



Art market



Huon Mallalieu

Only connect

A new fair aims to attract new and established collectors and the Royal Watercolour Society has a Secret Postcard Sale

THE new Connect Art Fair at the Mall Galleries, SW1, from 3.30pm on January 29 to February 2, deserves the best of fortune. The name is inspired by E. M. Forster's famous passage about 'the building of the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion... Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted'.

The hope that is expressed by Matthew Hall of Panter & Hall is that it will 'connect buyers with dealers not normally seen at the larger London fairs, and to introduce those many extraordinarily talented artists, from across three centuries, who for one reason or another have slipped off the radar'.

It has been brought together by a dealers' co-operative, rather than a professional organiser, and is intended to fill 'the sudden gap in the fair calendar created by the absence of fairs concentrating on the discerning, entry and mid-level collector'. With the disappearance of the Works on Paper fairs that used to open the London market year, the experiment is well worth attempting.

There will be about 30 exhibitors offering paintings, drawings and prints in a wide variety of styles (Fig 2), from 19th-century traditional to contemporary, with a strong representation of 20th-century Modern British and 'a sprinkling of Scandinavian mid-century modern'.



Fig 1: *Tungsten Requiem* by Dante Marioni, choreographed by Michael Hulls, at Messums Wiltshire



Fig 2 above: Robert Austin's *Cat & Mandolin*, with Elizabeth Harvey-Lee. Fig 3 below: Trevelyan's *Strawberry Hill*, with Manning Fine Art



In fact, despite the emphasis on reviving the reputations of the unjustly overlooked, there will be plenty of well-known names, including Mary Fedden, John Nash, Donald Hamilton Fraser, Julian Trevelyan and David Hockney, as well as that wonderful draughtsman Giovanni Boldini.

Trevelyan's final painting, the 24in by 30in *Strawberry Hill* (Fig 3), which will be with Manning Fine Art at £13,700, was originally commissioned by the dealer John Iddon, who is also an exhibitor.

Blondes Fine Art has a collection of work by Elizabeth Blackadder, including a pastel of cats and a 12in by 8in watercolour, *Blue Poppies* (Fig 4).

There will be true unknowns, too, such as the anonymous mid-century American illustrator responsible for *Trunk Call* (Fig 6), a 30½in by 20in oil painting with Panter & Hall, an impressive piece of work, although one fears for the safety of that mirror. Then there is a 1940s artist of whom I know nothing but the name, David Craig; he painted the amusing 22in by 30in *And Mother Came Too* (Fig 5) offered by Ted Few.

Everything will be vetted and prices are set 'to represent

Pick of the week

Three years ago, I was surprised by the enthusiasm for a collection of 'Wally Birds' and other Martin-ware pottery grotesques that was sold by Phillips,

New York. I had assumed that they were a purely British taste, but prices ran up from \$20,000 (£13,686) to \$233,000 (£159,440), whereas, on home turf, the record stood at about £106,000.

The four Martin brothers ran their pottery first in Fulham and then in Southall for 50 years from 1873 and were best known for the jars modelled as grotesque birds by the eldest, Wallace (1843–1923). Sometimes, these and other strange figures were inspired by Lewis Carroll's characters, but a few Wally Birds were actually based on real people, including the most expensive there, which satirised Benjamin Disraeli.

In December, the same saleroom took \$175,000 (£137,250) for another 'real' Wally, so to speak—a bird modelled on Sir Edward Clarke, the QC who represented Oscar Wilde against the Marquess of Queensbury.

Could a wonderfully bizarre anthropomorphised crab (above)—the top Martin price this time, \$275,000 (£217,250)—have been based on anyone? It measured a massive 16in by 18in. It is a much rarer model than the various birds, but a catalogue essay did not speculate about this, instead proposing that Wallace was inspired by the 17th-century potter John Dwight, who had also worked in Fulham, and linking the Martins' monsters to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau*.



Fig 5 above: *And Mother Came Too* by David Craig, with Ted Few.
Fig 6 below left: *Trunk Call*, anonymous, with Panter & Hall. Fig 7 below right: *London Tree Studios No 1* by Peter Quinn, with RWS



tremendous value in what can sometimes seem an over-inflated London art market'.

Not anonymous, but unidentified artists will be part of the mix at another event opening on the evening of January 29 at the home of the Royal Watercolour Society (RWS), Bankside Gallery, SE1, between Tate Modern and the river. Following the success of a similar event in 2017, the RWS is holding a Secret Postcard Sale as part of a special fundraising exhibition, for

the renovation of its new space in Whitcomb Street, SW1, just across the road from the National Gallery (COUNTRY LIFE, August 1, 2018).

As well as unsigned postcard-sized works by such notables as Ken Howard, Diana Armfield, Shanti Panchal, Annie Williams, Richard Bawden and June Berry—each priced at just £60—the exhibition will include further works on offer in an online auction and—not for sale—some from the diploma collection by

past RWS Members, such as Samuel Palmer and John Singer Sargent. There will also be a model and plans of the new gallery space. The exhibition and online auction (Fig 7) will close on February 3.

Over the years, the Chris Beetles Gallery, Ryder Street, SW1, has been a generous supporter of the RWS. There is still time to investigate the gallery's annual winter online sale, which continues until this Saturday. At the outset, more than 2,500 paintings, illustrations and cartoons were on offer at greatly reduced prices and it is still worth browsing (www.chrisbeetles.com).

Messums Wiltshire is principally housed in the wonderful 13th-century tithe barn at Tisbury that is said to be Britain's largest thatched building. No doubt, the fire-proofing will have

been thoroughly re-checked ahead of the current shows and this weekend's two-day Glass Festival, when demonstrations by contemporary masters using a furnace set up in the barn will be followed by a chance for visitors to blow their own.

The festival marks the closure of a show of glass by Dante Marioni, a member of an American artistic dynasty who trained in Venice to beautiful effect.

It also complements *Tungsten Requiem* (Fig 1), an installation of lights choreographed by Michael Hulls, which continues to February 24. In 2016, Mr Hulls created *LightSpace*, an installation at Sadler's Wells that was the first ever presentation on the main stage without any dancers or performers—other than halogen bulbs.

Next week Legal loving cup

Fig 4: *Blue Poppies* by Elizabeth Blackadder, with Blondes Fine Art

