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FT WEEKEND - SHOPPING: The fair with charm - and affordability

By Paula Weideger, Financial Times

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The more successful a biennale, the more tempted its organisers are to make new friends (and more money) in the year between. In Venice an international architecture exposition now fills the Public Gardens while the art world is home recuperating from its fandango.

In Paris in 2003, the Syndicat National des Antiquaires (SNA) came up with something perhaps a little more enticing: it created the Salon du Collectionneur to alternate with the sumptuous Biennale des Antiquaires. The Salon's second edition opens on Friday. There will be more than 120 exhibitors from 11 countries, half of them doing the fair for the first time. Special exhibitions and a series of lectures will take place during the nine-day run.

The salon is divided into six mini-neighbourhoods: antiquities and primitive art; Asian art; ceramics; jewellery and silver; furniture and objects of art; drawings, paintings and sculpture. Inevitably there are blurred boundaries. Where to put Chinese painting or Japanese pottery? But on the whole, the design works well. There's a lot to be said for having your prey, whether it's Delft tiles or art deco mirrors, already corralled. You can quickly move from one vitrine or stand to another, and then pounce.

Antoine Lebel, assistant secretary-general of the SNA, deals in Chinese export porcelain at his gallery in the rue de Beaune. A fanciful, early 18th-century teapot currently on display will soon find itself at this year's salon. Its body has the straight sides of a tankard but the modelling of handle and spout transform it into a rather endearing ostrich.

Lebel explains that there used to be separate ceramics and Asian arts fairs during the biennale's off-year. "Our idea was to consolidate," he says. And to expand. With more specialities these days, there are more dealers and clients, too.

But the confusing thing about the salon is not just that there's an overlap of genres and, sometimes, dealers. Both the salon and the biennale are in September and both in the same place - currently that's the Carrousel du Louvre but from next year it will be the Grand Palais. So apart from the name, what's the difference between them?

In short, it's money.

Dealers pay twice as much per square metre for a stand at the biennale. And because it is such a killer event, they pay thousands more for decorations and

entertaining. All those zeros on their price tags are not only the result of sometimes hefty mark-ups. Dealers have to take expensive stock to the biennale to cover costs. The salon's lower overheads allow dealers to show less expensive objects and still have a profitable fair.

It has to be said that foreign dealers are the exception to the above rule. For them there is little difference in cost between the fairs. Floris Vanderven, a Dutch dealer in oriental porcelain who attends both events, candidly reveals: "I pay in total €40,000 for my stand at the salon. With shipping, insurance and hotels it costs me about €60,000." Doing the biennale costs him about €75,000.

Vanderven does both fairs because he likes having the continuity with his clients that this offers. And also for the exposure. "Just as people go to London for the season in June, there is a group of foreign people for whom September is 'Paris time'," he says.

With costs much the same, so is the price range of objects Vanderven exhibits at the two fairs. But Frank Prazan, owner of the Paris gallery Applicat-Prazan, which specialises in contemporary and modern art, is able to take full advantage of the salon's lower cost. And he does.

At his office above the *Agallery* on rue de Seine, he explains that at the salon he "hopes to interest people there in artists who are not so well known".

Among those artists the gallery shows from the French school of the 1950s, only "a few, like Riopelle, Poliakov and Solage, have big names, internationally, with prices in dollars". Their work goes to the biennale. "The second tier, no less important in quality, we hope to promote at the salon." With demand not yet very strong, prices - in euros - are lower, so the salon gives Prazan a chance to pump up interest and prices; and offers buyers a chance to get in early.

The owner of Galerie Artesepia on rue de Verneuil has yet another motive for doing the salon. Georges Franck, who dealt privately for a decade before opening the Artesepia a year and a half ago, says: "One reason for doing the fair is to publicise its existence." He will be taking 10 views of Paris from the gallery's collection to the fair and a drawing by François-Marius Granet (1775-1849), rare because of its large size.

If you visit the salon, a top tip is to head straight for the stand of Motard and Hervieux, dealers in antique jewels and objets d'art. (I once bought a modest but bold 18th-century silver Spanish pendant from them.) This time, Jean-Christophe Motard says they will be showing exceptional tobacco rasps at the salon.

Tobacco rasps? Evidently these implements for grating tobacco into snuff, often made of carved ivory, are much in demand. (Hawkins & Hawkins sold a 100-piece collection of them for about £300,000 at the summer Olympia.)

Motard is emphatic that no one should think that the salon is "a junkie exhibition". On the contrary. "A lot of our clients are very happy to come. They know it has quality and charm yet is also more affordable."

In the future, Lebel hopes that more dealers will do both fairs. In five or 10 years there may be little difference between the salon and the biennale. If so, now is the time to make the most of the salon's quality, charm and affordable prices.

Salon du Collectionneur, Paris, September 16-25,
www.salonducollectionneur.com