Bonhams

MAGAZINE | SUMMER 2020 ISSUE 63

Ruth Asawa
Her high-wire act

Henry Moore
His late, great work

The Bloomsbury Group
At least they had each other

Meissen men
Making the mould

and
Asian art around the world

Princess 75 Motor Yacht

EXPERIENCE TOGETHERNESS

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PRINCESS

CRAFTED IN PLYMOUTH, ENGLAND

Old Master Paintings

London
Wednesday 8 July
2pm

Attributed to Francisco Barrera
(Madrid 1595-1657)
The Four Seasons (detail)
a set of four, oil on canvas
143 x 204.5cm (56 5/16 x 80 1/2in). (4)
Estimate: £150,000 - 250,000
($190,000 - 320,000)

Enquiries: Caroline Oliphant
+44 (0) 20 7468 8271
caroline.oliphant@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/oldmasters

Contents

Issue 63

Features

Columns

Front cover

Ruth Asawa (1926-2013)
Untitled (S.408, Hanging Five-Lobed, Two-Part Form, with the Second and Third Lobes Attached by Chain and Interior Spheres in the First and Third Lobes) circa 1953-1954. (detail)
See page 36

California and Western Art

Los Angeles
Tuesday 4 August
1pm

Granville Redmond (1871-1935)
Poppies and Lupine (detail)
oil on canvas
100 x 73cm (20 x 30in)
Painted in 1914
Estimate: $100,000 - 150,000
(£65,000 - 90,000)

Enquiries: Kathy Wong
+1 (323) 436 5415
kathy.wong@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/california

Editor's letter

We all know that in the past three months, the world and our lives have changed. But as the dystopian panic subsides and we embrace the 'new normal', we increasingly realise that amid the considerable suffering and privations, many of our concerns have stayed the same, if not heightened by the situation due to fewer distractions. While confined to our homes, we have been thrown back on our interior resources, and, I hesitate to say, our interiors.

Just before lockdown began, my family was offered the chance to escape to the country. It was such a kind gesture from our friends, but in the end, we took the view we wanted to stay in our own home, surrounded by the things we love. We constantly reading that this is the era of the 'end of stuff' – how no one has objects to dust, or books stacked in lurching towers, due to a combination of technology and the deadly Marie Kondo.

But, in my household anyway, this is patently untrue. And it was at this moment I realised how important and comforting my possessions are.

A lot of Bonhams' clients clearly feel the same. During the past three months, our sales have demonstrated the appetite of collectors – many of them new to Bonhams – to acquire even more. In sales that ranged from Native American Art to 19th century British and European Art, from Motor cars to Prints, the response to our auctions has been what one can only describe as 'highly enthusiastic'. Of course, the sales have taken place without buyers being physically present in any of our salerooms – all bids have been taken online or on the phone. But that hasn't stopped either the buyers, or the excitement. (I was gripped by

the bidding battle in the Islamic and Indian Art sale of a man depicted in several different poses, munching on a sheep's leg. It sold for more than five times the estimate.)Just as our sales are currently taking place online – please visit Bonhams' website for updates – so is this edition of *Bonhams Magazine*. We hope that normal service will be resumed in the autumn.

Contributors

Matthew Sturgis

Matthew Sturgis takes an amused look at the intellectual ferment and socio-sexual entanglements of the Bloomsbury Group on page 18. He is an historian who has published biographies on Aubrey Beardsley, Walter Sickert and Oscar Wilde, as well as reviews for *The Independent* and travel writing for *The Sunday Telegraph*.

Mark Hudson

The former chief art critic of *The Daily Telegraph*, Mark Hudson has won the Samuel Johnson Prize, Thomas Cook Travel Book Award and Somerset Maugham Award for his books, which include *Titian: The Last Days*. In this issue, he considers some monumental late works of Henry Moore (see page 30) – and judges them ripe for reappraisal.

Rachel Spence

Art journalist Rachel Spence writes for the *Financial Times* and other publications, bringing a particular passion to telling the hidden stories of women artists. On page 36, she explores the tough life and ethereal creations of Japanese-American sculptor Ruth Asawa. Rachel's latest collection of poetry, *Call and Response*, was published this year by Emma Press.

Matthew Wilcox

Matthew Wilcox is a freelance journalist and film-maker. He has filmed in a remote island of Canada, fished for salmon and worked with Californian boutique winemakers. He revisits the first encounters between the West and the huge, impassive statues of Easter Island on page 24, investigating the myths of the less familiar wooden *moai kavakava*.

Maev Kennedy

A freelance writer for *The Guardian* and *The Art Newspaper*, Maev Kennedy is also a regular on BBC Radio 4, appearing on panels and presenting *Open Book*. The daughter of two novelists, she has a deep understanding of the artistic impulse – which she discusses on page 42 in relation to the fiercely driven South African painter Irma Stern.

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Editor Lucinda Bredin **Editorial** Andrew Currie, Sasha Thomas **Copy Editor** Simon Coppock **Designer** Nathan Brown **Assistant Designer** Natalia Brusa **Photographs** Bonhams Photography **Advertising Enquiries** Renata.Molina-Lopes@royalacademy.org.uk **Published** four times a year by Bonhams 1793 Ltd, 101 New Bond Street, London W1S 1SR **Subscription** (four issues) £25 for the UK, £30 for Europe or £35 for the rest of the world, inclusive of postage. **Subscription Enquiries** Linda Pellett, Bonhams +44 (0) 1666 502 200; ISSN 1745-2643. Issue 63

Quail Motorcar Auction

Los Angeles
Wednesday 14 August
2pm

Mille Miglia eligible
One of 18 Sprint Veloce Zagatos produced
1957 Alfa Romeo Giulietta Sprint Veloce
Coachwork by Zagato

Estimate on Request

Enquiries: Jakob Greisen
+1 (415) 503 3284
jakob.greisen@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/motorcars

News

In and out of Bonhams salerooms

✳ **Asia Month**

When the world stopped in March, New York's Asia Week, together with the Bonhams Asian sales, went on hold. Now it's time to bounce back. This July, Bonhams will present six Asian Art sales across its global salerooms in London, Hong Kong, New York and Los Angeles.

The works, spanning centuries, will highlight Asian artistry and ingenuity. They range from a rare group of 11 fresh-to-the-market works by the modern master of Chinese paintings Xu Beihong (1895-1953) and his pupils, [left] to be offered in Fine Chinese Paintings on 7 July in Hong Kong, to a collection of gilt bronze sculptures from the recently rediscovered Khasa Malla kingdom of 13th-/14th-century western Tibet and Nepal in the Indian, Himalayan & Southeast Asian Art sale on 23 July in New York. One highlight is a gilt copper-alloy figure of Shadakshari Lokeshvara, *c.*1300-1350 (estimate: US$200,000-300,000), which bears an inscription identifying royal patronage, making the work central to our growing knowledge of this once powerful medieval kingdom. [below right]

In New York's Fine Chinese Paintings and Works of Art on 21 July, there is a magnificent landscape in the style of Yuan Jiang (estimate: US$30,000-50,000) bearing a Yiqin Wangbao collector's seal of Prince Yi, [above left] and a rare imperial midnight-blue embroidered yardage for an emperor's surcoat from the 18th/early 19th century (estimate: US$25,000-30,000). Still in New York, the Fine Japanese and Korean Art sale on 22 July, has a rare pair of late 17th-century Kakiemon 'Hampton Court Vases' (estimate: US$70,000-90,000) and, in the Korean section, a ten-panel Joseon Dynasty screen of the Diamond mountains, which dates to the 1800s (estimate: US$30,000-50,000). There will also be a sale, Refined Pursuits: Fine and Decorative Chinese Art on 26 July in Los Angeles, and more than 600 items of jade, ceramics, textiles and works of arts, including important ancient pottery from the Professor Conrad Harris Collection of Early Chinese Art in the sale of Asian Art on 28-29 July at London Knightsbridge, [below right].

