



'Souhaits et démarches (A 103)' (1979) by Jean Dubuffet — Fondation Dubuffet/ADAGP
© O. Rozennou, courtesy Waddington Custot

The master planner of Masterpiece

Lucie Kitchener | The fair returns after three years with ambitious plans for global growth undimmed by Covid, says its chief executive. By *Susan Moore*



'A blue and yellow Macaw' by Sarah Stone at Karen Taylor — Courtesy Karen Taylor

Aaron). The latter is one of eight dealers who asked to return to the fair after a gap of a few years — among the others are Marlborough Gallery, photography specialist Michael Hoppen and furniture dealer Michael Lipitch. Newcomers also include Waddington Custot and Swedish design specialists Jacksons.

In October, Kitchener made another call: to reduce the offering to 128 exhibitors (the largest edition had 154), with 27 from overseas. It could be the right decision, since other fairs — Tefaf in

'Masterpiece London encourages people to discover things they weren't expecting to find'

Maastricht and Brafa in Brussels — have moved their dates to June and the three overlap. Some big-hitters will do both the Maastricht and London fairs — among them Richard Green and Dickinson — while others, such as Wartski, SJ Phillips and Adrian Sassoon, have opted for Masterpiece.

Will overseas buyers come? "I'm old-school — I have picked up the phone and talked to our US collectors," she says. "They say they are longing to return to London for Wimbledon, Masterpiece and the auctions."

As for the fair's long-imminent international expansion, she hopes to announce a new event for the end of 2023. For the moment, however, Kitchener's focus is returning to the fair's heartland in style.

This is going to be a celebratory return," announces an upbeat Lucie Kitchener as she talks about the first international Masterpiece fair for art, design and more in London for three years. "Despite the challenges, this is not the time for compromise."

Kitchener was brought into the fair in 2016 to advise on strategy — and ended up staying as chief executive of the event, which is two-thirds owned by MCH Group, the parent company of Art Basel, and which has international ambitions. She believes that nurturing a business on to a global stage is about "translation, not replication", and she credits her late father, the record producer and "Fifth Beatle", Sir George Martin, with fostering her principles.

"He taught me about collaboration, integrity and belief, to listen but hold on to what you believe is important," she says. "I learnt that a little bit of bravery was important too. *Sgt Pepper* was revolutionary; it could easily have bombed."

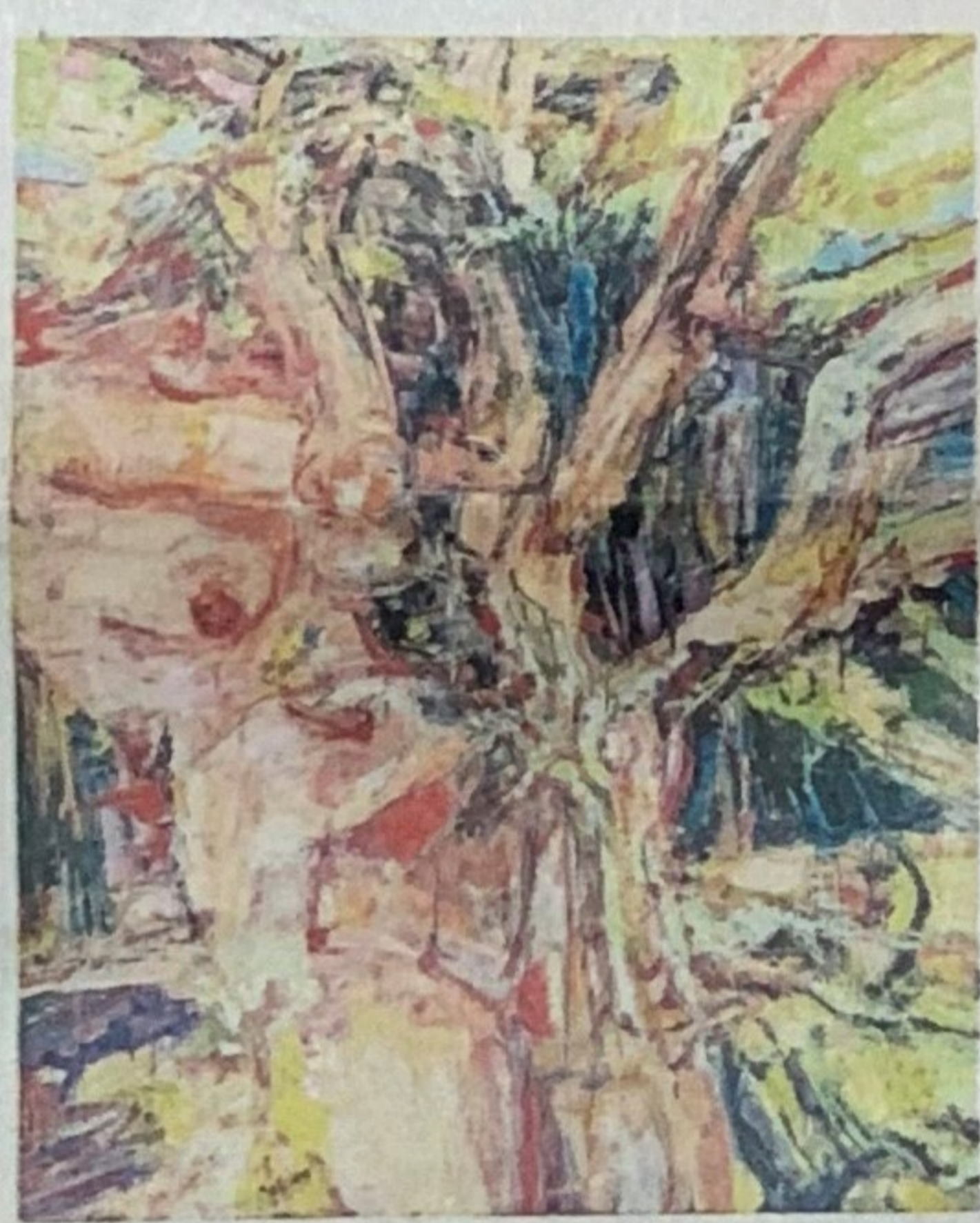
The last three years — "It could not have been a worse time" — have certainly required gutsy decisions, as well as a steady hand.

