

TEFAF Museum Restoration Fund Supports the Conservation of a Rare, Medieval, Hebrew Prayer Book at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston



Photo Courtesy of [MFAH](#). The Hebrew text on the left page reads, "I will love."

TEFAF's first grant of 2022 will conserve the Montefiore Mainz Mahzor – a cultural, religious, and research object that is more than 700 years old

New York, NY (March 3, 2022) – The European Fine Art Foundation ([TEFAF](#)) is pleased to announce that **The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston** (MFAH) is a recipient of the TEFAF Museum Restoration Fund, a grant program created in support of the international art community's vital work to preserve artistic and cultural heritage.

The MFAH is the largest cultural institution in the southwest region of the United States with an encyclopedic collection of nearly 70,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present. With TEFAF's funding, the MFAH will conserve, using culturally appropriate methods, the **Montefiore Mainz Mahzor** (circa 1310–20), a festival prayer book and one of the rare Hebrew "illuminated manuscripts"—hand-written books with painted decorations—still in existence.

"This extraordinary manuscript is one of a very few surviving examples from Medieval Germany, and is all the more remarkable because it was actively used by congregants for centuries. When we acquired the *Mahzor* in 2018, it was the first piece of Judaica to enter the Museum's collection, and has prompted the endowment of a new gallery for Judaica. This generous grant from TEFAF will allow our team of conservators in Houston to restore and preserve this exceptional touchstone of Jewish heritage, so that we may display the book in our galleries as part of the Museum's World Faiths Initiative," said Gary Tinterow, Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Hide van Seggelen, Chairman of TEFAF commented, "Supporting the wider art community is, and always has been, an integral part of TEFAF's mission. The TEFAF Museum Restoration Fund is one way that the foundation demonstrates its ongoing dedication to cultural heritage. We are delighted and honoured to be working with the MFAH on such a wonderful project this year. We are immensely proud to present this particular work—the unique European cross-cultural exchange an object like this affords in modern times is extraordinary."

"This represents the first time the fund has received an application for a work of Judaica and a manuscript, both categories represented at TEFAF, here married into one object. We are delighted to broaden the scope of our conservation projects in keeping with the diverse interests of the fair's international audience and exhibiting dealers," said Rachel Kaminsky, an art expert on the TEFAF Museum Restoration Fund committee.

The book will be on view at [TEFAF New York](#) from May 6 through 10, 2022. MFAH conservation efforts will begin later this year.

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, the TEFAF Museum Restoration Fund supports the restoration and conservation of culturally significant works in museums and institutions worldwide. Museums and institutions that have attended TEFAF Maastricht or TEFAF New York are eligible to apply for the grants, which are awarded by an independent committee of experts.

TEFAF will award a second grant to another museum institution leading up to TEFAF Maastricht, which runs June 25–30, 2022.

The Montefiore Mainz Mahzor

During Medieval times, the Jewish communities of the cities of Mainz, Speyer, and Worms became centers of Jewish life in the Rhineland. Charlemagne and his successors invited Jews to settle in the Rhine Valley and they flourished in the ninth and tenth centuries. After suffering at the hands of Crusaders in 1096, they rebuilt their communities in trading towns along the Main and Rhine, commissioning luxurious illustrated manuscripts such as the Mainz Mahzor a century later.

These books belonged to the entire congregation, and were publicly displayed and paged through. Measuring 16 by 11 inches, this codex has 299 leaves, each ruled in ink, pricked and written in black and red ink in Ashkenazic script. It was illuminated with hybrid animals, grotesques, and human figures. Its worn pages, some long ago incised or cut away, are palimpsests of generations of congregants. The *Mahzor* has been on view in the Judaica galleries of the MFAH since it was acquired in 2018.

The MFAH Restoration Process

The conservation treatment will take place at the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation Center for Conservation at the MFAH in the fall of 2022. The grant from the TEFAF Museum Restoration Fund will allow MFAH conservators to undertake an in-depth study of ethical and culturally appropriate conservation treatment for this illuminated manuscript, which has deep significance to the Jewish community. Stakeholders throughout the community will be consulted, and the project will include the input of Dr. Diane Wolfthal, an art historian at Rice University who is currently researching the manuscript, along with colleagues throughout the museum and the conservation field.

The MFAH conservation team has sampled and analyzed the *Mahzor's* parchment by eZooMS (Electrostatic Zooarchaeology by Mass Spectrometry) and determined it to be calf in origin. Many illuminations have been lost due to Christian censorship, and some leaves have been incised or cut out over the centuries by former owners, collectors, or dealers.