Additional sales will take place in September as part of Bonhams' Asian Art sale week in New York.

Hong Kong Jewels and Jadeite

Hong Kong, Admiralty
Monday 6 July
2pm

An Exquisite Emerald and Diamond 'Cluster' Necklace
by Graff
Estimate: HK$ 1,100,000 - 1,800,000
(£110,000 - 180,000)

Enquiries: +852 2918 4321
jewellery.hk@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/motoring

Pawel Litvinski

Torque of the town

The 1959 Porsche 718 RSK Spyder was as quick and it is elegant – as numerous bigger-engined Italian motor cars found to their cost in endurance road races across Europe. Only 34 of the model were ever built, but the 718 RSK won or was placed at Le Mans, Sebring in Florida and Targa Florio in Sicily. This rare example of the 718 RSK – offered by Bonhams at the Quail Motorcar Auction in the Los Angeles saleroom this August – was ordered new by New Jersey motorsports enthusiasts Bernie Vihl and extensively raced by Bob Holbert, who won SCCA and international events across North America. The RSK was then bought by Long Island enthusiast Herb Wetanson, before entering the current owner's collection in 1974. Previews for this year's Quail Motorcar Auction will take place in Los Angeles and East Coast, and viewings will be held on 12-14 August at the Petersen Automotive Museum.

Enquiries: Rupert Banner
+1 212 461 6515
rupert.banner@bonhams.com

Dog walking

The British artist Elizabeth Frink often took the road less travelled, not least in her unconventional approach to her sculptures. Rejecting the traditional modelling tradition exemplified by past masters such as Rodin, Frink would work her plaster casts with a chisel and surform – a sort of plane that looks like a cheese grater and has a similar effect. Her finished bronzes thus have a distinctive and instantly recognisable textured surface. Frink used this technique to give raw energy and life to her favourite subjects: men, horses – she was a keen rider – and dogs that look so real one expects them to breathe. *The Large Dog*, which leads the Modern British and Irish Art sale in London in July, is a particularly rare beast. From an edition of only six, it dates from 1980 – at the start of Frink's golden decade – and has never before been seen at auction.

Enquiries: Matthew Bradbury
+44 (0) 20 7468 8285
matthew.bradbury@bonhams.com

Modern British & Irish Art

London
Wednesday 1 July
2pm

Craigie Aitchison, C.B.E., R.S.A, R.A.
(British, 1926-2009)
Crucifixion II , 1987-9
oil on canvas
172.8 x 144.8 cm (68 x 57 in)
Estimate: £60,000 - 80,000
(€67,000 - 89,000)

Enquires: Christopher Dawson
+44 (0) 20 7468 8296
christopher.dawson@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/modernbritish

✯ Take a bough

The Universities China Committee in London (UCCL) has played a vital role for scholars in China and the UK since its foundation in 1925, facilitating research visits between the countries and promoting Chinese studies and language teaching in Britain. For the past 70 years, the UCCL has owned a collection of 11 paintings that were presented to the organisation by visiting Chinese artists in 1950. It is now to be offered in the Fine Chinese Paintings sale in Hong Kong in spring. The collection has a fascinating and heartening history. Escaping the hardships of the Chinese Civil War, the student artists found a warm welcome in a London still struggling with rationing and the after-effects of the Blitz; these exceptional paintings were given in gratitude. For years, they hung on loan at the Buddhist Society in London, and from 1968 were on display in the Department of Chinese Studies at the University of Leeds. Many of the young artists were pupils of the President of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, Xu Beihong, a celebrated painter in his own right, whose *Magpies on Autumn Branches* (*above*) is among the highlights of the sale. The proceeds will support the work of UCCL.

Enquiries: Iris Miao
+852 2918 4321
iris.miao@bonhams.com

✯ Don't try this at home

Desperate remedies against pandemics are nothing new. Sir Isaac Newton wrote that the best cure for the plague was to suspend a toad in a chimney for three days until it vomited insect-rich earth onto a dish of yellow wax and, unsurprisingly, died. "Combining powdered toad with the excretions and serum made into lozenges and worn about the affected area, drove away the contagion and drew out the poison." In fairness, the great man added more practical advice: "places infected with the Plague are to be avoided." These ideas are contained in two unpublished pages of notes, handwritten by Newton, which were sold in Bonhams online-only Essential Genius: Ten Important Manuscripts sale in early June. They represent the only significant writings on the subject by the world's greatest scientific mind.

✯ Swan around

This wonderfully opulent gala-sleigh – reputedly commissioned by Ludwig II of Bavaria – forms part of the sale of the Jacob Collection in London on 29 July. King Ludwig did nothing by halves, as visitors to his fairytale castle Neuschwanstein will know. Sometimes called the 'Swan King' – they say he influenced Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake* – he was also known, less flatteringly, as 'Mad King Ludwig' by those in his government who were plotting to dethrone him. Days after his exasperated ministers forced him to abdicate, Ludwig drowned in Lake Starnberg, in mysterious circumstances.

The Jacob Collection also contains objects that span more than 3,000 years – from Egyptian and Roman antiquities to 20th-century design. There are impressive collections, too, of cameras, scientific instruments, Victorian erotica, Japanese works of art and books, furniture, paintings, and toys, including a full-size children's carousel made in 1951, all to be sold without reserve.

Enquiries: Charlie Thomas
+44 (0) 20 7468 8358
charlie.thomas@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/privatecollections

Modern & Contemporary Art

London
Tuesday 23 June
5pm

Damien Hirst (b. 1965)
Twenty Four Hours, 2008 - 2009
signed, titled and dated 2008/09 'Twenty Four Hours' Damien Hirst (on the reverse)
metal, resin and plaster pills and watercolour on canvas
27.9 x 35.6 cm. (11 x 14 in.)
Estimate: £15,000 - 20,000
($19,000 - 25,000)

Enquiries: Cassi Young
+44 (0) 20 7468 5815
cassi.young@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/mca

✯ Swimming in opals

Everyone who met Gloria Manney recognised her as one of a kind. A voracious collector with curiosity, courage and a point of view all her own, she and her husband Richard researched and collected an amazing array of cultural objects, including rare books and 18th- and 19th-century fine and decorative arts. They assembled the greatest collections of American portrait miniatures and American colonial goldsmithing, which are both now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Their furniture can be seen at the Winterthur museum, the Met and the Art Institute of Chicago. But Gloria's first love – right from childhood – was the opal: her birthstone. Her magnificent collection of opals comes to Bonhams Los Angeles on 30 June. It includes a stunning black opal and diamond pendant from the world's premier locality for the mineral – the Coocoran Opal Fields, Lightning Ridge, Australia. Designed by Jenni Brammall and carved by Daniela L'Abbate, the 99-carat stone evokes waves and the swirling seas. No wonder they named it 'Aqua Profonda' – Deep Water.

