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Author: Lee Carter

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Art Fairs

See 6 Highlights From TEFAF New York, From a Lalanne Grasshopper Bar to a Seafaring Pair of Wyeth Murals

The tony New York edition of Europe's top fair for historical masterpieces arrives at the Park Avenue Armory.

Lee Carter, May 12, 2023

Haida Pair of Lions Donald Ellis Gallery



Anonymous Haida artist, *Pair of Lions* (ca. 1840). Courtesy of Donald Ellis Gallery.

TEFAF is a redoubt of one-of-a-kind items, and these wooden lions are no exception. Carvers belonging to the Haida people of the Pacific Northwest occasionally crafted items that were not native to North America—as in the case of a matching pair of carved African lions in red spruce or cedar with iron nails, dating from around 1840. “We don’t know for certain why these lions were carved,” said gallery owner Donald Ellis. “If I were to speculate, I’d say they were commissioned by the senior factor at the Hudson Bay Company for use in his home, since carved stone lions were popular in the gardens of his native England.” The lions were most likely realized from a very early photograph or book illustration, in a way that combined 19th-century European naturalism with traditional Northwest Coast-style features. The noses, whiskers, manes, and tufted tail tips are naturalistic, while the eyes, eyebrows, and mouth point to a Northwest Coast origin. In addition, the faces appear to be masks, revealed in a curved line from forehead to nose to chin, further suggesting a northern coastal origin. The asking price for these unusual lions is \$650,000.