

FROM A DEALER'S DIARY: EXHIBITING AT AN ART FAIR

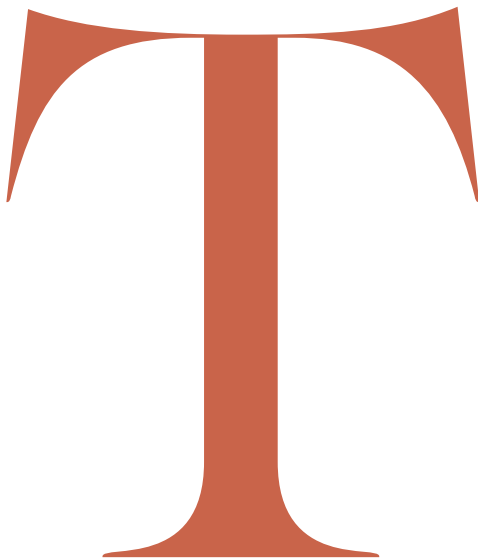


BEHIND THE SCENES

Editor's Note: Held every August since 1980, the newly renamed Baltimore Art, Antique & Jewelry Show is America's largest indoor antiques fair, featuring hundreds of exhibitors from around the world. On offer are paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints, furniture, silver, Asian antiquities, porcelain, Americana, historical jewelry, glass, and textiles. We asked Carole Pinto, an independent, New York-based dealer who handles paintings from the late 19th and 20th centuries, to describe what happened behind the scenes before and during last summer's show.



Carole Pinto on her stand at the Baltimore Art, Antique & Jewelry Show



The week before an art fair is always stressful. My preparation had started weeks earlier, focused primarily on deciding which paintings to exhibit on my stand. This is not an exact science, and it takes educated guesswork to anticipate attendees' tastes: are they relatively traditional, or will they be attracted to something edgy? Will they prefer marine paintings (a logical choice given Baltimore's proximity to the Chesapeake Bay), or perhaps Impressionist landscapes? And what is their sweet spot when it comes to price?

Once I chose my paintings, the nitty-gritty of wrapping and labeling each work took place on the floor of my Manhattan living room. Endless rolls of bubble wrap and Scotch tape were used to protect the precious cargo, and, after two exhausting days of manual labor, they were ready for loading onto the van.

I arrived in Baltimore a few days before the fair's official opening, checked into my hotel,

and met with the student I had recruited from the Maryland Institute College of Art to help me set up the stand. Because I work by myself, I needed someone to help lift and position each artwork on the wall. I was lucky to find Lauren, an illustrator who was excited by the prospect of this unusual project.

The pictures arrived the morning before the show was to open, so Lauren and I got right to work unwrapping and ensuring that nothing had been damaged, especially the frames. We lined up the paintings side by side along the floor, imagining together how best to group them. Should they be hung thematically, chronologically, or stylistically? I wanted to exhibit as many works as possible without overcrowding, so I decided to place one large painting in the middle of each panel and then work around it. Once the central pieces were hung, it became a question of trial and error



Carole Pinto in front of *Garden Scene* by the Armenian painter Diran K. Garabedian (1882–1963), c. 1915

— seeing what looked best. I asked Lauren to hold up painting after painting while I stepped back a few paces to see how fluidly the eye would move along the wall. Once the locations were set, out came the measuring tape, hammer, and nails. Before we knew it, eight hours had passed. We took one last look at the display before heading home, exhausted.

I arrived early the next morning, ready to take a fresh look. Having made a few minor changes, I placed a label alongside each painting: name of artist, title of work, biographical information, provenance, the art museums that already own works by the artist, and — of course — the price. Finally, I set up a chair and a table covered with useful literature about the artists.

I rushed back to the hotel to change, stopped at a florist for fresh-cut flowers, and arrived just in time for the opening. The entire convention center had been magically transformed from a

loading dock into a glittering emporium of art and antiques, and a buzz of anticipation arose as the first guests made their way in. (Greeting guests with a smile is *de rigueur*, and by the end of the weekend my facial muscles actually ached.)

I spent the next four days on my stand, sometimes juggling three clients at a time, sometimes seeing none at all for what seemed eternity. An exhibitor must be patient, retain that welcoming smile, and show enthusiasm about all of the artists represented. (Though all of mine are deceased, I have come to consider them friends because I know so much about them.) Clients often view a work two or three times before making a decision, and I never want to appear pushy. A work of art is something that they'll want to enjoy for a very long time, so it is best that they take the time necessary to see if it really resonates.

After spending four days in the convention center — 10 hours each day, always on my feet — I was exhausted mentally, physically, and psychologically. That exhaustion is always magnified if there are no sales, but at this edition of the show, I sold two Parisian park scenes to a couple from Washington. That success swiftly brought another smile to my face, and I forgot both my exhaustion and any lingering doubts. To celebrate, I picked up the phone and invited Lauren out to share Maryland crab cakes on the harborfront. By dessert, we were discussing what I should bring to Baltimore next year.

Carole Pinto (carolepintofinearts.com) works as a private dealer and art adviser, writes regularly for art publications, and teaches a class on the art market at Hunter College in New York City.