



Masterpieces for the masses

By Emily Hulme
ehulme@am-ny.com

There is a perception that the art world is a difficult to navigate, snobby and insidery scene. And in some cases, unfortunately, that's true: Money talks, it's all about who you know, etc.

The Affordable Art Fair is fighting this attitude. AAF, an international series of art fairs, aims to capture the attention of potential patrons who might be turned off by the insular image the art world can project. The organization started in London in 1999, and has been in New York for the past seven years.

The first part of the show's mission is in the name: Affordable. The organizers look for works and galleries with prices less than \$10,000 to entice first-time buyers. But equally important is the education initiative, with panel discussions, demonstrations, tours and children's classes.

"[We want] to build a relationship with the visitors and develop a real loyal fan base," says Laura Meli, director of AAF NYC. "It's just

On view

At the Altman Building — Metropolitan Pavilion, June 12-15.

■ June 12 noon-9p.m., June 13-14 noon-8p.m., June 15 noon-5p.m.

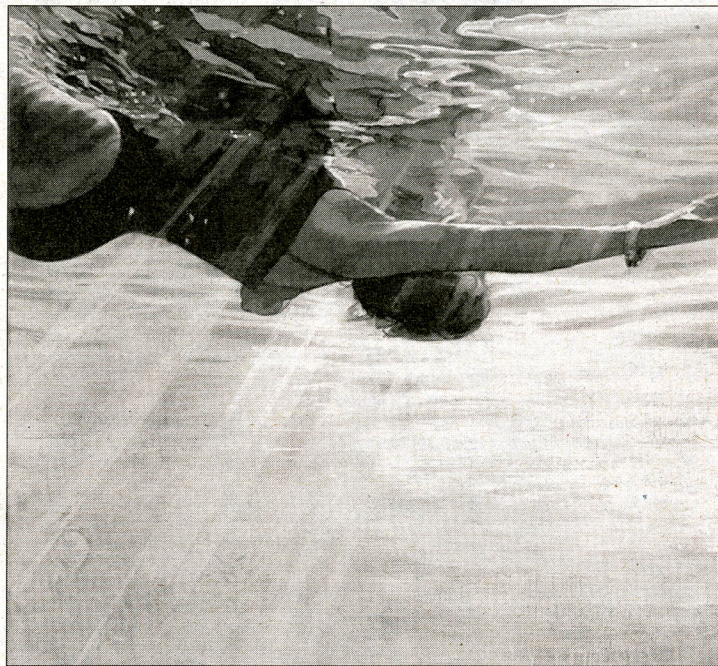
■ **Per day rates:** General admission \$17, students and seniors \$12, group-discount rate \$10, children under 12 FREE, fathers get in free on Sunday with their children

■ 135 W. 18th St., www.aafnyc.com

been a great experience, [showing people that] art's for everyone, you know, not just for those who can afford \$20 million for a painting."

To maintain this welcoming atmosphere, Meli recruits galleries and artists that fit the mold. Artists are accepted by application, and Meli has active relationships with all the exhibitors.

But art world newbies aren't AAF's only audience. Veteran gallery-goers and art collectors are in attendance as well, Meli says. "And then there's also young fam-



Carol Bennett's "Bracelet" is on sale for \$6,000 at the Affordable Art Fair.

ilies looking for a great way to spend the day as well as to buy a piece to hang over their couch or to put into

their new two-bedroom in Brooklyn."

Though the recent economic downturn may put a

crimp in new buyers' budgets, Meli is looking at it as an opportunity to expand the fair's audience even further

What we're buying

Laura Meli offers hot trends in the New York City art market:

- Chinese art
- Indian art
- Eastern-European art.
- Mixed-media and works on paper.
- "Photographs for a new buyer are always a great introduction to buying art, and I think it can be easier to live with."

"People are living in apartments and brownstones and they don't have a lot of wall space to deal with," Meli says. "They come in and they are looking for really great pieces that they can invest in and live with and love and look at every day for the next number of years."

"It's not really typically a group of people that are collecting and then putting it in storage; these are people that are buying in order to live with it."

to include established collectors looking for a deal.

"Maybe now those people are looking to spend \$10,000 on a piece, and that's where we come in. We are the fair that keeps art accessible and affordable," she says.