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LAPADA Art & Antiques Dealers Fair

By Rebecca Davies, CEO of LAPADA

Each year, as autumn begins to fall, there is a ferment of activity amongst the established plane trees of Berkeley Square. Covering over 40,000 square feet -including an upstairs brasserie- and temporarily housing 108 stands, the LAPADA Art & Antiques Fair marquee is erected to welcome over 20,000 visitors over the course of one week.

The LAPADA Fair exemplifies the diversity of the trade, from antiquities through to the contemporary: here, in Central London, you might find an Inuit baby anorak alongside Picasso ceramics and contemporary Asian art. Like the association itself, where tradition and a modern approach work hand in hand, the vibrant atmosphere at the fair illustrates an art and antiques scene that can very much speak to today's consumer.

In an age of mass-production, the individuality of the pieces collated by the exhibitors, often imbued with history, is more desirable than ever, and each reincarnation of the fair both reflects and fosters the resurgence of interest in such items from the younger generation, who have embraced collecting as a valid and accessible form of self-expression that does not have to be regarded as just academic or stuffy.

Today good design is celebrated in the media and discussed by the younger generation, so that, for example, a black neoclassical vase might interest a contemporary buyer for its clean lines and tactile use of marble as much as it would a seasoned collector for its maker and impeccable provenance.

Cross-collecting is a buzzword that nonetheless encapsulates a deeper desire for a broad approach across disciplines and time periods: rather than collecting by type of piece or period, what our audience is clearly focussed on is quality and rarity.

Similarly, authenticity and integrity is important to today's audience, and we have eighty specialists vetting the fair to ensure that every item on display is accurately described and of the correct standard of quality. LAPADA's Code of Practice requires that its members provide clear and accurate descriptions of items for sale; moreover, each member has undergone an application process to become part of an association that the public can trust. The dealers who share their knowledge and passion with

visitors to Berkeley Square are ambassadors for LAPADA's wider membership of 550 members, nationally and internationally, all of whom are bound by the same high standards.

Looking to the future, it is this eclectic mix of covetable items from uniformly reputable dealers that LAPADA is excited to bring to a wider audience through its newly-launched independent marketplace portal, www.lapada.org. Just as fairs have become an important part of the art and antique trade's landscape, so has the need for an online presence: the public has completely changed the way they source things, from everyday items through to luxury goods.

And just as the LAPADA Art & Antiques Fair has become known as an elegant but unpretentious event, so too a site where beautiful and diverse items can be easily and stylishly viewed is essential. Both showcases for our dealers aim to make serious collectors and first-time buyers alike feel at home, though the latter holds an advantage in lack of physical restrictions.

As an Association, we are also charged with protecting the interests of our members in government and to act in response to legislation that could adversely affect the trade. The British art market alone is worth more than £8 billion and it continues to make a significant contribution to the economy, in terms of the employment and the skills it generates.

From shops and galleries through to fairs and online sales, the art and antiques trade form an important part of the UK's cultural and economic landscape and it is imperative that we strive to support it.

Personally, coming to the position of LAPADA Chief Executive from a background most recently in contemporary art, it has been exciting to see our antiques dealer members confound outdated stereotypes and take a truly forward-looking approach to their businesses, whilst maintaining the love of their subject which makes the profession almost a vocation.

It gives me great pleasure to reflect that, with the appreciation of the unique coupled with an eclectic aesthetic becoming a hallmark of our times, the future of such art and objects as presented by our dealers can only be bright.

Rebecca Davies is the Chief Executive of LAPADA, the largest professional trade association of art & antiques dealers in the UK. The role covers a large spectrum of responsibilities, with the sole aim of looking after the best interests of the Association's members, including: organising conferences and seminars; arranging benefits for members, including PR coverage; overseeing the LAPADA Fair in Berkeley Square; as well as managing LAPADA's relationships with other fine art fairs in the UK and internationally.

Rebecca, on behalf of the Association, is a spokesperson for the trade and lobbies government on legislation that adversely affects its members, runs promotional initiatives and gathers and analyses important industry statistics.

As the representative for LAPADA, Rebecca also holds the post of Treasurer for the British Art Market Federation (BAMF).

Previously, Rebecca was Managing Director at the London contemporary art gallery Blain|Southern, which she set up with Harry Blain and Graham Southern in 2010. She played a pivotal role in all aspects of the business from management and strategy to growth.

She was instrumental in the establishment of further galleries in London, New York and Berlin and managed the lease acquisition and subsequent development of four galleries and two offices.

Prior to this, Rebecca was the European Business Director at leading contemporary art gallery, Haunch of Venison, from 2005.

Rebecca has a Masters in History of Art from the Courtauld Institute and a Bachelor's Degree in Art History & Sociology from the University of Virginia.