Noah's Ark set from 1860 Germany — clearly not played with — is a biblical and zoological education in one **(Robert Young Antiques, E4).** Circa 1900, a clock made of hollowed-out duck eggs spins the fragile domes around their axes, like a solar system model, each at different paces indicating hour, minute, day, tide, etc. **(Thomas Heneage Art Books, B4)**.

These days we work more for animals than vice versa. Check out two luminescent bird paintings by the British painter Ayesha Gamiet (born 1982), colored with hand-ground pigments and overdoses of shell gold **(Jonathan Cooper).** They are part of a series interpreting the Sufi poem "The Conference of the Birds." One, a deep blue interpretive skyscape, recalls both the ceiling of Grand Central Terminal, down Park Avenue, and the Victorian lithographs by the ornithologists John and Elizabeth Gould, on view in the neighboring booth of **Peter Harrington (C12)**.

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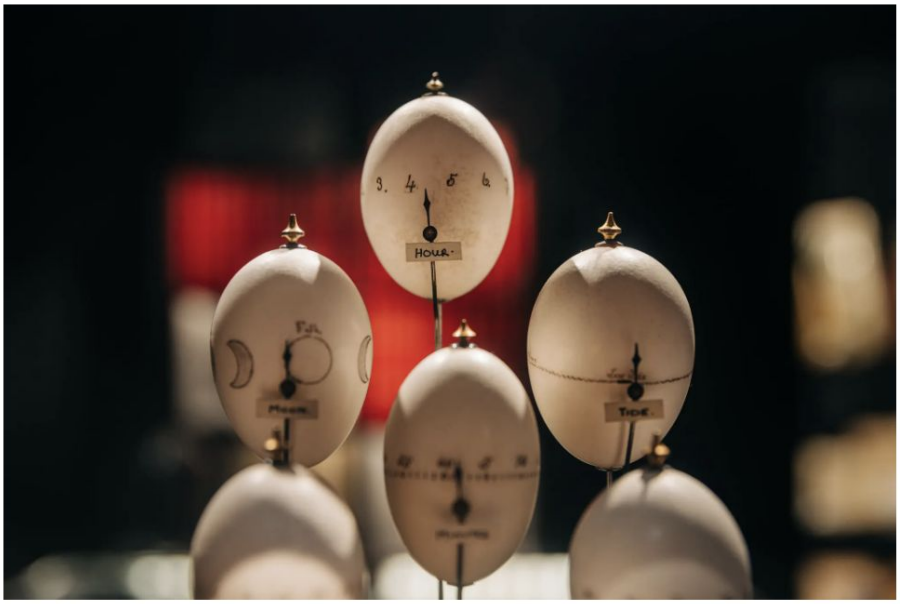
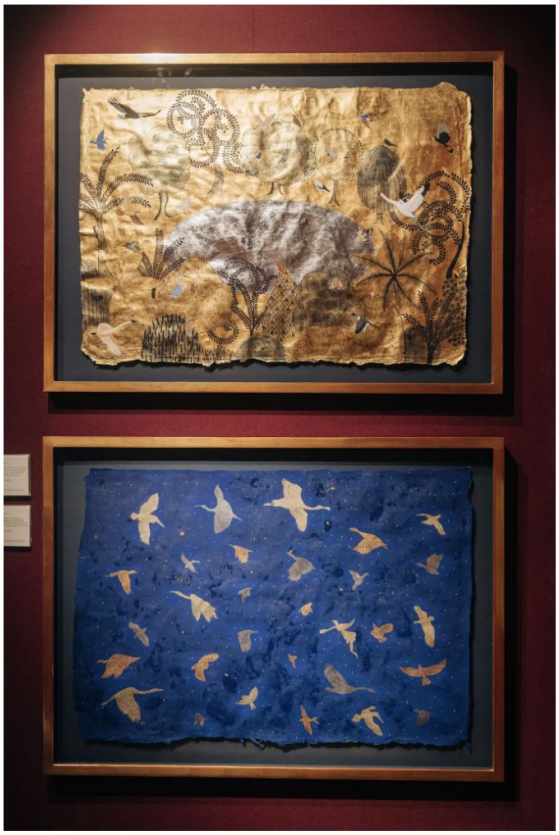


Detail of Charles William Croydon, "We Are Seven Duck Egg Clock," with calendar, moonphase and tidal dials, hand-painted on duck eggs. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times



Top and bottom, Ayesha Gamiet's, "Simorgh," 2024, "Valley of Bewilderment," 2024, at Jonathan Cooper. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