Enquiries:
Claudia Florian +1 323 436 5421
claudia.florian@bonhams.com

✯ Look, don't touch

The Bolognese Baroque artist Marcantonio Franceschini is very much a painter's painter. Less well known to the general public than some of his contemporaries, Franceschini – whose son Giacomo followed in his father's footsteps – enjoys a higher reputation among art historians. The go-to scholar on the work of Marcantonio Franceschini was Dwight Miller, who published the standard work on the artist in 2001. Miller's erudition and irrepressible personality – his poll parrot Polly would fly over his head as he bicycled to work in the art department of Stanford University each day – won him numerous friends and admirers in the academic community and beyond. Over the years, Miller acquired an impressive collection of paintings, highlights of which are to be offered at the Old Master Paintings sale in London in July. They include a wonderfully vibrant *Noli Me Tangere* by – who else? – Marcantonio Franceschini.

Enquiries: Caroline Oliphant
+44 (0) 20 7468 8271
caroline.oliphant@bonhams.com

What happened next…

Super car: super price
A 1932 Bugatti Type 55 Super Sport Roadster sold for $7,100,000 at Amelia Island in Florida in March.

Hitting the high notes
Singing and acting legend Diahann Carroll's Steinway baby grand soared to ten times its estimate at the Los Angeles sale of her estate in March.

Hail to the Chief
Watussi Chief's Wife, by Irma Stern, topped the Modern & Contemporary African Art sale in London in March, selling for £447,000.

Indian, Himalayan & Southeast Asian Art

New York
Thursday 23 July
10am

A Gilt Copper Alloy Figure of Shadakshari Lokeshvara
Khasa Malla, circa 1330-1350
7 1/4 in. (18.5 cm) high
Estimate: $200,000 - 300,000
(£160,000 - 240,000)

Enquiries: Edward Wilkinson
+852 2918 4321
edward.wilkinson@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/himalayana

Knock, knock

Hu's here. *Benedict Tsang* talks to Bonhams' new Chairman, Greater China

Right
Bobbie Hu, Chairman, Bonhams Greater China, enjoys the mindfulness of the tea ceremony
Image courtesy: United Daily News

Below
Richard Lin (Lin Show-Yu, 1933-2011)
July 58

Bobbie, you have spent almost three decades working in the art and luxury world. Was this what you have striven towards ever since you were small?
Believe it or not, my childhood ambition was to marry a baker – simply because I loved bread. It doesn't exactly sound ambitious, does it?

How did that work out?
Well, I actually ended up starting my working life in the aviation industry. My first job offer was as a flight attendant for China Airlines, which I eventually turned down. My late father poked fun at me, saying that I might splash coffee on a passenger – I was quite a character back then. So instead I took a back-office job with Singapore Airlines, handling seat reservations and ticketing. I am a numbers person, so counting fares and checking mileage was a natural match for me then. We are talking about a time when everything was done manually – you even wrote out plane tickets by hand.

How did you step into the auction world?
Literally with a landline telephone and a typewriter. It was 1991. Christie's established a joint venture with Swire in Taipei, and I got the job as an administrator. I still remember stepping into that windowless, five-square-metre office on my first day – I was all by myself. On the desk were a corded telephone, a typewriter, and a big folder of client information. My task was to call them up, one by one, to make sure they would receive a catalogue: the rest is history.

You mentioned that you already knew how to bid by then?
My late father was a collector of Chinese coins and ceramics, so I grew up in a home full of auction catalogues. Destiny, perhaps.

And you soon rose to one leadership role after another, didn't you?
At Christie's Taiwan, I had to build everything tirelessly by myself, from client liaison to setting up a legal office. After Christie's, I served as Managing Director at

Left
Modigliani's 1918 *Portrait de Jeanne Hébuterne (tête de profil)*

Below
This 28.44-carat Burmese unheated 'pigeon's blood' ruby and 19.50-carat diamond necklace will be offered at Bonhams' Hong Kong on 6 July (estimate HK$2,600,00 - 3,600,000)

Sotheby's and at Bulgari. After all these years, my clients have become like my friends.

What is the biggest change that you have noticed in the industry?
Definitely the collector. In the past, people in Asia wouldn't start collecting until they were more established in life – I'm talking about being 40 years old at least. Their tastes were what we now call 'traditional', focusing on Chinese paintings and Chinese ceramics.

How about now?
Now the crowd is so much younger. You have many people in their 20s or 30s, buying contemporary art as a hobby while also collecting whisky and watches at the same time – the lifestyle element is stronger than ever. Also, wealth has spiralled in the past two decades, so the collector in Greater China is now generally looking for an upgrade in life. They keep an open mind to all collecting categories and celebrate eclecticism. This is where online sales like our 'Luxury Online' series – which captures the spirit of the digital generation and of diversified collecting tastes – have become important: they are an effective way of tapping into this younger group.

What is the key goal in your new position at Bonhams?
I have been reconnecting with collectors and cultivating new clients in Greater China, and this is something that I will continue to focus on. Having spent the past decade just with jewellery at Bulgari, this could not be more exciting for me, as I get to learn more and meet more interesting minds. Bonhams is such a time-honoured company, and I am really looking forward to raising awareness among collectors over here even further. It is so important to me that they get to enjoy being with us, an auction house that listens to its clients and works with their needs.

How do you find work-life balance over so many years of demanding jobs?
For one, I am quite blessed that I don't easily get nervous, so that helps tremendously. But sometimes it is necessary to take a moment to feel grateful for what you have. Personally, hobbies like the tea ceremony, volunteering and meditation have been really helpful – I practice them often. My last meditation camp lasted seven days, up in the mountains, at the end of January. It was just when COVID-19 hit Taiwan, and perhaps we went a little too deep into meditation – nobody was aware of the pandemic until we left the mountains. It felt as if the world had changed completely during that week.

Is there that one artwork that you really remember?
It would probably be one of Modigliani's many Jeanne Hébuterne portraits. It registered clearly in my mind because I saw it on my first trip to Paris in my 20s. I also like Cézanne a lot. My father made museum visits a huge part of my childhood, especially the National Museum of History. He always purchased my tickets, so it wasn't until I grew up that I realised one has to pay to get in.

For those readers who have never been to Taiwan, where would you recommend they go? Especially for the arts...
For a unique taste of Taiwan, you need to visit the east coast, where the stunning coastline runs hundreds of miles along the Pacific Ocean. Nature is a given there, but it is also home to many outdoor art projects and festivals. Cloud Gate – an internationally renowned modern dance group – famously gives an annual performance amid Taitung's paddy fields. Imagine an abstract dance performance in the countless paddies that seamlessly extend towards the towering mountains in the distance. It is a visual experience of an intensity like no other.

Benedict Tsang is Head of Communications, Asia.

The Modern and Contemporary Art sale is on 10 July at the Admiralty in Hong Kong.
The Hong Kong Jewels and Jadeite sale is on 6 July.

New York Jewels
New York
Tuesday 28 July

A 15.52 Carat Old-Mine Cut Diamond Ring
Estimate: $125,000 - 175,000
(£95,000 - 133,000)

A 14k Gold and Ruby Bracelet, Cartier
Circa 1960
Estimate: $6,000 - 10,000
(£4,500 - 7,500)

An Emerald, Ruby and Diamond Parrot Brooch, Cartier
Circa 1955
Estimate: $8,000 - 10,000
(£6,000 - 7,500)

Enquiries: Brett O'Connor
+1 212 461 6526
brett.oconnor@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/jewelry

Group sex

The Bloomsbury Group was notoriously self-absorbed. But out of that incestuous milieu came art of great fascination, writes *Matthew Sturgis*

Right
Roger Fry (1866-1934)
Portrait of E.M. Forster, 1911
oil on canvas
28¼ x 23⅝in (73 x 60cm)
Estimate: £30,000 - 50,000
($40,000 - 65,000)

"Only connect...". Even to those who know nothing of E.M. Forster's writings, the phrase is familiar. It is both the epigraph and the theme of his novel, *Howard's End*. It might also be a fitting motto for the Bloomsbury Group.

