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Dealers Notebook: Georges De Jonckheere on the 2016 Biennale des Antiquaires

BY SONIA KOLESNIKOV-JESSOP | JULY 17, 2016



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Attribution Jan Mandijn, The Temptation of Saint Antoine
(De Jonckheere)

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First founded in Brussels in 1976 and specializing in Flemish painting, the De Jonckheere gallery has participated in each Biennale des Antiquaires over the past 40 years. In 1983, the gallery moved to Paris and over the years it has expanded its expertise to include 18th-century masters of Italian Veduta (landscapes) and modern painters. It opened another gallery in Geneva in 2011, where it also displays its archives and library. George De Jonckheere, who runs the galleries with his brother François, talks to Blouin Artinfo about their plans for this year's fair:

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What will be the focus of your presentation at the Biennale?

We're dedicating an exceptional display to the followers of Hieronymus Bosch. This year marks the 500th anniversary of his death and he's being honored this year by two spectacular exhibitions, one that was just held in his hometown of 's-Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands, and the other is taking place currently at the Prado in Madrid. No signed work by the master has appeared on the market, however a certain number of emulators and followers have revealed subjects resoundingly "Boschian," which allows us to discover and unpick his rather unusual world.

We'll also be displaying a selection of works by the old Flemish masters from the 16th and 17th centuries, our area of expertise for nearly 40 years. Finally, we will be displaying some modern work; as has been the case before with the two previous editions of the Biennale, this combination is perfectly representative of the two facets of the activity of the gallery.

What do you think still fascinates people about Bosch paintings?

Undoubtedly, the strange and the fantastic that dominate these purely religious subjects. The cruelty of certain scenes and the audacity of the pictorial vocabulary employed continues to stupefy viewers. We predict that the presentation of these selections during the Biennale will touch art lovers who are conscious of the inaccessibility of Bosch's works on the market and who will enjoy the fantasies via his first circle.

Did Bosch have a lot of followers, and who were the key ones?

Some clues left behind suggest that Bosch's studio may have produced some copies of the master's originals. These copies are the fruit of orders and of the desire to satisfy commercial strategy. Sadly, no other evidence today proves the functioning of this studio, to which we generally employ the wider and more prudent term 'School of Bosch.' This first circle of artists would produce copied and/or inspired works of his original paintings. Whilst certain hands still remain to be identified, we can distinguish two painters, Pieter Huys and Jan Mandijn, as those amongst the best disciples of Bosch. They can be differentiated from the others by their originality. In fact, if they're retaining the motifs of Bosch by copying or distorting them, they are both showing proof of creativity in the layout of their compositions.

Where do the works you will be offering come from?

These works primarily come from private collections. Some that have appeared on the market wanting to be attributed to Bosch, are those of his followers and emulators. Rarely, these singular subjects satisfy the art lovers' sufferance.

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What influence does Bosch's work still have today on contemporary art?

The works of Bosch, rediscovered by the Surrealists, play a part in the visual memory of each and every person for his images are truly iconic. (Even) before the phenomenal success of the 's-Hertogenbosch exhibition one could not have doubted its resonance in contemporary art. Who inspired him? Undeniably the strange and fantastical that dominate those purely religious subjects. The cruelty of certain scenes and the use of bold pictorial vocabulary continue to shock the viewers, whilst for the majority of people during Bosch's time it was perfectly comprehensible.

What will be the highlight of your booth?

If I had to pick out only one painting it would be "Saint Christophe," dedicated to Jan Mandijn, for its complex composition. But personally, I also feel the "Christ on the Road to Calvary" by Frans Francken the Younger is an astonishing rediscovery. This painting, a work of youth, expresses all the influence from Bruegel. The composition's complexity, the abundance of detail, and the variety of characters shows just how skilled and eloquent its master was becoming.

And if you could own one Bosch painting?

Without hesitation, the fabulous "Garden of Earthly Delights."

