



We'll always have Paris

An intriguing array of sculptures from antiquity to modern times stars in this year's edition of FAB, which returns to the French capital's newly restored Grand Palais



Fig 1: An angel plays a violin in a black-chalk drawing by Andrea Lilio. With Stephen Ongpin

WHEN the Grand Palais in Paris closed for restoration in 2021, its place as the site of trade fairs was taken by the Grand Palais Éphémère, on the Champs de Mars, with a view towards the Eiffel Tower. Now, true to the structure's name, that is to disappear, despite the hopes of the owners that there might be an extension. When I visited for last year's FAB Paris fair, there was talk that it might be re-erected elsewhere. I was impressed by it and hope that it does have a further life. Be that as it may, it will be a thrill to see this year's event (November 22–27) back in the Grand Palais itself, post-Olympics (and restoration). I believe that a lot of the work was to do with the glass roofs and I hope the system of blinds used for the Olympic fencing events is permanent, as on sunny days the building can feel like a greenhouse.

FAB Paris is the offspring of the long-lived Biennale, which had run its natural course, and the much younger Fine Arts Paris. The merger has given the event renewed energy—this is the third staging and it promises well. The Biennale was principally regarded as a showcase for French culture and only secondarily as a marketplace; such overseas exhibitors as

were admitted were expected to conform. Numbers have risen from 55 at the final Fine Arts Paris in 2021 to 95 now, with about one-third from outside France and 26 first-time exhibitors. Selling is very much on their minds.

One of the first-timers is Stephen Ongpin from London, a long-standing exhibitor at the specialist spring Salon du Dessin that is keen to add a multi-disciplinary event to its Parisian activity. Its offerings range from Old Master to late 20th century and include a 6¼in by 4¼in black-chalk drawing by Andrea Lilio (about 1555 to after 1635) of an angel, vigorously playing a violin, seated on a cloud (**Fig 1**). It is squared for transfer and a study for a figure in a now-dismembered altarpiece in the artist's native Ancona, Italy. Only about 80 of his drawings are known.

From preview material, it looks as if the fair will be strong in sculpture from antiquity to modern. Not so long ago, it was quite possible to buy 19th- and even 18th-century busts comparatively inexpensively from British antique shops and, for people with the strength to get

Fig 2 left: A marble bust by Bertel Thorvaldsen. With Trebosc + Van Lelyveld. **Fig 3 below:** José Alvarez Cubero's bust of Rossini. With Desmet

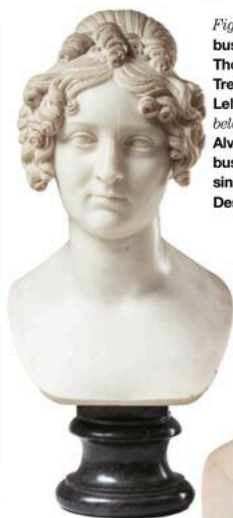


Fig 4 above: An 'Eye' ring of gold, ammonite opal and diamonds. With Lydia Courteille

them home and a talent for decoration, one alone could give a room a distinction that only much more up-market pictures could achieve. On occasions, the identities not only of sitters, but even of major sculptors had been forgotten and there were discoveries to be made.

At the fair will be two fine early-19th-century marble busts, both carved in Rome, but neither by an Italian. One of these (**Fig 3**) is exactly such a rediscovery. José Alvarez Cubero (1768–1827) was given a grant by the King of Spain to work in Rome, where he was strongly influenced by the neo-Classicism of Canova. Despite being made court sculptor to Ferdinand VII, he remained in the Eternal City almost until his death. Between 1819 and 1827, he made a plaster and two marble busts of the composer Gioachino Rossini, the second on commission from the 14th Duke of Alba. Despite his vast wealth, the Duke had run short of money when buying art in Italy and had been bailed out by his friend Rossini. An inventory in the Alba archives mentions it, but this bust had disappeared by the Duke's death in 1835. Possibly, he had given it to Rossini in gratitude for the loan. Art historians have been hoping to find it ever since, but it re-emerged only recently in a private German collection, ➔

Courtesy of Trebosc + Van Lelyveld; Lydia Courteille/Oliver Bräuer; Robert Taubert; David Ghezelsbas/Vincent Grier Duboulier; Galerie Léage/Thomas Hemmcke; Rosenberg & Co