

## HEARD &amp; SCENE

For Timeless Art,  
A European Gallery  
Pops Up Uptown

What do you get the spouse who has everything? How about a Botticelli? Should a blue-chip item such as an early 16th-century Italian masterpiece be in your price range, you're most certainly in luck, and you don't even have to fly to Europe to make the purchase.

Starting this week, one will be on offer on the Upper East Side.

The work is just one of the many antiques amassed by Galerie Brimo de Larousilhe, Galleria Alessandra Di Castro and Galerie Kugel, which have banded together and taken over the Academy Mansion with an exhibition until the end of the month.

Brimo, Di Castro, Kugel will open on Tuesday with a private party for 150 guests, catered by Le Cirque. Among those expected are Ronald Lauder, Carolina and Reinaldo Herrera, Beatrice Santo Domingo, Ian Wardropper of the Frick and Lee Radziwill.

This is the first time the three galleries and their owners, all second-generation antique dealers and friends since childhood, have worked together on a project of this scale.

"The whole idea is that we're three dealer friends and we all have different visions and different specialties and we decided to merge them," said Alexis Kugel, who runs Galerie Kugel on quai Anatole France in Paris with his brother, Nicolas.

Late last week, Messrs. Kugel along with Alessandra



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Di Castro, from Rome, and Marie-Amélie Carlier, also from Paris, were starting to see their vision, which they came up with a year ago, come to true fruition on East 63rd Street. They had all worked on plans before arriving in New York, but "then you see the pieces in the flesh and basically, it's completely different," said Ms. Carlier.

The point, said Ms. Di Castro, is "we mix everything. And it's encouraging people to do the same at home. It's modern in spirit. This is art senza tempo," or art outside the boundaries of time.

One of the rooms closest to the entrance, for instance, features ancient Roman mosaics a few paces from the remnants of an Egyptian statue engraved with deities that Ms. Di Castro estimates to be from 3500 B.C. As for its price, basically pocket change "in excess of" \$1 million, she explained.



Above, a triptych by Master of the Piani d'Invrea Cross that depicts St. Thomas Aquinas enthroned between St. Peter and St. Dominic, from the Italian region of Liguria, circa 1335. Left, a chaise with the Crucifixion, from Limoges, France, circa 1190-1200.



Marie-Amélie Carlier and Edouard Vatinel prepare a display.

Another room features a small statue commissioned by Pope Pius VI of the day he was elected pontiff. "He considered himself very handsome," said Ms. Di Castro of the piece, which she estimated at 75,000 euros.

Still another features the crown jewel: the Botticelli, which Mr. Kugel helped

discover. "There is no Botticelli of that importance and beauty that has come into the market for decades," he said. "There is nothing in common with this." This is probably the most expensive piece in the collection at the Academy Mansion, though, as of our walk-through, Mr. Kugel didn't want to yet

name a price.

"We do that later," said Ms. Di Castro. "You are coming a bit too early."

Upstairs there are, among other treasures, a set of seven tapestries from around 17th-century Brussels that Nicolas Kugel said "costs less than a Picasso" as well as many pieces of rare French furniture including some by André-Charles Boulle, the cabinetmaker for Louis XIV.

Though they expect a few of the more than 300 pieces to be purchased by museums, the gallerists said they prefer to not to use the terms "museum piece" or "museum quality." That connotes the pieces are "not necessarily perceivable to own" for your home, said Mr. Kugel.

In an age when they believe auction houses have taken over the market and work directly with personal clients, the friends are hoping to "emphasize the role of the antique dealer in helping collectors," said Mr. Kugel.

"Above all, we buy with our own taste," said Ms. Di Castro.

"And we each have specific tastes," said Ms. Carlier.

It is a good economic time for the galleries to come to America, Mr. Kugel added. And beyond expanding their relationships in this city, their goal is to redefine Manhattan as a "center of art and connoisseurship," he said. "New York is a very exciting and active city but the younger generation is not necessarily aware that art of this quality can be available."

Explained Ms. Di Castro: "We want to say, 'Come in, you're more than welcome to look around, and we will try to explain the objects we fell in love with.'"

And should you choose to buy, "You can start with a drawing at a few thousand," she noted.

"Or you can go directly the masterpiece," Mr. Kugel chimed in, "and start at the top."