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Love and Marriage

"You are my bird," reads the inscription in a brooch made by the French sculptor Niki de Saint Phalle, from 1973. It's an odd endearment between lovers — but could be sweet if you mean it. And it fits her piece. Brought by **Didier, Ltd. (D6)**, a specialist in jewelry by artists, this enamel-on-gold brooch takes the shape of a blobby creature in bright pinwheels and zebra stripes. Direct address is also the strength of the posy rings at **Les Enluminures (A6),** a dealer known for miniatures of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. They have brought a standout gimmel ring from England, circa 1750, hinged so that its three hoops can swing out in a trefoil arrangement then clasp back into one ring. The action of closing the three bands unites two small hands, each enameled in beige, upon the ring's central cluster of ruby and diamond. Though believed to be an engagement ring, the inside reads "Gage D'amitie," or "token of friendship." To skeptics it could be a handshake as much as a caress. Marriage, after all, is a contract.

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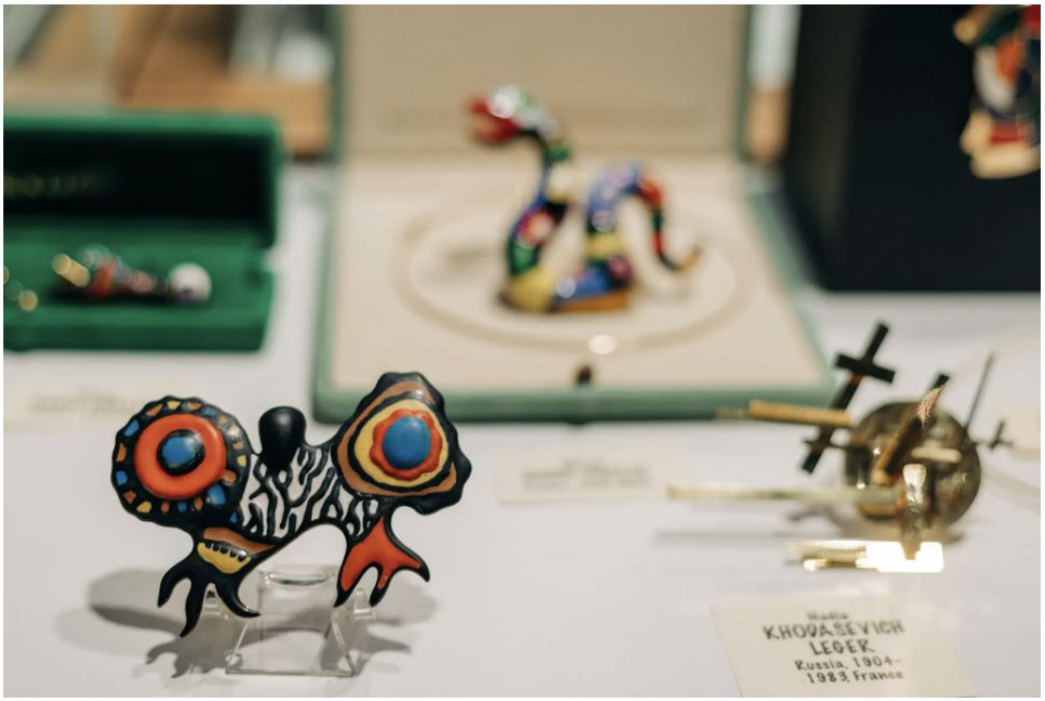
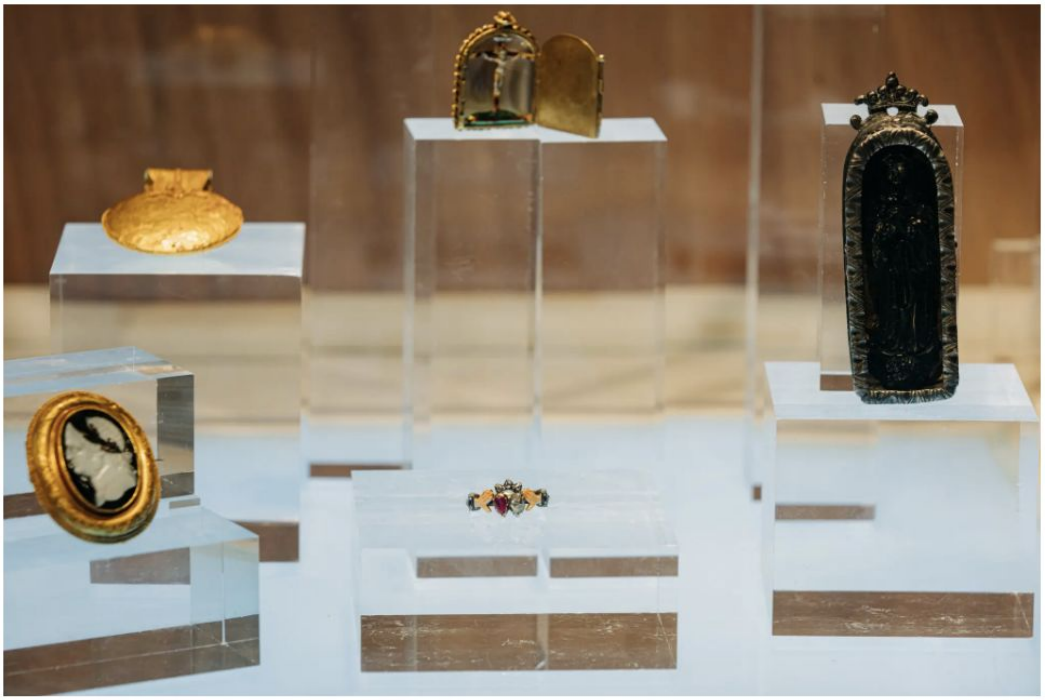