Connection – or, perhaps, interconnection – was at the heart of 'Bloomsbury'. Intellectual relations, human relationships: the various 'Bloomberries' may have had very different ideas, very different tastes, very different approaches, but they remained, to themselves and to others, always a 'group' – passionately engaged in debating their positions, enjoying their perspectives, and having sex with each other.

And it is this sense of interconnectedness that gives such a distinctive flavour to so many Bloomsbury productions – as the various personalities sought to memorialise, anatomise and amuse both themselves and each other in paint and prose.

There are memoirs and biographical sketches, portraits and self-portraits, letters and home-furnishings, semi-autobiographical novels and self-revelatory Christmas cards.

In August's sale of Fine Books and Manuscripts, there is a copy of William Hickey's *Memoirs* (in four volumes), inscribed to Lytton Strachey by his (largely frustrated) lover Dora Carrington – and her husband Ralph Partridge (whom Lytton lusted after): a rare literary memento of the quintessentially Bloomsbury *ménage* that the *trois* maintained at their Wiltshire home, Ham Spray. The four volumes contain – in a further nexus of Bloomsbury interconnection – the slightly larger version of the little bookplate that Carrington created for her beloved in 1931, only shortly before his death: his name set within a lightly rococo cartouche against a trellised background.

Carrington recalled sticking these plates into books with Lytton one afternoon and "suddenly" thinking of

> "'Bloomberries' passionately engaged in debating... and having sex with each other"

a particular Bond Street auction house that need not be named here, and of "the bookplates in some books I had looked at, when Lytton was bidding for a book and I thought: These books will one day be looked at by those gloomy-faced booksellers and buyers. And suddenly a premonition of a day when these labels will no longer [be] in this library came over me. I longed to ask Lytton not to stick in any more." And perhaps she did ask him, for certainly the bookplates (particularly

Opposite
Duncan Grant (1885-1978)
Study of Vanessa Bell
oil on board
24⅛ x 16⅛in (61.3 x 41cm)
Estimate: £20,000 - 30,000
($25,000 - 40,000)

Left
Duncan Grant (1885-1978)
The Plaster Cast – Venus, *c.*1918-19
oil on canvas
16½ x 10½in (42 x 26.5cm)
Estimate: £12,000 - 18,000
($15,000 - 25,000)

in this larger format) are rare enough to put a smile on the face of even the gloomiest-faced buyer.

Although – as the 20th century advanced – 'Bloomsbury' became more and more conscious of the interest of posterity (and the commercial implications of the same), it managed always to maintain its own keen fascination with itself. This self-absorption – and the artistic virtues that arose from it – are well caught in the sprightly late self-portrait by Vanessa Bell, done around 1952, when she was in her seventies. With the sitter, only half in the picture, framed by a wide-brimmed straw hat, and set within the muted tones of the magical Charleston interior that she had, herself, created, it is an image layered with artistic – and Bloomsbury – resonances. It is one of several of the group's paintings to be offered in the Modern British and Irish Art sale at Bonhams New Bond Street in July.

There are layers and connections too, of a different texture, in Roger Fry's wonderfully perceptive and amusing portrait of E.M. Forster, done some four decades earlier in 1911.

Although Forster stood slightly apart from the inner Bloomsbury coterie of Cambridge friends and Stephen sisters (Virginia and Vanessa), he was a familiar part of their world, and in constant engagement with it.

He had a particular affection for Fry, the painter-critic, whom he came to know as a neighbour in Surrey – rather than London. There were regular Sunday lunches *chez* Fry, and much mutual admiration mingled with occasional bouts of bemusement. Forster was impressed by Fry's ability to be both a 'Modern' and a rationalist. Fry delighted in Forster's 'really beautiful writing', but wished the novelist would 'keep his mysticism out of his books'.

The portrait – painted at a time when Fry, steeped in the Parisian experiments of Post-Impressionists, Fauves and Cubists, was striving to introduce something of their daring simplification

Left
Duncan Grant (1885-1978)
Vanessa Bell, *c.*1913
pencil and oil on board
11 x 10in (27.8 x 25.5cm)
Estimate: £6,000 - 8,000
($8,000 - 10,000)

Below
Duncan Grant (1885-1978)
Reclining Nude with Fan
signed 'Duncan Grant'
oil and charcoal on paper
laid on panel
22½ x 30¼in (57.2 x 77cm)
Estimate: £5,000 - 7,000
($7,000 - 9,000)

Opposite
Vanessa Bell (1879-1961)
Self-portrait, *c.*1952
oil on canvas
16½ x 12¼in (42 x 31cm)
Estimate: £20,000 - 30,000
($25,000 - 40,000)

and anti-naturalism into his own practice – was an upshot of that happy friendship and those Sunday lunches.

The closeted-homosexual Forster gave, to a friend, an account of the work in progress: "Roger Fry is painting me. It is too like me at present, but he is confident he will be able to alter that. Post-Impressionism is at present confined to my lower lip which is reduced thus... and to my chin on which soup has apparently dribbled. For the rest you have a bright, healthy young man, without one hand it is true, and very queer legs,

