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For the vast majority of those around Mayfair and St James's, the numerous galleries tucked away on its historic streets are something of an enigma; however, there are a number of youthful gallerists and dealers looking to draw in a younger audience and highlight Old Masters as alternative options for art collectors.

These individuals say that London Art Week, which takes place this month, is key in introducing their galleries to different demographics. Benedict Tomlinson is the director of Robilant+Voena on Dover Street, one of the world's leading Old Master galleries – and he is aware of the difficulty in attracting a younger crowd to view what is perceived as a more formal art form. "What is so important about London Art Week is that it is encouraging people to go into

Front row left to right:
Megan Corcoran (Stephen Ongpin Fine Art) with *A Statue In A Garden* by Jean-Honore Fragonard (1732-1806); Charles Mackay (The Weiss Gallery) with *Edward VI Of England* by the studio of William Scrots (circa 1550)

Back row left to right:
Valentina Vico (Benappi Fine Art); Clementine Sinclair (Christie's); Tom Davies (Daniel Katz Gallery); Helen Smith (Ben Elwes Fine Art); Benedict Tomlinson (Robilant+Voena); Alexandra Hamburger (Ariadne Galleries); Matthew Reeves (Sam Fogg); and Harry Gready (Benappi Fine Art)

Photographed at Robilant+Voena with Marino Marini horse sculptures.

galleries. We need organisations like this." He says that galleries can suffer from the fact that they are somewhat obscured from public view. "There are some extraordinary galleries in Mayfair and St James's that are hidden away and people just don't know about. We're a tiny little gallery on a first floor; getting people to ring the doorbell and not feel that they're going to be intimidated is a challenge. It's an old problem."

Matthew Reeves is a young dealer at Clifford Street gallery Sam Fogg, which focuses on medieval, Islamic, Indian and Ethiopian art. He agrees that the emphasis for galleries needs to be on bringing people in. "Increasingly, my aim and ambition is to bring the audience to the community and the material – and bring the material and community to the audience," he says. "I'm heartened by London Art Week, because



it raises the profile. People wouldn't come in otherwise. It's so easy to think of the gallery as closed; but I don't want people to think we're a shutdown business or secretive in any way – it's really the opposite.”

“One of the keys to attracting a younger audience to appreciate Old Masters is to support a younger generation working in that field,” says Clementine Sinclair, specialist in Old Masters at Christie's. She says engaging young people across the industry is central to making Old Masters relevant for a new audience. “As curators, in auctions, with dealers, dealing independently; as restorers, framers, or writing for art publications. Enthusiasm is infectious and when younger audiences see their peers involved in Old Masters, they may be inspired to engage.”

With this in mind, Christie's launched its Young Old Masters event in January, aimed at creating an opportunity for young people involved in the Old Masters art world to share their experiences, knowledge and interests.

One example is Megan Corcoran, the 27-year-old gallery manager at Stephen Ongpin. Having studied art

a number of reasons why Old Masters are often overlooked when it comes to viewing and buying – including younger generations growing up exposed to contemporary art; and a lack of knowledge on the history of the artists.

“I think too many people, young and old, assume that vast knowledge is required to enjoy Old Masters; but the subjects are universal – portraits, landscapes and still-lives, for example.” Sinclair believes that art from all eras can be enjoyed without knowledge of the history surrounding its creation. “The works can be appreciated purely aesthetically. While knowledge enhances one's understanding, it is not a pre-requisite for enjoyment.”

Tomlinson agrees. “Take a contemporary work; you might not understand what's going on, and you're unlikely to get the conceptual elements. However, you can still appreciate it. In the same way, you can say an Old Masters painting is beautiful, without knowing the symbolism.”

Today's gallerists and dealers are also battling the perception that older works demand higher prices. “People think these things are in museums, so they could never

NEW BLOOD FOR OLD MASTERS

Local gallerists share their love of the Old Masters and hope to attract a new audience to London Art Week this month. By Reyhaan Day

history at Harvard University and interning at museums and galleries in New York, Corcoran was pushed towards a career in finance, before recognising that she wasn't following her passion. Enrolling on Sotheby's Institute of Art's masters programme in London (with its emphasis on Old Masters), Corcoran met Stephen Ongpin at Frieze Masters; and the rest, she says, is history. She says she always felt a stronger connection to Old Masters artists. “I felt much more of a connection with the artist as opposed to the contemporary works that were more conceptual; I felt these were harder to grasp, and I couldn't feel the artist in the same way.” Corcoran says the best thing about her job is seeing people fall in love with a piece. “I can get quite sentimental. When someone buys a drawing that you have spent the last 18 months to two years falling in love with, and they're suddenly taking it home...sometimes I'm really devastated,” she says, laughing.

Those in the industry say there are

afford to buy one; but that's not the case at all. You can buy very well-priced Old Master paintings compared to what's in the modern or contemporary market,” says Tomlinson.

For many, London Art Week acts as an introduction to these oft-misunderstood works of art – and participating galleries understand the importance of such an event. “The coordination of auction house sales, dealer exhibitions and Masterpiece attracts collectors, advisors, experts and curators of Old Masters from all over the world,” says

Sinclair. “It is a great opportunity to see the best works on the market all in one place and helps raise the profile of this field of collecting.”

Reeves says that casual art-lovers are equally welcome. “London Art Week gets people in. It doesn't matter if they buy or don't buy; it's most important that people see these objects, which have been hiding in private collections.”

London Art Week runs from June 28-July 6 across Mayfair and St James's. For a full schedule, visit www.londonartweek.co.uk

