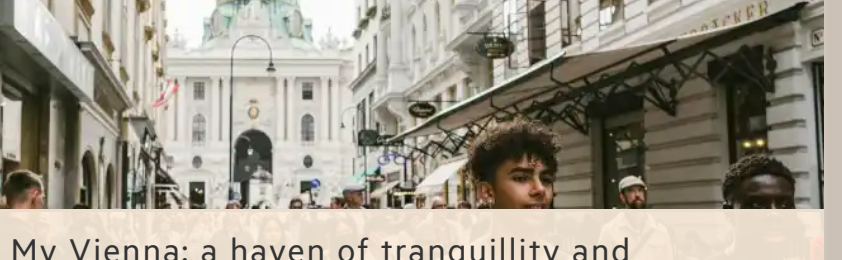
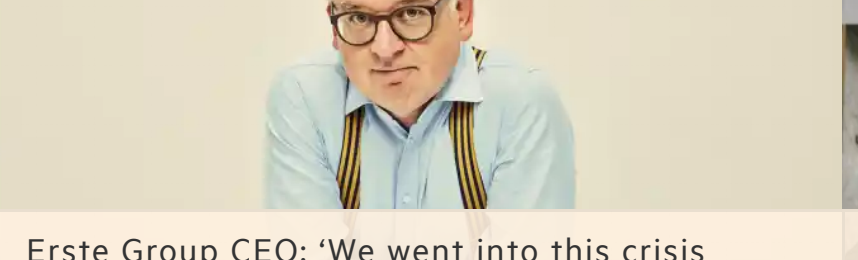



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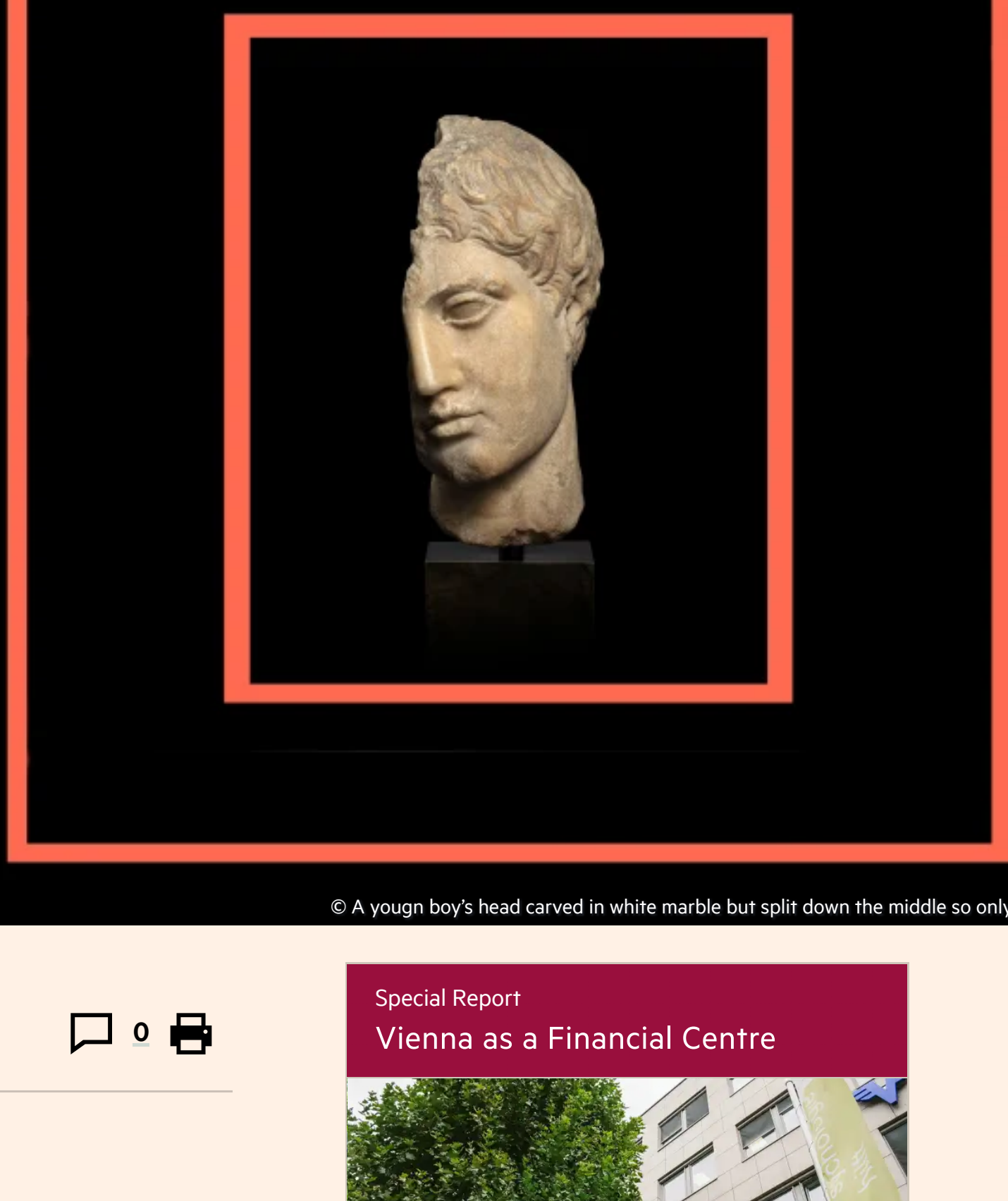
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New tricks for old-art galleries at Tefaf Online