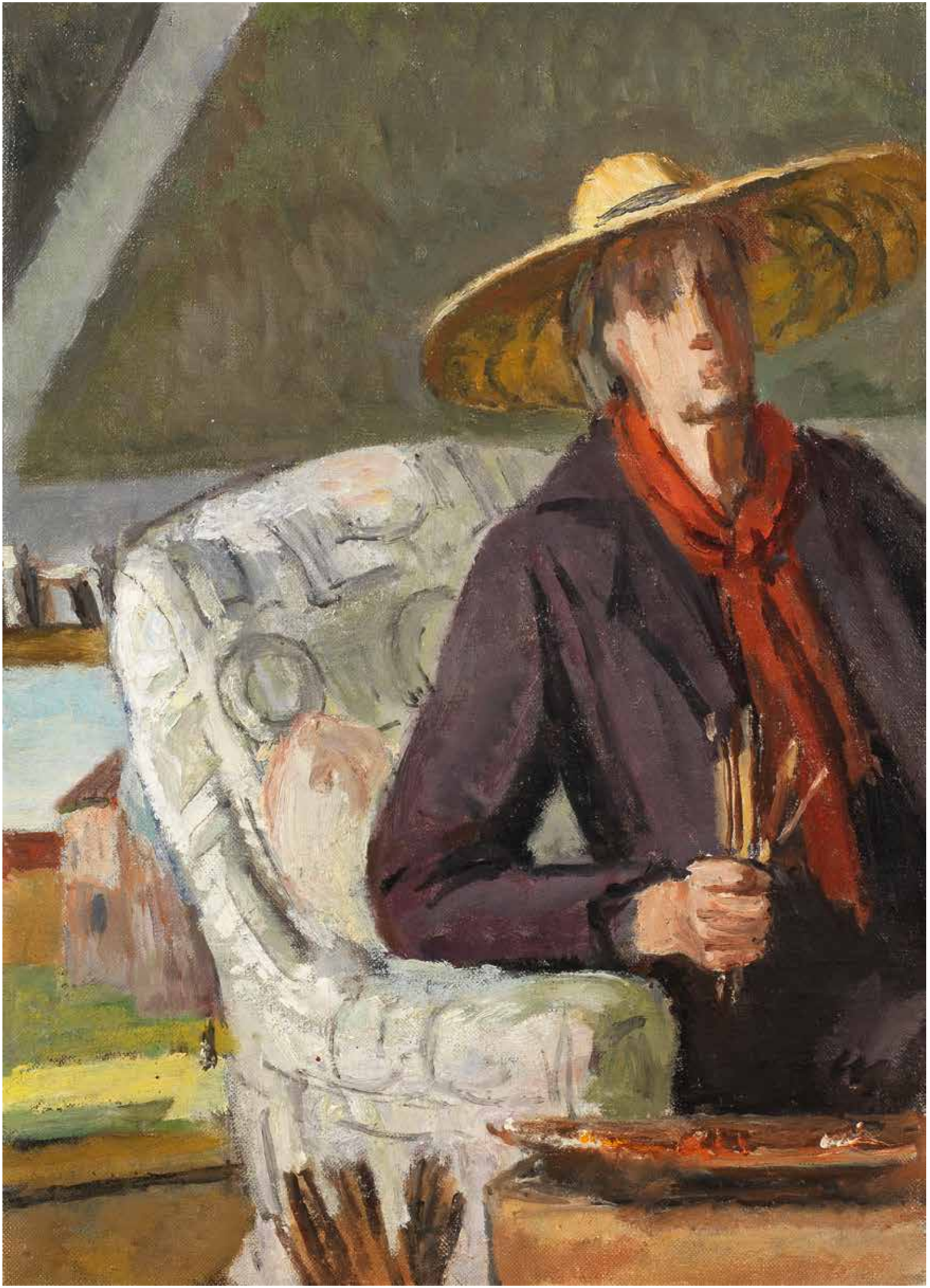
"Roger Fry is painting me. It is too like me at present, but he is confident he can alter that"

perhaps the result of an aeroplane accident, as he seems to have fallen from an immense height on to a sofa."

There was, it turned out, much telling psychological truth expressed by those severe abbreviations and stylistic impositions, and particularly by the treatment of those legs. When the picture – purchased by Forster for £17 10s – was installed in the family home at Weybridge, it provoked a concerned inquiry from a visiting vicar to Forster's mother: 'I hope your son isn't queer.'

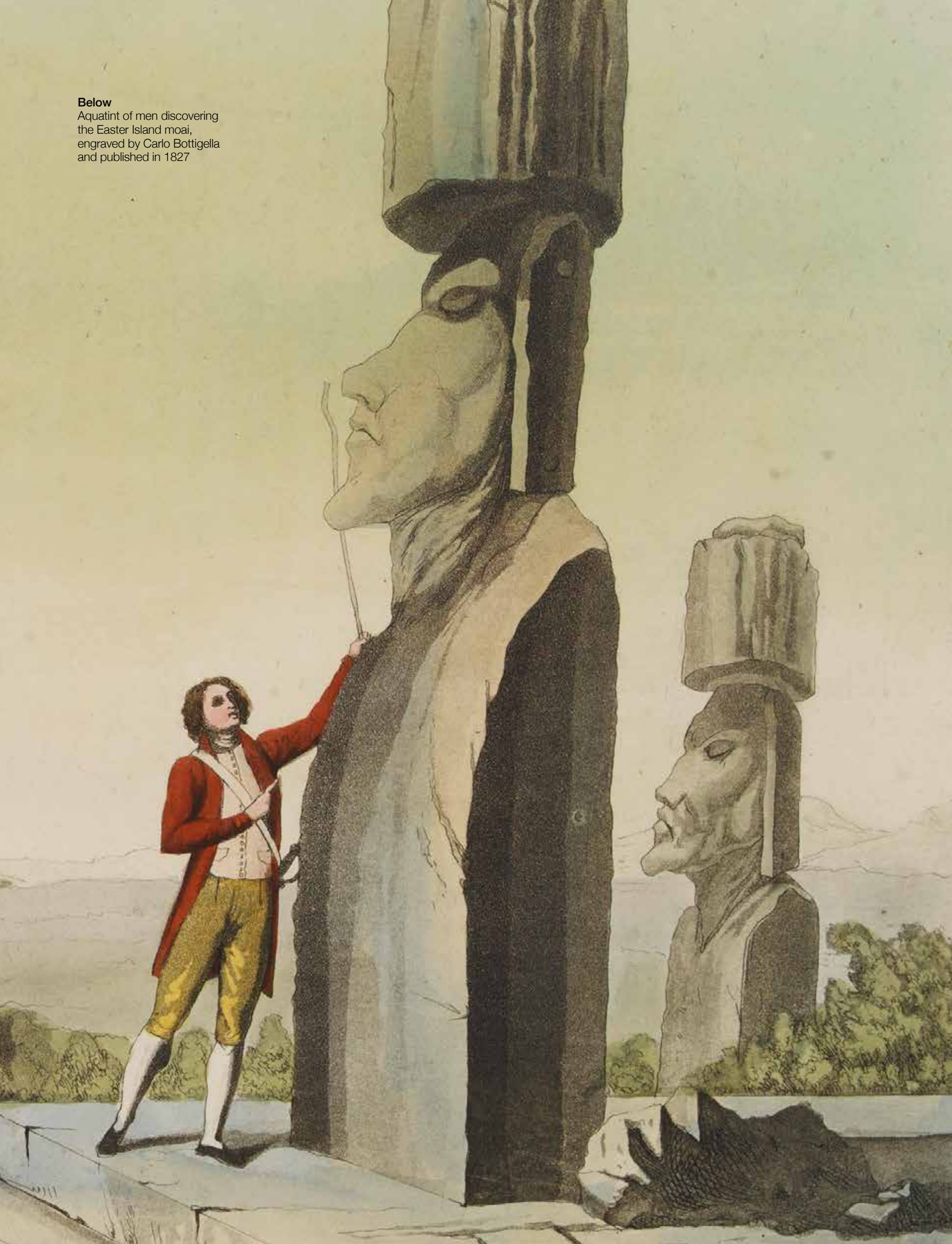
Matthew Sturgis is the author of several award-winning biographies including Oscar: A Life *(2019) and* Walter Sickert: A Life *(2005).*

Sale: Modern British and Irish Art
New Bond Street, London
Wednesday 1 July at 2pm
Enquiries: Matthew Bradbury
matthew.bradbury@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/modernbritish



Paradise lost

The mystery of the great stone idols of Easter Island has captivated the world for centuries. But, says *Matthew Wilcox*, the island's wooden carvings have their own story to tell



Below
Aquatint of men discovering the Easter Island moai, engraved by Carlo Bottigella and published in 1827

The story is an old one, but it bears retelling: After hundreds of years in isolation, religious mania strikes the inhabitants of a tiny island deep in the South Pacific. For generations, the population toils in the carving of great stone idols. Huge numbers of trees are required for this activity, deforestation ensues – cue soil erosion, famine, war, cannibalism and, eventually, cultural obliteration.

This fable has made the face of the stone *moai* of Easter Island some of the most famous images in the world, and the poster child for Malthusian collapse.

