

# DRAWING THE CROWDS

THE SALON DU DESSIN: 'WHERE THE WHOLE DRAWING WORLD' CONGREGATES

Grand both in importance and scale, the Salon du Dessin in Paris still manages to be an intimate event. **Annie Blinkhorn** previews this clubbable drawings fair.

**I**f TEFAF is the fair for paintings, the Salon du Dessin in Paris (Palais de la Bourse, 25-30 March) is the art calendar's major event for drawings. Its history is one of strong and steady development. Begun in 1991 as 'Salon du Dessin de Collection' with just 17 exhibitors, all French, it expanded to admit four foreign dealers in 1995. This year there will be 36 stands, of which roughly half are French and half international. Exhibitors are invited by a committee of eight Parisian dealers, headed since 1994 by the fair's chairman, Herve Aaron of Didier Aaron & Cie. Rather than expanding indiscriminately, the fair organisers prefer to invite galleries only on alternate years, or even less regularly, to maintain variety.

Stephen Ongpin is one dealer who is delighted to be returning again this year, 'I exhibited in 2008 and was pleased – I had just set up on my own. They knew me [from working at J.-L. Baroni] but I expected it to take a few years to "earn" my place to join.' He is at pains to point out that the Salon is 'a very egalitarian fair – the stands are all the same size, same design. I'll be delighted if I'm invited again, but I'd turn up for the week regardless – it's when the whole drawings world congregates'.

<sup>1</sup> *Le printemps* by Ker-Xavier Roussel (1867-1944), 1915. Oil on paper 100 x 65.0 cm. Jill Newhouse and Neffe-Degandt, New York





## SALON DU DESSIN

Variety is essential to the fair's appeal, as dealers hope to sell to collectors buying outside their usual field. Chantal Kiener, a founder member of the fair, who specialises in lesser-known 19th- and 20th-century artists, is taking pencil drawings by Rene Ernest Huet and Charles Milcendeau (Fig. 4). 'During the Salon, I can sell to collectors of 17th-18th century. It brings collectors who would not usually come to my gallery looking for things.'

The fair's remit is broadening, if slowly, from its original focus on French and Italian 17th-19th-century Master drawings. Modern masters are now prominent, and this year three contemporary galleries have been added to the mix. Among them is Galerie Thaddeus Ropac. As Victoire de Pourtales explains, the gallery hopes that collectors will be drawn to works by, among others, Georg Baselitz (Fig. 3), Gilbert and George, Antony Gormley, James Rosenquist and Andy Warhol. 'We love the quality of the Salon du Dessin, and felt it was a good idea for us to go and hope that collectors of Old Masters can appreciate the drawings we will exhibit.'

Although the Salon's invitation-only aspect lends it a select feel, it is the centre-point of the wider Semaine du Dessins – a 'drawings week' of events in and around Paris, started in conjunction with the Salon 10 years ago. Among the events is the fourth International Lecture series of the Salon du Dessin, which this year has the theme 'The Sculptor's Drawing'. (David Ekserdjian, a former editor of *APOLLO*, will be speaking on 'Nicolas Cordier, draughtsman'). There are Master drawings sales at Sotheby's, Tajan and Piasa over the week and more



than 20 museums and galleries will be holding exhibitions to coincide with the fair.

For collectors, the appeal of drawings lies partly in their being (on the whole) more affordable to collect and house than paintings and sculpture. Says Chantal Kiener, 'This year in particular I shall try to have things under €5,000 to appeal to young new collectors.' Although no-one is immune to the effects of the current economic climate, New York dealer Jill Newhouse, who will be exhibiting *Le Printemps* by Roussel (Fig. 1) and *Nymph desarmant l'amour* by Corot, believes that drawings are less hostage to fashion and fortune than other areas of art collecting: 'people interested in drawings are avid collectors, very sincere... their response to collecting guards the market against the ups and downs of the economy. [The drawings market] doesn't crash or inflate and enjoys a stability that other areas don't.'

Part of the pleasure of drawings, according to Miss Newhouse, is that they are 'intimate objects – either in scale or they show the intimate side of the artist, often a side they kept for themselves, more personal than large-scale paintings.' On the subject of what defines a drawing, Mr Ongpin offers a clear definition: 'a "drawing" is basically a work on paper – pencil, chalk, pen and ink, charcoal, pastel, biro, watercolour, gouache and even oil paint, but the important thing is that it is on a paper surface.' He will be showing a pastel by Claude Monet of Waterloo Bridge. It is, he says, 'the star of my stand – it has never before been exhibited' (Fig. 2).

The most remarkable thing about the Salon du Dessin is the way that it is both large and small. 'The single most important event in drawing' and grand in its events programme, it is nonetheless spoken of in warm, clubbable tones. As Mr Ongpin says, 'The market is very vibrant but small – there's a handful of dealers in each country and we all know each other... we have wonderful camaraderie... it's collegial and we all get along.'

[www.salondudessin.com](http://www.salondudessin.com)

2 *Waterloo Bridge, London* by Claude Monet (1840-1926), 1901. Pastel, 29.4 x 46.3 cm. Stephen Ongpin Fine Art, London

3 *Ohne Titel 5.XII.06* by Georg Baselitz (b. 1938), 2006. India ink, watercolour and ink on paper. 65.7 x 51.2 cm. Galerie Thaddeus Ropac, Salzburg

4 *Portrait de Vendéen* by Charles Milcendeau (1872-1919) 1897. Black chalk on paper, 29 x 29.3 cm. Chantal Kiener, Paris