From podcasts and Instagram to video tours, exhibitors are trying to show off their wares to best effect



© A young boy's head carved in white marble but split down the middle so only the right half is seen



Melanie Gerlis 2 HOURS AGO



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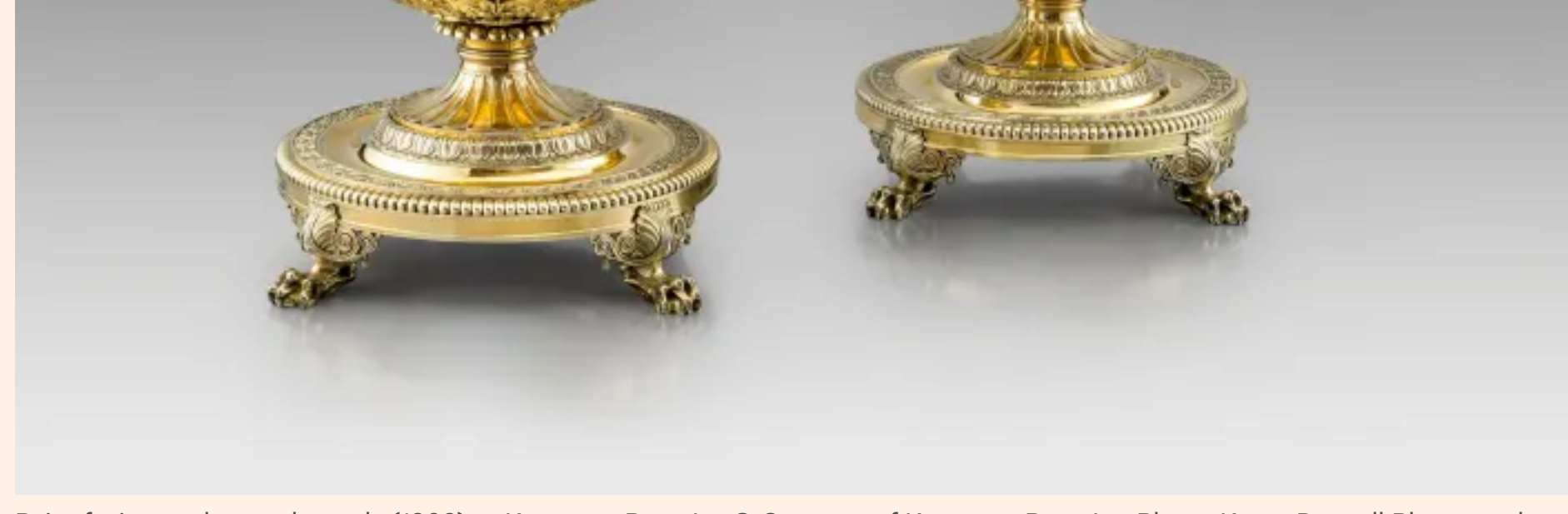
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"This might be the last chance to experience an exclusively virtual fair." So read the wry gallery e-invite to Tefaf Online (September 9-13), sent to clients of the English antique silver specialists Koopman Rare Art. It is, says Koopman director Lewis Smith, a deliberate injection of humour into what has been a difficult time for dealers of older art since the Covid-19 pandemic struck.

"Can anything other than contemporary art be truly successful online? The jury is still out," he says. Nonetheless, the London dealer is keen to participate in the online version of the Maastricht fair, with items including a pair of silver wine coolers from 1809, complete with their stands, that show Bacchus in full swing (1809, £385,000). Similar examples can be found in London's V&A and the White House, Smith notes.



Pair of wine coolers and stands (1809) at Koopman Rare Art © Courtesy of Koopman Rare Art. Photo: Karen Bengali Photography

Tefaf's organisers, who for the second time have been forced online-only, have been doing their best to meet the varied needs of their 250-plus exhibitors whose wares span antiquities to recent works of art. There will be a greater emphasis on video and options for more interactive conversations since the fair's first online-only edition in November, while the talks programme has been extended (some panels will be hosted in collaboration with the Financial Times). A new Tefaf Collections series of films invites six experts to give their own highlights tour.

Also new is that exhibitors can now show three items each, up from the focus on just one that was stipulated for the original online edition. This was a smart idea when collectors were deluged with images and resulted in some sales. But it proved limiting for some. Having three items allows for curation around a theme, as well as a range of prices.