Less known, but equally fascinating, are the island's wooden carvings, *moai miro* – curious human and combined human-animal forms, including birds, lizards and sea eels. Perhaps the most enigmatic of these figures are the *moai kavakava*, whose name derives from the word for 'figure' (*moai*), and *kavakava*, the Rapa Nui (Easter Island) word for 'ribs'. A superlative example of this art form is to be offered by Bonhams in Los Angeles at the African and Oceanic Art sale in July.

Formerly in the collection of Commander John William Pike, who probably acquired it while on duty with HMS *Devastation* in the Pacific during the early 1860s, the Blackburn *kavakava* is thought to date to the 1840s. These wooden figures are the supreme expression of the art and ingenuity of one of the most extraordinary societies on earth. Its grim, corpse-like visage is all the more affecting as it captures that society at the very moment of its almost total destruction.

Indeed, if the myth of Easter Island we began with caught the world's imagination, it is by no means as extraordinary as the island's true history. For the settling of Rapa Nui by Polynesians represents the culmination of one of the greatest feats of skill and perseverance in human history as, sailing against the prevailing winds and guided only by the stars, these unsurpassed mariners ventured out across the vast Pacific.

More than 1,000 miles from the nearest landmass, Easter Island is the easternmost point of the Polynesian Triangle, an area of some 800,000 square miles of ocean – bounded at its northern tip by Hawaii and its southern corner by New Zealand – and tied together by mutually comprehensible languages, rituals and customs.

Debate still rages over exactly when the island was settled, but it is now thought to have occurred about 1,000 years ago. The indigenous inhabitants credit its discovery to the king Hotu Matu'a, a legendary figure of the heroic era of Polynesian navigation. An entire society crammed themselves onto huge double-hulled outrigger canoes for the journey, along with their staple crops of taro, sugar cane, yams and bananas, their domesticated animals, and paper mulberry trees, the inner bark of which was used to create a fine white barkcloth.

The new settlers referred to the island as *te pito o te henua*, 'the navel of the world'. There, a society of hereditary chiefs, priests, clans and guilds took shape, and a sophisticated cultural life blossomed, revolving around an intricate spiritual world, with its worship of ancestor spirits (*aku-aku*) and concepts of taboo and *mana* – or sacred power.

Opposite
Cadaverous male figure, Easter Island/Rapa Nui
18½in (47cm) tall
Estimate:
$800,000 - 1,000,000
(£600,000 - 750,000)

Above
Man of Easter Island (1776), engraved by William Hodges

Right
Photograph of a *moai*, with a Chilean boy sitting on a horse for scale, taken at Rano Raraku, Easter Island, *c*.1914-1915

If we know all this, why is the island still routinely reduced to an Ozymandian warning about the perils of resource depletion? What really happened to destroy this complex and fascinating culture? The mystery of Easter Island is not the creation of the stone *moai* – spoiler alert: they commemorate powerful ancestors.

"An entire society crammed themselves onto huge double-hulled outrigger canoes"

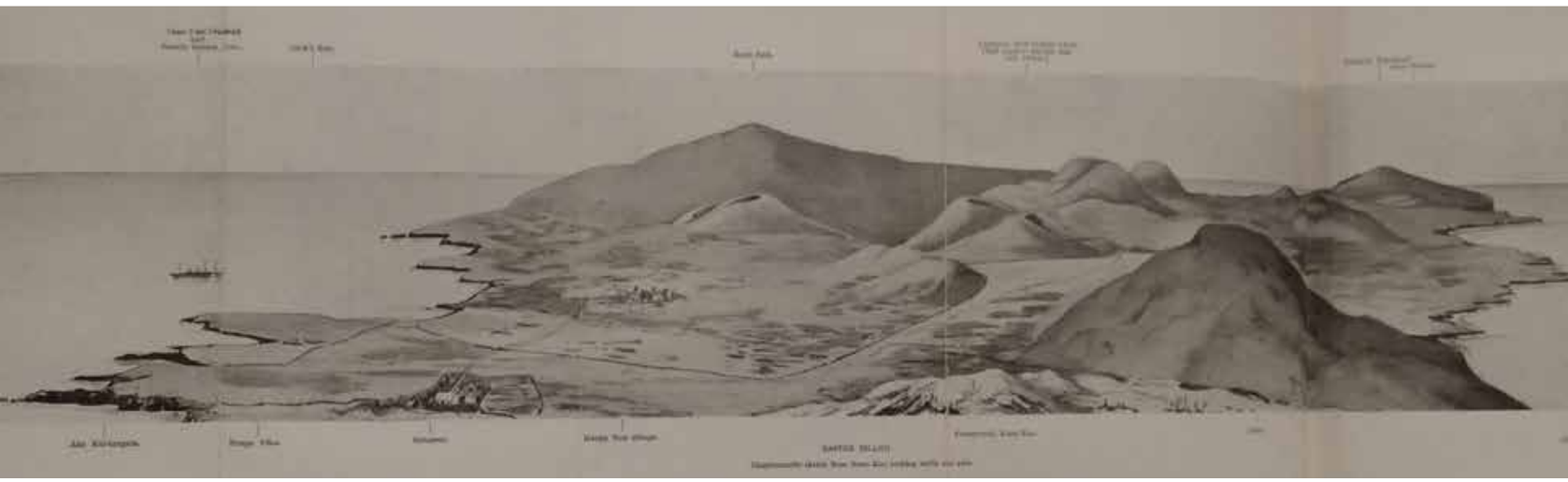
Its dark secret is that what nearly terminated the indigenous populace and its culture was genocide.

In 1862, around 1,300 islanders – half the population – were kidnapped by Peruvian slavers in a single raid and shipped to the Chincha Islands off the coast of Peru. There, Maurata – the last King of Rapa Nui – died in the guano quarries, along with his family and almost the entire class of priests, learned men and carvers.

With the disappearance of these men, the genealogies, histories, myths and legends that might have shed light on the island's past also vanished. The carving of figures, introduced to the island by its first inhabitants 1,000 years ago, ceased. This is the reason so much of the island's past is veiled.

By the 1870s, ravaged by smallpox and the predations of slavers, the number of native islanders had collapsed from an estimated 3,000 to barely a hundred souls. A few years later, the island was annexed by Chile and the land given over to sheep.

Piecing together the world of the islanders has been the work of many generations since. Key to this are the magnificent artefacts they created: the stone *moai*, of course, but no less important are the textiles and stories and carvings that were fortunate enough to make it off the island in the hands of whalers, sea captains and traders before missionaries ordered the confiscation and destruction of the majority of surviving carvings. Today, there are as few as 85 *moai kavakava* that date to before the island's conversion to Christianity in the late 1860s.