Left, Niki de Saint Phalle's "You are my bird," 1973, at the Didier booth. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times



Gimmel Fade ring (center) with the inscription "Gage D'amitie," 1750, at Les Enluminures. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

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Up In Arms

Another symbol of harmony, a Japanese *mon*, or heraldic emblem, adorns a pair of Japanese lacquered katana cases — the protective sheath of a blade — from one family in the Edo period. Brought by the antique-arms dealer **Peter Finer (A3)**, these deceptively sleek objects resemble elongated bowling pins, with the six-dot mons adorning the upper lids and steel clasps. A roughly contemporaneous token of death — though much less subtle — is an Old Testament figurine in ivory by the 18th-century German sculptor Simon Troger (**European Decorative Arts Company, A11**). Cain steps into his brother's groin and stiff-arms his face, as he raises his cudgel, a hunk of wood appearing to bend like elastic, as if downswung toward his brother at light speed. Equal care is paid to the teeth and glass pupils in the screaming Abel as to the firs (carved from fruitwood) that clothe the men's bodies. It's hard to imagine Troger making two, but he did. This one's copy is in Bavaria.

In an exhibition of much implied violence (don't miss the Greek helmets at **Hixenbaugh Ancient Art, E11**), it's telling that the basest gesture comes in a deep, blood-red splatter of acrylic on burlap from 2014, by the painter Hermann Nitsch, hung ironically among the Austrian finery at **Kunsthandel Nikolaus Kolhammer (D14)**.

