

THE BEATING HEART OF ART

Galleries and dealers will put the spotlight on pre-contemporary artworks at London Art Week next month. We sat down with a selection at Colnaghi to hear why the event is bringing a buzz back to the area

WORDS REYHAAN DAY



RD: Why does Mayfair and St James's have an importance in the art world?

AM: Mayfair and St James's are historic world centres for art. That's what really attracted us to this area – knowing that it's a destination; and also the vitality of the area. People come here from all over the world to indulge in the historic legacy that this area has to offer.

WE: People associate Mayfair and St James's with the best dealers; and, historically, there has been a concentration of top auction houses alongside dealers in this small area. Being here gives a certain resonance to the gallery and to new clients or people meeting you for the first time. That's the greatest importance for us.

SO: Being around the auction houses is obviously a vital thing.

RE: It would be difficult to find another city in the world with as rich a concentration of dealers and auction houses – but also conservators, curators, archives, The London Library, the resources at The Courtauld, the Royal Academy, the Heinz Archive at The



AT THE TABLE

ANGELA MULLANY
director, Mullany Fine Art

EMANUELA TARIZZO
gallery director,
Tomasso Brothers Fine Art

RACHEL ELWES
director, Ben Elwes Fine Art

REYHAAN DAY
Mayfair Times

STEPHEN ONGPIN
director, Stephen Ongpin Fine Art;
London Art Week chairman

WILL ELLIOTT
director, Colnaghi

WILLIAM MITCHELL
director, John Mitchell Fine
Paintings

National Gallery... It's such a rich area for everyone to gather.

ET: There's a heritage here that goes back around 300 years. It makes sense to be here, and it's nice to feel that you are continuing a tradition. We also want to be here for our clients too – to make it as easy as possible for them to reach us.

WM: The retail is also important. However, we disguise it, we are in a retail trade. Therefore, we are historically linked to Bond Street, which, when it's not under construction, is rather elegant. There is such a variety of shops on Bond Street that it lends itself well to us being in this area. There is also, of course, an extraordinary conglomeration of wealth gathered there.

RD: How does London compare to other major art cities, such as New York?

AM: As fine art areas, Mayfair and St James's are enduring, notwithstanding the

pressures and encroachment from other commercial activities taking place in this part of London. I think it really remains, compared to New York, a concentration of the art market and art world. Geographically, London has advantages too; from US, European and the Middle Eastern visitors. I think the summer season in particular, which London Art Week falls within, is probably one of the most exciting times during the London calendar.

SO: There are also far fewer Old Master paintings or sculpture dealers in New York than in London. I thought about opening a gallery in New York; but for what I do, which is drawings – and in terms of sourcing material – I decided I would much rather be in London. America is still a very important market, and I have an exhibition in New York every January that I rent a gallery for; and I do an art fair as well every year; but there's a much better concentration in this area than you would ever find in New York, in terms of what we like to call pre-contemporary art.

WE: There is a diversity in London galleries unlike anywhere else; but most importantly, sourcing is easier in London. Being here gives greater access to Europe. There's also a tranquility and ambience around these streets that is conducive to looking and thinking about art, which you don't necessarily get in New York. You can go to Bond Street and it's heaving with people; but on the side streets, it's nice and quiet. It's a great atmosphere for popping into a gallery and looking at things.

WM: A lot of American museum curators stay in DUKES Hotel; they enjoy being near to galleries. People enjoy the tranquility of St James's and Mayfair, relative to any other city. You can walk from your hotel, see four or five galleries, go back and see someone – and that's a huge advantage. You can't do that in any other city.

ET: We're actually collaborating with a New York gallery for the upcoming London Art Week. It's a good platform for New York galleries to come to Europe.

RD: How does London Art Week help put the spotlight on Mayfair and St James's galleries and dealers?

WE: London Art Week reinforces that there are some great dealers here and it's going to be worth your while to visit them. It promotes the idea that it's not just the auctions during that week; there are some fantastic shows on and some great dealers too.

RE: Whilst museums might have substantial acquisition budgets, their travel budgets come from quite a different place and are often very limited. Therefore, to have a destination place where they can see their colleagues and dealers, do some research, visit lots of exhibitions and exchange information with people, it makes it an indisputable forum that people have to attend.

WM: They don't need to make appointments either; they are free to go anywhere they want. A lot of people find that very comfortable.

ET: London Art Week also creates an energy – a buzz – especially in summer, when it's



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very pleasant to walk around and to hop from one gallery to another; to an auction house, to a restaurant. Museum curators know each other; clients know each other. You talk about what you've seen, what you've loved and what you've bought, if you want to; I think that is the uniqueness of London Art Week.

SO: I think that's very true. It's a very collegial field – not just the dealers themselves, but the clients will very often know each other. In the summer, you have this convergence of dealers and clients, but also museum curators, scholars and auction houses. There is a camaraderie, for want of a better word.

WM: The more long-term dealers take the approach that it's good to know what each other has got. It allows people to come to decisions on what they want to buy or what they want to shortlist in their week.

RD: There is sometimes the perception that galleries are somewhat inaccessible. How does London Art Week encourage visitors to come into the gallery?

AM: Approachability is important. London Art Week is part of that. You're inviting people to come in who might otherwise be a bit shy or reluctant. Because it's part of a bigger event, you can have that one-on-one discussion with people – whether they are active buyers or merely curious.

ET: London Art Week tells people how many galleries there are, where they are, their

opening times, and even provides a map. It's conducive to getting people to visit. It particularly benefits younger visitors. We meet young researchers, PhD students or even younger, BA students; or even young people who are interested in art, but perhaps don't yet have the budget to buy. It's an excellent way to connect with them.

SO: There's nothing I like more than somebody who may be 21 years old coming in and asking me if I have any drawings by Fragonard. That's what I was like, and I would find it very difficult to do that back then. Most art history students these days are focusing on contemporary art; but for those that are interested in Old Master paintings or drawings, London Art Week is a wonderful opportunity.

RE: It's about welcoming the younger generation, but also understanding where their interest rests. Is it about materials and techniques, or just enjoying the beauty of what they're looking at? Is it about developing their connoisseurship skills, or helping them to understand that what they're looking at is material culture, and that it's a way of feeling enlightened about the past? Paintings help



“YOU HAVE THIS CONVERGENCE OF DEALERS AND CLIENTS, CURATORS, SCHOLARS AND AUCTION HOUSES”

younger generations understand that. Dealers participating in London Art Week have a lot to give, with their knowledge of these paintings and their knowledge of history, through these works of art.

RD: How does London Art Week compare to an art fair?

SO: It's less expensive for a start!

WE: It's a nice complement to an art fair. There is an urgency and intensity at an art fair that can be productive and beneficial – but it can also be negative. Some people like space and time. London Art Week gives people time to think about the works, to absorb them. For museums, it can be better – because unlike private clients, museums can't necessarily react immediately; they need a bit more time to mull things over.

SO: Last summer, we saw curators from 20 different museums. We then sold to four of those. Every year, there are more curators coming for London Art Week. We had around 800 people in the gallery last year, including those curators. London Art Week is still relatively young, don't forget; as an entity, it's only three or four years old. It's really on its way to becoming an integral addition to the summer season.

*London Art Week runs
from June 28 to July 5.
londonartweek.co.uk*