In the late 19th century, a few survivors began to record what was remembered of the days before the Peruvian raids, carefully writing down in notebooks what had previously been transmitted by wise men. It was these survivors whom the English anthropologist Katherine Routledge found when she visited in 1914. And it is thanks to them that we know the story of the creation of the *moai kavakava*:

One day, at dawn, Tu'u Ko Ihu walked along the road from Tore Tahuna and arrived at Puna Pau, the quarry of the stone hats. There, he saw two figures sleeping. The king stopped; he looked carefully; there was no meat, no liver, no intestines – only bones. After the king had passed by, the aku-aku *gathered their meat, appearing as living men once again. They sought the king on the road, and greeted him heartily, "Welcome, oh king! What did you find when you came here? Three times in different guises they asked the* ariki*, and each time the king said, "Nothing". After dark, the* aku-aku *prowled the ground outside the house of Tu'u Ko Ihu, listening to*

"The king saw two figures sleeping. There was no meat, no liver, no intestines – only bones"

hear if he spoke about what he had seen. The ariki*, however, held his tongue.*

The next day, when the king awoke, he took the wood called toro-miro*, and he began to carve. First he carved the eyes, then he carved the nose, he carved the ears, he carved the throat, he carved the torso, he carved the hands, he carved the stomach, he carved the ribs... The first* moai *was Hitirau, the* moai kava-kava*, a warning for all of what the king had seen.*

Opposite top
Sketch of Easter Island, looking from Rano Kao, 1914

Opposite below
Woman of Easter Island (1777) by James Caldwall, after William Hodges
Back of of the Rongorongo Tablet G (Small Santiago)

Above
A View of the Monuments of Easter Island, painted by William Hodges on his return from accompanying Captain Cook on his Second Voyage (1772-75)

Opposite
Cadaverous male figure, Easter Island/Rapa Nui
18½in (47cm) tall
Estimate:
$800,000 - 1,000,000
(£600,000 - 750,000)

Like the outrigger canoes of those first settlers, which were loaded with the essentials for life, the stories and songs of the Easter Islanders had been encoded with the seeds of renewal. The islanders were able to begin carving again.

> *The king took a thread. He tied one end to the throat of the* moai *and another one to the feet. Pulling the strings with the hand, he made the figure walk. Soon, the word had spread all over the island: the dead are walking.*

Against all the odds, Easter Island society did not collapse irrevocably; the makers of the island's giant stone *moai* did not disappear. Rapa Nui culture was not totally eradicated and today their identity, language, traditions and magnificent art live again.

The islanders are telling their stories again. The ancient tale ends, *Ku ha'ere 'ā te mōai 'i roto i te hare o te 'ariki o Tu'u Ko Ihu*. "The *moai* are walking in the house of the king Tu'u Ko Ihu."

Matthew Wilcox is a freelance journalist and film-maker.

Sale: African and Oceanic Art
Los Angeles
Thursday 2 July at 10am
Enquiries: Fredric Backlar
+1 323 436 5416
fred.backlar@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/oceanic

More and Moore

At the very peak of his career, Henry Moore's work became controversial. *Mark Hudson* revisits the late, great work of a monumental national figure

In 1966, when Henry Moore made *Two-Piece Sculpture No.7: Pipe* (which is offered at Bonhams' Impressionist and Modern Art sale in New York in July), his status as Britain's greatest living artist appeared unassailable. His cutting-edge thunder may have been usurped by younger sculptors such as Anthony Caro, but Moore – the first artist to give British modern art an international profile, the man who paved the way for all those who came after – stood above fashion. A craggy, plain-speaking Yorkshireman, eulogised in endless TV documentaries and magazine features, Moore was a truly monumental national figure. And that esteem extended well beyond these shores, with a seemingly never-ending round of major Moore exhibitions staged throughout the world over the post-war decades.

Yet on the work Moore was producing at this time, critical – and public – opinion remains divided.

Born in Castleford, Yorkshire, in 1898, the son of a mining engineer, and brilliantly gifted as an artist, Moore was marked out for eminence from an early age. Yet his determination to break the stranglehold of the academic tradition – felt in common with artists throughout Europe – drew hostile reactions in the interwar period. By the late 1940s, however, that had changed: Moore now represented the official face of British art. His organic-abstracted images, which drew on the elemental forms of the British landscape but never lost sight of the human figure – and human values – felt life-affirming in a world recovering from the Second World War.

Promoted by the British Council as the embodiment of a forward-looking post-war Britain, Moore became the go-to artist for public sculptures in new architectural developments across Britain's bomb-damaged cities.

Below
Henry Moore (1898-1986)
Two-Piece Sculpture No.7: Pipe, conceived in 1966
bronze, inscribed (on the base) 'Moore 6/9'
37in (94cm) in length
Estimate: $550,000 - 800,000 (£420,000 - 620,000)

© Getty Images

Opposite
Henry Moore strove to "present the human psychological context of my work with the greatest clearness and intensity"

With unlimited resources and teams of assistants at his disposal, Moore was able – from the 1950s to the 1970s – to produce bigger, heavier, more imposing works to fulfil ever more prestigious commissions, even as his physical strength was declining. Yet, while works such as *Arch* (1979-80) and *Sheep Piece* (1972) have achieved a degree of popularity and are still widely exhibited, they have come to be thought of as over-inflated – as though in the transition from tiny maquettes from Moore's own hands to monumental dimensions (*Sheep Piece* is more than 18 feet high) some vital energy and tension has been lost. Tate's major 2010 Moore exhibition included only a handful of works from after the mid-1950s – barely looking at the three decades prior to Moore's death in 1986.

"Moore and his assistants produced bigger, heavier, more imposing works "

The past decade, however, has seen signs of a change in the received wisdom on late Moore. Gagosian's 2012 exhibition *Late Large Forms* – shown in London and New York – presented the artist in a starker, more contemporary fashion, offering a leaner, fitter late Moore. By emphasising the work's increasing abstraction, it was able to reject both the historical context that tends to bog Moore down, and the slightly mannered stylisation that besets some of his earlier, more explicitly figurative works.

This rediscovered Moore is exemplified in *Two-Piece Sculpture No.7: Pipe*, a relatively small work (by the standards of this period) at just a metre wide. Here, the apparent abstraction of its polished forms is offset by hints of dramatic, even erotic figuration. The two-part structure, meanwhile, a typical feature of Moore's later work, brings echoes of one of his most characteristic subjects, one he returned to obsessively over five decades, a subject that takes us back to the beginning of his career and his early fascination with non-Western art: the reclining figure.

Moore's pivotal encounter with what was then called 'primitive art' came in the early 1920s, when he'd just arrived in London as a student at the Royal College of Art – after traumatic service in the First World War.

At this time, he discovered on weekly visits to the British Museum the "intense vitality", as he described it, "the direct and immediate response to life" of traditional African, Oceanic and Pre-Columbian sculpture.

But the sculpture that exerted a more profound influence on him than perhaps any other was a plaster-cast of a Mexican chacmool figure encountered at a museum in Paris. The male reclining figure – its face turned towards the viewer, supporting itself on its elbows, with knees raised – was designed as a sacrificial altar. But what impressed Moore was the sense of dynamic compression in the balance of upright upper torso and raised knees – the way the sprung energy of the form seemed to emanate directly from the block of stone from which it was carved. It was a quality he sought to emulate in many of his finest carvings of the period, such as the brown Hornton stone *Reclining Figure* (1929) in Leeds Art Gallery. But, while the Mexican image was male, Moore's recumbent figures were invariably female: embodiments of womanly strength and fecundity,

"His recumbent figures were a complement to his repressed inner struggles"

and of an idealised serenity that provided a distant complement to his own repressed inner struggles.

As Moore explored the possibilities of the reclining figure over the decades, the forms became more abstracted, in line with the general modernist tendency towards reduction and formalisation: an approach Moore claimed allowed him to "to present the human psychological context of my work with the greatest clearness and intensity".