A foray into Hong Kong was planned for October 2019. "I felt very strongly that to pull out completely was the wrong thing to do both in terms of building a long-term presence in the region and out of respect for it," she says. "We turned up to streets full of rioters."

Then came Covid. The call to cancel the London

fair, which takes place in an immense marquee in smart Chelsea, was made at the end of March 2020. "I felt we did not have a choice at all." Last year proved tougher. "We had worked really hard. I wasn't worried about people getting Covid, I wasn't worried about the fair not working operationally, but in the end I realised that new travel restrictions meant that I could not guarantee our dealers an international audience."

"We looked at doing a smaller version, but we could not honestly say that it would be better for the dealers than doing something in their own galleries." Masterpiece also looked at later dates for 2021, but "we all felt that Masterpiece is what it is, a summer fair which does what it does really well, and we should stick to that".



Main: Lucie Kitchener. Above: 'Daphne' (2020-22) by Catherine Goodman at Marlborough Gallery. Below: 'A Giant Banksia with Expanding Top' (2022) by Kate Malone at Adrian Sassoon

Masterpiece has evolved a formula that prides itself on its visitor experience and on attracting both those who do not otherwise attend art fairs and those obsessive collectors who do. It offers everything from museum-quality works of art to unique Ferraris, fine dining (Daphne's debuts this year) and sophisticated content such as non-commercial installations and a talks programme beyond the exhibitor offer.

The fair is about accessibility. "We don't want visitors to be intimidated because they don't know a lot or can't necessarily afford to buy something. Putting a price on everything is important, as is a balanced breadth of offer." It's also about reliability: "Our vetting is the most rigorous in the world — there are 180 experts who come in and spend an entire day poring over each object. I always say to people that we have done the hard work for you."

And it's about discovery too. "Search engines direct us to what we supposedly want or need. I think Masterpiece does the exact opposite: it encourages people to discover things they weren't expecting to find."

