

# For Collectibles, All Roads Lead to New York

If art fairs were cameras, their views might range from panoramic wide-angle to sharp-focus close-up. Most land somewhere between, but for the next several days New York will be host to two that define the extremes.

**ROBERTA SMITH**

**ART REVIEW**

On the one hand there's the annual cornucopia of culture that has become the Winter Antiques Show, now in its excellent 54th incarnation at the Park Avenue Armory. Encompassing objects from far-flung places and times, its elaborate booths can nearly add up to a small but encyclopedic museum, one that can put down stakes or break camp in something like 24 hours.

On the other hand there's the relative upstart, the nine-year-old New York Ceramics Fair, presenting mostly glazed plates and vessels but also glass at the National Academy Museum. No booths to decorate here, just cheek-to-jowl glass vitrines loaded with Staffordshire, Wedgwood, Sèvres, Delftware and majolica presenting a concentrated slice — mostly European 17th century to early 20th century — of the art medium on which the sun truly never sets.

As the New York Ceramics Fair abundantly suggests, the ceramics medium is universally necessary as well as rich with possibilities of form, function and decoration that have brought out genius in nearly every culture and period.

There is much to be seen and absorbed here. Asking questions usually has good results and who can resist the opportunity to use the word Spode? Beyond the European focus, Cannondale Antiques has some exuberant Japanese pieces from the 1930s by a potter named Sanpei; they might be by George Ohr collaborating with Andrew Lord. Iznik Classics has four contemporary potters perpetuating and deviating from the Iznik tradition in various ways. Sylvia Powell Decorative Arts is featuring, among much else, examples of the wild Fairyland Wedgwood and the flowered pots of William Moorcroft with their deep washy colors.

At Janice Paull there are contrasting versions of the Bandana ironstone pattern, which is a distinctive, delicate floral (Chinese peonies) transfer design in black on white. It was produced between 1830 and 1848, then revived in the 1890s. Almost like a coloring book, the outlines were filled in, painted over or around with bright colors or tinted with metallic glazes, like some early version of Andy Warhol's silk-screen paintings. The variety is striking, as is the combination of mechanical means and hand-making, which recurs throughout the show, with some interesting sidetracks.

At Moylan/Smelkinson, a large platter combined widely spaced elements of traditional blue transfer with "clabbering," as the dealers called the fine textured red — not unlike a Yayoi Kusama net painting — filling in the extensive blank areas around the blue and white designs. (Here you can also trace different pattern designs, which were unpatented, from factory to factory, or contemplate the iconography of the popular Spode Dollar pattern. The floral parts seem identifiably Chinese but the weird twigs looped in green boas are about ... what? Tree grafting seems possible. Anyone?)

At the Simon Westman booth, a stately platter strainer has Greek-vase scenes in black transfer surrounded by textured red, but the word clabbering rang no bells. (Across the way at the William R. & Teresa F. Kurau booth, in what is called Historical Staffordshire, the blue transfer turns dark enough for tornado warnings. This early-19th-century ware was made for export to the young United States, as suggested by depictions of American battles, colleges and historic buildings.) Finally, a possible precedent for the red filling-in can

**NEW YORK CERAMICS FAIR**, National Academy Museum and School of Fine Arts, 1083 Fifth Avenue, at 89th Street. Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. \$15. (212) 289-0496; caskeylees.com.

**WINTER ANTIQUES SHOW**, Park Avenue Armory, Park Avenue, at 67th Street. Friday, Saturday and Monday through Wednesday, noon to 8 p.m.; Sunday and Thursday, noon to 6 p.m. Through Jan. 27. winterantiquesshow.com. \$20. Free shuttle buses will run from the show to Antiques at the Armory.

The following auctions of antiques also take place this weekend:

**CHRISTIE'S**, 20 Rockefeller Plaza, (212) 636-2000; christies.com. American furniture, folk art, prints and decoys era auction, Friday.

**SOTHEBY'S**, 1334 York Avenue, at 72nd Street, (212) 606-7000; sothebys.com. Important Americana, Friday and Saturday.



MOYLAN/SMELKINSON ANTIQUES

A dessert dish, around 1810, at the New York Ceramics Fair.

be found at Garry Atkins: two large English Delftware plates dating from 1740, before the transfer technique was invented. Here Dutch scenes are painted by hand in blue on areas of white that were obviously blocked out before the plate was skillfully sprinkled with oxide manganese for a textured red-brown ground. But don't take my word for it. Go, look, ask.