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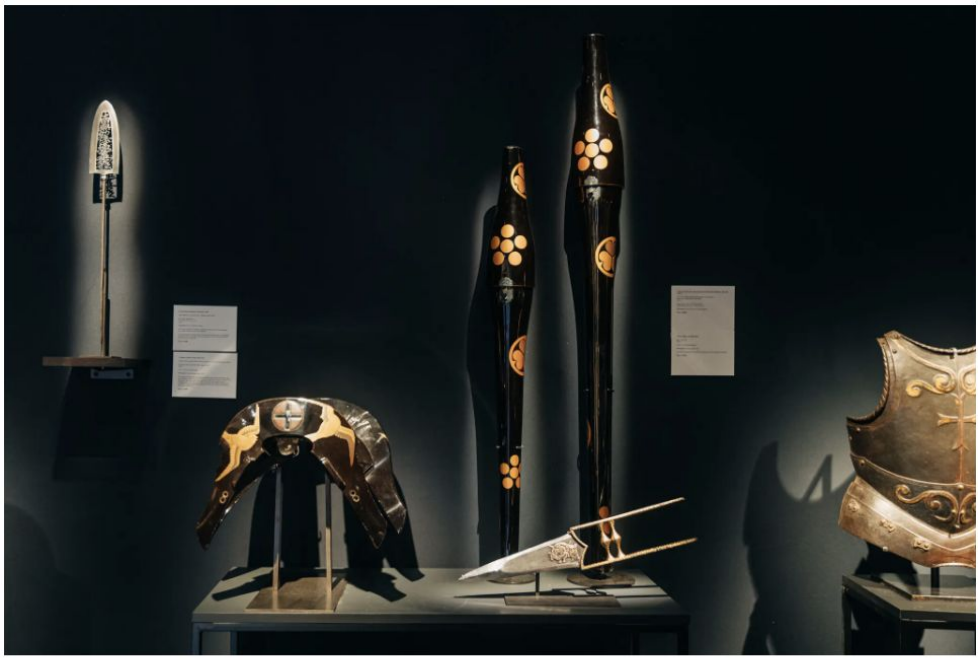
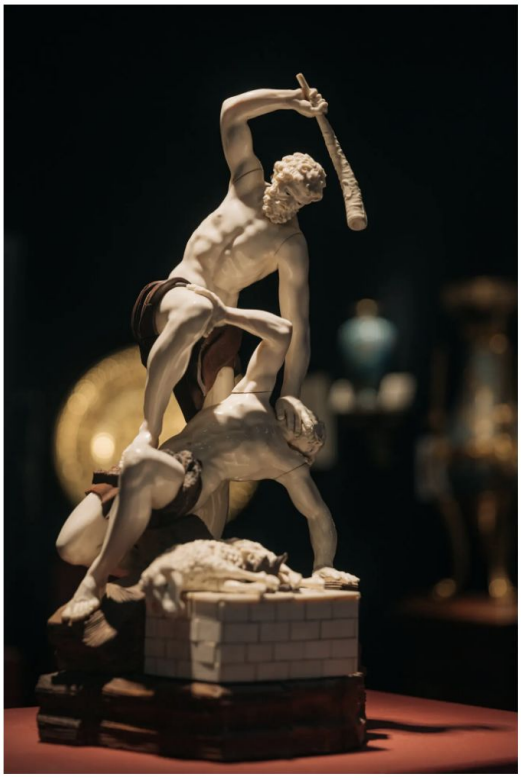


From left, a Japanese arrowhead, 1650; a Japanese saddle or Kura, 1661; a pair of sword cases or Katana -Zutsu, 18th-19th century; a Katar dagger, late 18th century; and a breastplate, circa 1550-60, at Peter Finer. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times



Simone Troger, "Cain and Abel," 1740-45, at European Decorative Arts. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

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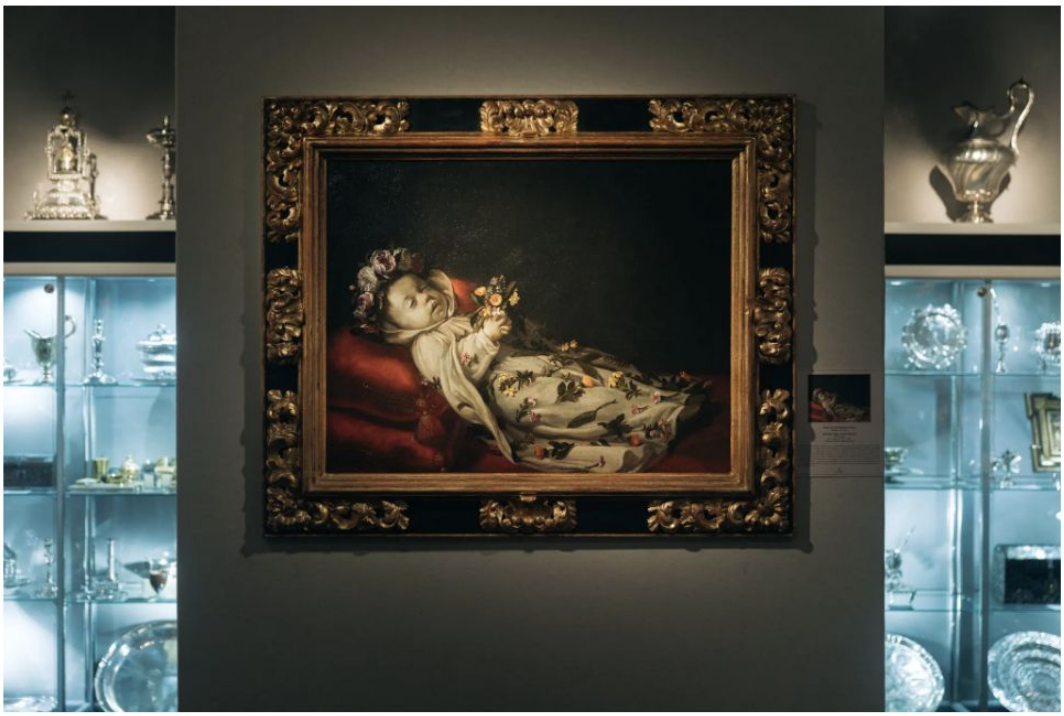
Art and Pathos: The Sorrow and the Pity