Generally, the treatment will include consolidation of leather on the cover of the *Mahzor*, which has lifted over time. Losses and tears of the parchment throughout the book will be mended and stabilized. The parchment used in the *Mahzor* comes from skin from a kosher animal and the text and illuminations would have been produced under the same strict guidelines (“halakha”). Conservation of illuminated manuscripts often requires consolidation—a process that refers to strengthening the bond between pigment and parchment, typically with non-Kosher gelatin. In the Jewish tradition, a scribe (“sofer”) is usually enlisted to restore sacred texts. Before undertaking conservation of the *Mahzor*, the museum’s conservators will determine culturally appropriate methods and materials of treatment after extensive discussion with stakeholders, researchers, and colleagues in order to preserve the essential values of the Mainz Mahzor as a cultural, religious, and research object—and a work of great beauty.

The Restoration Fund’s Committee of Experts

Rachel Kaminsky, a private art dealer from New York who was formerly head of the Old Master paintings department at Christie's; **Dr. Kenson Kwok**, Founder and former Director of the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Peranakan Museum in Singapore; **Carol Pottasch**, a senior restorer and conservator from the Mauritshuis, The Hague; **Dr. Ashok Roy**, Museum scientist and leading international expert on the materials and techniques of European Old Master Paintings; **Sir Nicholas Penny**, Art historian, author, former curator and former Director of the National Gallery, London, make up the international committee of experts which made the decision for this 2022 grant of the Fund.

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ABOUT THE MUSEUM RESTORATION FUND

The TEFAF Museum Restoration Fund was established in 2012 in order to support and promote the professional restoration and related scholarly research of significant museum artworks. Championing art in all its forms, applications for its grants are open to museums from all over the world and artworks from any age. Each year, a maximum of € 50,000 will be allocated to projects. The committee of independent experts usually selects two winners to each receive a maximum of € 25,000 to support their restoration project.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

Spanning 14 acres in the heart of Houston's Museum District, the main campus comprises the Audrey Jones Beck Building, the Caroline Wiess Law Building, the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden and the Nancy and Rich Kinder Building. Nearby, two house museums—Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens, and Rienzi—present collections of American and European decorative arts. The MFAH is also home to the Glassell School of Art, with its Core Residency Program and Junior and Studio schools; and the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA), a leading research institute for 20th-century Latin American and Latino art.

ABOUT TEFAF

TEFAF is a not-for-profit foundation that champions expertise and diversity in the global art community, evidenced in the exhibitors selected for its two fairs, which take place annually in Maastricht and New York. TEFAF acts as an expert guide for both private and institutional collectors, which inspires lovers and buyers of art everywhere.

ABOUT TEFAF NEW YORK

TEFAF New York was founded in early 2016, originally as two annual art fairs in New York at the Park Avenue Armory—TEFAF New York Fall and TEFAF New York Spring. Today, TEFAF New York is one singular, annual fair that encapsulates modern and contemporary art, jewelry, antiques, and design, featuring around 90 leading exhibitors from around the globe. Tom Postma Design, celebrated for its innovative work with leading museums, galleries, and art fairs, has developed designs for the fairs that interplay with the spectacular spaces while giving them a lighter, contemporary look and feel. Exhibitor stands will flow throughout the Armory's landmark building encompassing the Wade Thompson Drill Hall and extending to both the first and second floors of the Armory's period rooms, creating a fair of unprecedented depth and impact in New York City.

ABOUT TEFAF MAASTRICHT

TEFAF Maastricht is widely regarded as the world's premier fair for fine art, antiques and design. Featuring over 280 prestigious dealers from some 22 countries, TEFAF Maastricht is a showcase for the finest art works currently on the market. Alongside the traditional areas of Old Master paintings, antiques, and classical antiquities that cover approximately half of the fair, you can also find modern and contemporary art, photography, jewelry, 20th century design, and works on paper.

TEFAF Maastricht will be held in the MECC Maastricht from June 25–30, 2022. June 24 and until 2 PM on June 25 by invitation only.

PRESS CONTACTS USA

Josh Schoenfelder, josh.schoenfelder@sharpthink.com; 212.829.0002 x136
Sadie Dame, sadie.dame@sharpthink.com; 212.829.0002 x 116

GLOBAL

Magda Grigorian, magda.grigorian@tefaf.com
Bernadette Kiekenbeck, bernadette.kiekenbeck@tefaf.com

UK

Lucy Barry, lucy@culturalcomms.co.uk; +44.07912.627.876
Louise Carlsen, louise@culturalcomms.co.uk; +44.07463.046.482
Zoe Fields, zoe@culturalcomms.co.uk; +44.07464.954.771

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