Two pages from an illuminated manuscript prepared for Juan II, king of Castile and Leon...



...which will be on Dr Jörn Günther Rare Books' online stand © Courtesy of Dr Jörn Günther Rare Books (2)

Showing just a few items pays off, says Erin Donovan, deputy director at Dr Jörn Günther Rare Books in Switzerland: "We've shown up to 20 works online at other events but the click-through rate rarely goes beyond about five." She concedes that engaging virtually doesn't automatically suit their niche category: "It has been hard not to sit with clients and let them page through the books. [Manuscripts] are so seductive in the hands — you feel the power of their age, the paintings and the flashes of gold," she says.

But her gallery has harnessed some of the tricks of the digital trade, with an online store that sells catalogues and lower-priced manuscripts. The gallery has an engaging social media presence too. "We now have a 23-year-old managing our Instagram, Twitter and Facebook," Donovan explains, with more than 10,000 Instagram followers (@jgrarebooks).



An Attic white-ground lekythos (c450BC-430BC) attributed to the Quadrate Painter at Kallos Gallery © Kallos Gallery

Filming items has been vital for three-dimensional objects, notes Madeleine Perridge, director of the London antiquities specialist Kallos Gallery. "The black glaze of a Greek vase is so hard to reproduce in a photo. You need to turn it around, move it in light," she says. Items posted online also benefit if immediately attractive, something that doesn't always apply to antiquities. "It's not the same as contemporary art. There's a wonderful, nerdy engagement in the history of our works, which is hard to replicate digitally," Perridge says.

For Tefaf Online, the gallery has done well to theme its showings around "beauty and the artistic ideal in the ancient world". Their pieces include a fragmentary Roman head of a handsome athlete (c25BC-c25AD, £120,000) and an Egyptian fragment of a svelte female form (c332-200BC, £180,000).

Organisers of the Tefaf fairs are also rethinking more broadly since the pandemic stopped their 2020 Maastricht fair midway through. The aim is to restart the flagship event physically in March 2022, with their New York mini-fair also on the slate for May. Tefaf's other New York fair, which ran from 2016 for dealers in older art, never quite hit the mark and has been shelved.



Untitled (Knokke #3) (1987) by Keith Haring at Christophe Van de Weghe gallery © Courtesy of the artist and Christophe Van de Weghe gallery

Hidde van Seggelen, Tefaf chair for just over a year, underlines that these exhibitors are still well-served. "We have been pleasantly surprised that antiquities and sculpture dealers have been able to sell work online," he says.

He notes that much of the creativity comes from the dealers themselves. Innovations for this month's Tefaf Online include a joint appearance by the London antiquities specialist Charles Ede and New York contemporary gallerist Sean Kelly on *The Grand Tourist*, an art-world podcast. The two galleries also shared a booth at Tefaf in New York in 2019, a combination that appealed to today's cross-category collectors. Modern art dealers are also getting creative — or at least having fun — to attract digital eyeballs. Christophe Van de Weghe is showing a Keith Haring painting of someone eating a herring, "Untitled (Knokke #3)" (1987) — "a Haring herring", notes Van Seggelen (\$2m).



A 16th-century ink jar in the shape of a crab at Christophe de Quénetain © Courtesy of Christophe de Quénetain. Photo: Jérémie Beylard/Agence PH&P

Fundamentally, he says, a dealer's ability to discover, research and present is still core to the fair, whether on- or offline. He highlights a 16th-century ink jar in the shape of a crab, found at auction by the Paris specialist Christophe de Quénetain, who has since unearthed provenance from an Austrian Imperial collection (€200,000). There are no non-fungible tokens at Tefaf Online, despite their growing appearance on the wider art market. The idea was floated, Van Seggelen admits, "but we don't have a vetting committee for NFTs", he semi-jokes.

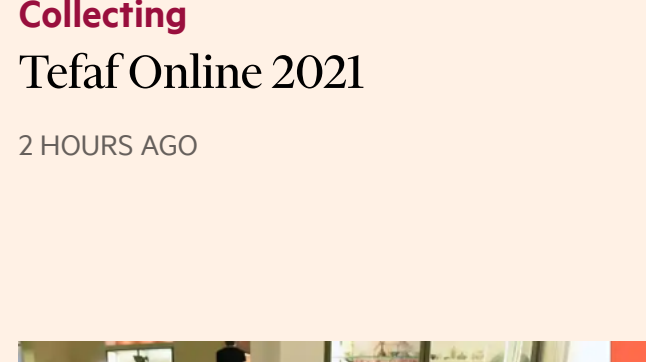
Either way, experimentation looks to continue through another choppy art fair season. "Tefaf is an important brand that we have invested in for 30 years," says Smith of Koopman Rare Art, "and it would be foolish of any dealer to ignore the importance of the online community. But that doesn't mean we will sell anything."

September 9-13, tefaf.com

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