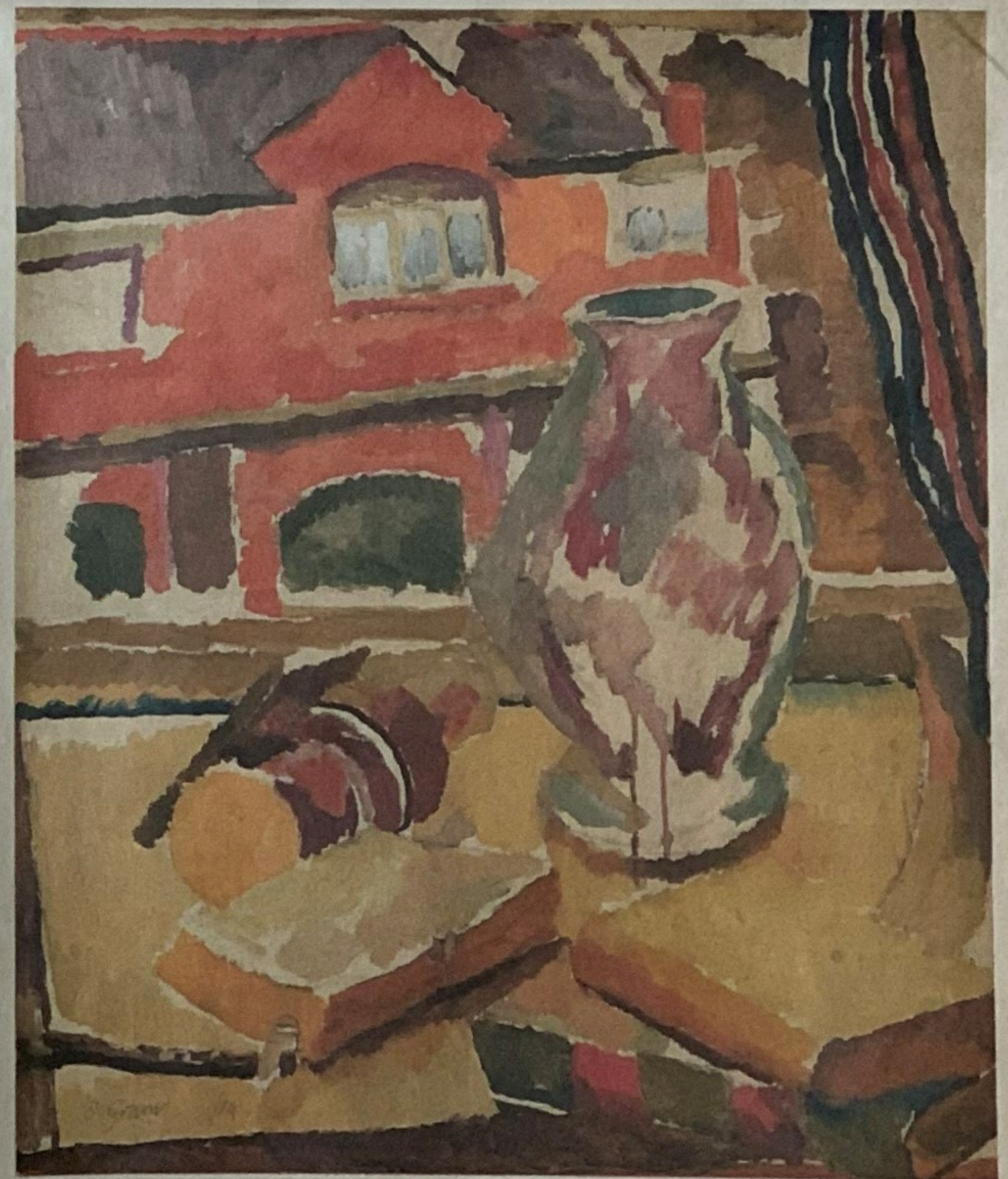
Discovery is one of three threads she sees weaving a way through this year's iteration. Dealers were asked to focus on their discoveries — she cites Thomas Hope's Coade-stone thrones (at Edward Hurst) and overlooked 18th- and 19th-century British female artists (at Karen Taylor). Another is "the female influence", outside and in. Wrapping the front facade of the fair's marquee will be artist Sarah Graham's enormous, joyful yellow anemones. "They will put a smile on everyone's face as they walk in," Kitchener says.

Inside, visitors will be greeted by two immersive light installations by Pakistani-American artist Anila Quayyum Agha. "There is a sim-



Above: 'Fashion 7, Stockings' (1997) by Sarah Moon at Michael Hoppen Gallery. Below right: a triceratops skull at David Aaron

Sarah Moon, courtesy Michael Hoppen Gallery



Duncan Grant (1885-1978). *Still Life on a Window Sill*, 1914, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm

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