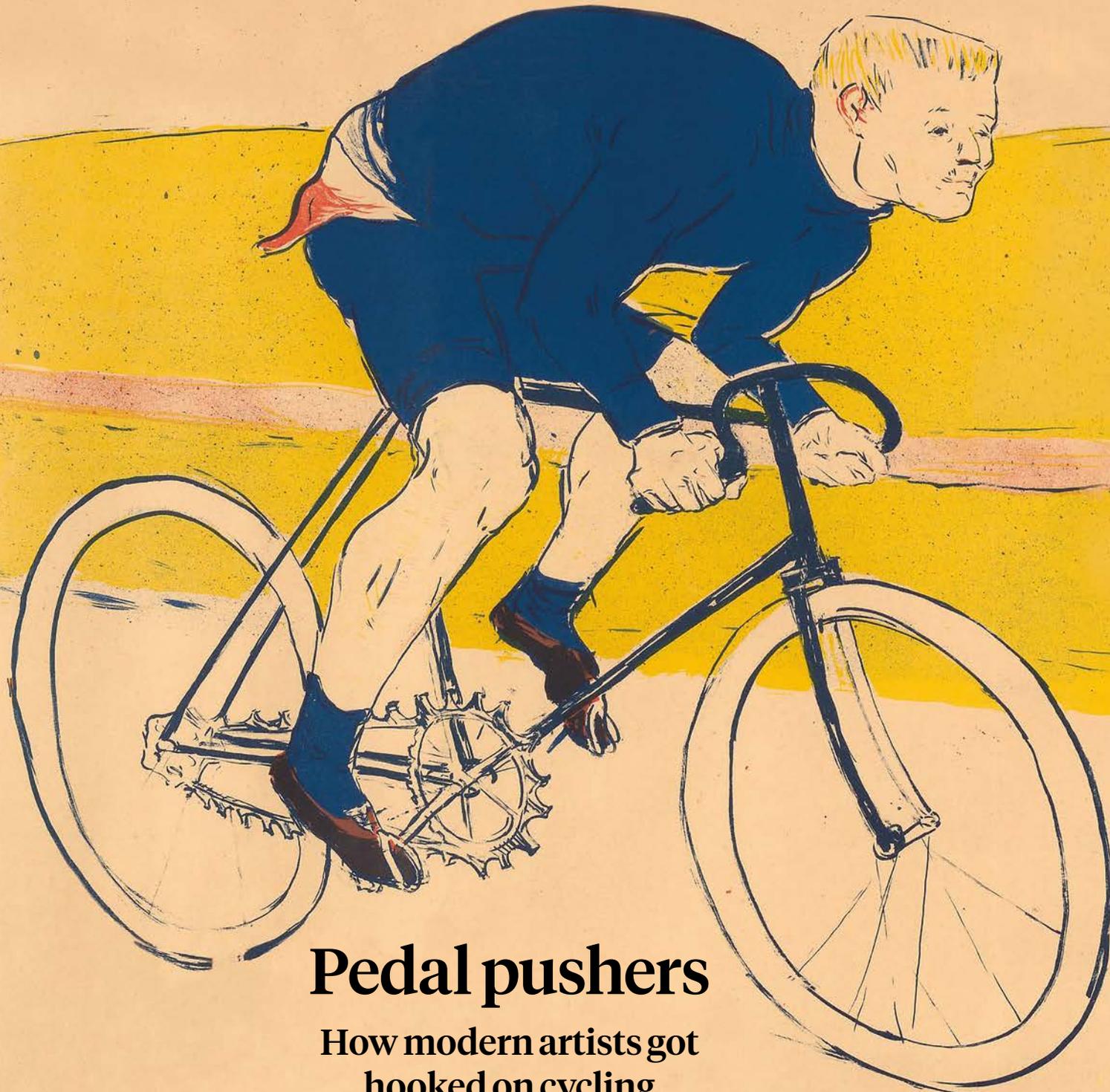


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Around the Galleries

Samuel Reilly

Frieze Week in London might not mean the usual throngs of international visitors in the capital, but art from all over the world will find a new home at Cromwell Place from this month

The London art world is gearing up for a Frieze Week like no other – without Frieze itself, and in the shadow of new lockdown restrictions for the capital, which at the time of writing are impending. ‘They’re certainly keeping us on our toes,’ says Victoria Luxem, operations director at Cromwell Place. But then, nimbleness is something of a guiding principle for this new arts hub – and so in some respects its opening on 10 October comes at just the right time.

Describing itself as ‘an art fair experience without the crowd’, Cromwell Place spans five townhouses in South Kensington, providing 14 exhibition spaces as well as offices, meeting rooms and storage facilities to a list of member galleries. Most of these are based outside of London; Luxem explains that the organisation is, in part, a testing ground – a means for galleries from around the world to ‘dip their toes into the market’, without having to take the plunge of establishing a permanent space.

The opening series of exhibitions and events offers a panoply of art from around the globe. New York stalwart Lehmann Maupin hosts a residency for the British artist Billy Childish, while the Palestinian hyperrealist painter Samah Shihadi will have her first solo show in London with Tabari Artspace. In uncertain times, Luxem says that many of these international galleries have found the flexibility offered by the space more appealing. Above all, Luxem is excited about the sense of ‘community’ that the space will foster. ‘It’s about sharing knowledge, and sharing ideas.’

For Touria El Glaoui, director of 1–54 Contemporary African Art Fair, the importance of community has also been paramount in her decision to press ahead with the fair’s eighth London edition (8–10 October). There was a virtual New York edition in spring, and the organisation has been active online in the months since, with a series of webinars on the future of the African art market. An enhanced digital offering brings its own opportunities, and the fair presents a hybrid programme this year, with an online platform (in partnership with Christie’s) for those galleries that couldn’t travel. But for El Glaoui, ‘One thing missing was the social aspect of the fairs – the relationships made between collectors and galleries.’

The talks programme, curated by Julia Grosse and Yvette Mutumba, founders of



1. *Pillars of Life*, 2020, Tadesse Mesfin (b. 1953), oil on canvas, 161.5 × 130cm. Addis Fine Art at 1–54 Contemporary African Art Fair

Contemporary& magazine, focuses on Latinx artists in the United States, and on diasporic connections between Africa and South America, while the physical fair provides a broad view of contemporary art practice across Africa and its diaspora, from the self-taught Egyptian painter Omar Gabr at Ubuntu Gallery to the acclaimed Ghanaian artist Godfried Donkor at Gallery 1957. At Addis Fine Art, there is an exceptional recent painting by Tadesse Mesfin: *Pillars of Life* (2020; Fig. 1) presents a group of elegant, elongated women at a marketplace

with baskets on their heads – caryatids in 2D, if we’re to follow the lead from Mesfin’s title. The Ethiopian gallery has also become a permanent member of Cromwell Place, and will open a Mesfin solo show – his first in Europe (27 October–15 November). International travel may seem a distant prospect now – but the market is rallying to ensure that art from the wider world need not be far away as well. **A**

Cromwell Place is opening on 10 October (www.cromwellplace.com).