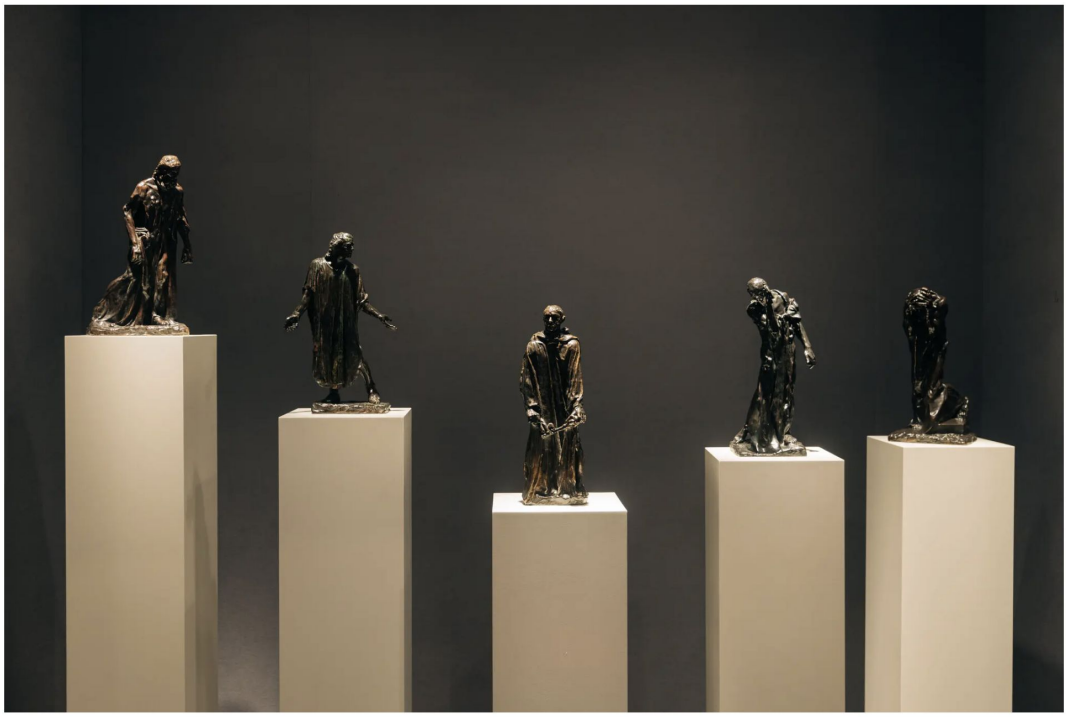
Lending a queasy double meaning to *nature morte*, a 17th-century death portrait by the Spanish still life painter Juan van der Hamen y León is one of the fair's strongest likenesses. In it, a small baby lies on a tomb of red velvet, her skin and dress a rocky gray **(Eguiguren Arte de Hispanomérica, D10)** and eye sockets blank, an icy contrast to the fresh roses and wildflowers with which she is adorned. It's a tension perhaps related to the hereafter, or at least to memory, in a way Auguste Rodin would exploit much later.

Rodin's bronze "Burghers of Calais," commissioned by their namesake city in 1884, imagined the six noblemen who offered up their lives as hostages to the King of England, in order to end the 1346 siege of Calais. The Winter Show veteran **Bernard Goldberg Fine Arts (C1)** has acquired a rare complete run of the lesser-known miniatures of these sacrificial men, all cast in the sculptor's lifetime. (Only five of the total six were cast in miniature.) Compare with the Met's full-size cast, from 1985, and these miniatures cleave the collective anguish into distinct emotions — one figure seems mid-dance, one bored, another ecstatic — in a range of patinas, from dark chocolate to leather.

The burghers who proffered sacrifice were spared at the last minute, French legend has it, making Rodin's retrieval of life from death a symbolic one. He finds his spiritual sequel, at least for this viewer, in an abstract etching by Ed Clark from 1982 **(Dolan/Maxwell, D12)**, with its buried sunset of red and blue yearning through occlusive bands of gold.



Juan van der Hamen y León, “Resting Child Under Flowers” at Eguiguren Arte de Hispanomérica. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times



Auguste Rodin, “The Burghers of Calais -- The Lifetime Bronzes” at Bernard Goldberg. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times