From the late 1930s, it occurred to him that these two essential parts of the human form – the upper and the lower, the raised torso and the bended knees – could be presented as separate elements, engaged in a sort of elemental conversation, even a confrontation, in which the echoes of landscape – always discernible in his work – could be made explicit. "I realised what an advantage [that] could be... If it is a single figure you can guess what it's going to be like. If it is in two pieces, there's a bigger surprise, you have more unexpected views."

In one of the best known of such works, *Two-Piece Reclining Figure No.5* (1963-64), at Kenwood House, upper and lower body appear sliced apart like once conjoined landscape features subjected to some violent fissuring. Yet there is no doubt which part of the body is which: the lower part, the generative portion, which keeps the body mobile, exists in an elastic parenthesis to the sentient upper section, the site of intelligence.

By the time we get to *Pipe* two years later, the appearance of abstraction is far more complete, the term 'reclining figure' has been replaced by simply 'sculpture'. But for anyone even slightly conversant with Moore's work, the echoes of that key motif will be immediately obvious.

Now, however, the sentient part has become irrefutably male, its phallic protrusion – coyly alluded to by the sculptor as the stem of a pipe – touching the more rounded lower part, which seems to cower away from it. The harmonious reciprocity of the two-part reclining figures has been replaced by a sense of invasion, even aggression, with a convex hollow in the 'female' part bringing to mind an open mouth or even a vagina. The muscular surfaces inspired by stones, bones and other organic forms, of which Moore kept large collections in his Hertfordshire studio, are rendered in highly polished bronze with none of the deliberate scratching and distressing seen in other works of this period – a calculated smoothness that somehow enhances the work's transgressive feel.

This is a work that presents the "human psychological context" of Moore's oeuvre with a disconcerting explicitness. It confirms the sense, remarked on by a number of close observers, that there was a great deal of anguish and unresolved conflict seething beneath the bluff, down-to-earth exterior Moore showed the world. It makes an excellent starting point for the rediscovery of a complex body of late work whose deeper resonances have yet to be explored.

Mark Hudson is an art critic and author of Titian: The Last Days.

Sale: Impressionist and Modern Art
New York
Tuesday 7 July
Enquiries: Molly Ott Ambler
molly.ott@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/impressionist

Opposite
Moore's monumental bronze *Oval with Points* (1968-70) at the Henry Moore Foundation in Much Hadham, England – site of the master sculptor's studio.

High-wire act

Ruth Asawa created sculptures that evoke both fragility and the enduring power of the natural form *Rachel Spence* explores this extraordinary artist's life and art

Subtle and ethereal, Ruth Asawa's wire sculptures grace numerous international collections, among them the Guggenheim and the Whitney in New York. As far back as the mid-1950s, she was participating in the São Paulo Art Biennial and exhibiting at New York's prestigious Peridot Gallery, alongside titans such as Philip Guston and Louise Bourgeois. And now her artistry is enjoying another richly deserved flurry of attention, with a monographic show at David Zwirner's New York gallery in 2017, a solo show in Zwirner's London gallery in 2020, and, on its heels, Modern Art Oxford is planning a major retrospective for January 2021.

But there is no need to wait until next year to admire one of her statement works of art. One of Asawa's brass-wire sculptures is currently on view (by appointment) at Bonhams Los Angeles. This work, *Untitled* (S.408), is to be included in the Post-War and Contemporary Art sale on 1 July. It was acquired in 1954 by close friends of the artist, soon after it had been completed. Asawa had designed the sculpture so that it could hang from the ceiling, and her friends installed it near a window so that it would throw shadows and interact with the natural world that inspired it. Until now, this artwork has never been shown to the public.

A serpentine cascade of curvaceous forms that flow in and out of each other through slender necks, the sculpture is, like much of Asawa's work, woven from tiny loops of wire. The result is a delicate, shimmering mesh that acts as a magnet for light and shadow. Asawa's enthusiasm for wire stemmed from her desire to show how "the relation between outside and inside was interdependent, integral".

Right
Ruth Asawa (1926-2013)
Untitled (S.408, hanging five-lobed, two-part form, with the second and third lobes attached by chain and interior spheres in the first and third lobes)
*c.*1953-1954 (detail)
Estimate: $1,000,000 - 1,500,000 (£750,000 - 1,200,000)

Today, thanks to artists such as Agnes Martin and, more recently, Cornelia Parker, who employed grids as ways to play with ideas of private and public landscape, such notions are no longer as radical as they were when Asawa began to explore them. But then Asawa matured in a world that was colonised by the macho, painterly heroics of Abstract Expressionists, and after that by Pop Art's celebrations of the sellable and superficial.

Significantly, the very luminosity of her career conceals the hardships of her early life. Asawa was born in Norwalk, California, in 1926. Here were planted the seeds of her refusal to follow the zeitgeist. Her childhood was a cocktail of love and hardship, where imaginative responses to difficulty were not a choice but simply essential

"During the Second World War, Asawa's entire family was interned"

to her survival. Growing up on the family farm, Asawa was one of seven children born to parents who were Japanese immigrants. During the Second World War, the family was interned. Asawa's father was arrested by the FBI and sent to a detention camp in New Mexico, while Asawa was interned with her mother and siblings in Arkansas.

Asawa remained unbowed. Passionate about art from childhood, she originally planned to become a teacher, but anti-Japanese sentiment made student teaching unsafe.

Yet, as she put it herself, "good comes through adversity". Unable to complete her degree, Asawa enrolled at Black Mountain College. According to Emma Ridgway, the curator of the upcoming retrospective at Modern Art Oxford, Asawa's vision – "embodied, sensitive and intimate, in synergy with nature" – is rooted in her time at this extraordinary institution, where her teachers, people like Josef Albers, were grounded in the Eastern mysticism of Taoism and Zen Buddhism.

Founded in 1933 by John Andrew Rice, and based on John Dewey's principles of progressive education, Black Mountain was structured according to ideals of democracy, collaboration and equality. Not only were students encouraged to pursue different

Opposite
Ruth Asawa making wire sculptures, November 1954

Above
Ruth Asawa (1926-2013)
Untitled (S.408, hanging five-lobed, two-part form, with the second and third lobes attached by chain and interior spheres in the first and third lobes) *c*.1953-1954 (detail)
Estimate: $1,000,000 - 1,500,000 (£750,000 - 1,200,000)

© The Estate of Ruth Asawa / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy The Estate of Ruth Asawa and David Zwirner

disciplines – including art, literature, dance, music and photography – they were also expected to undertake work on the college farm and in the kitchens.

With teachers who included Buckminster Fuller (who would build his first large geodesic dome at Black Mountain), Albers and Ilya Bolotowsky, Black Mountain was a benign and nourishing hothouse for Asawa's nascent determination to follow a creative path less ordinary.

Although her curious, open-minded sensibility ensured she enjoyed every element of Black Mountain's multidisciplinary programme, it was to be drawing that became the foundation stone of Asawa's practice.

Her early works on paper manifest a sparkling gift for line and colour. Alongside adept yet poetic figurative studies and rhythmical abstract patterns in pen and ink, Asawa had no compunction about 'drawing' using found materials. A glorious 1949 work shows tendrils of golden ferns meandering across a berry-red surface. Indeed, such experimentation was encouraged at Black Mountain, where resources were often scarce. "Since we didn't have anything to work with, we worked with the leaves which were plentiful in North Carolina, the wild leaves."

The mountain landscape, with its abundance of plants, trees and wildlife, proved a rich playground

"Since we didn't have anything to work with, we worked with leaves"

for a young artist whose love of nature was rooted in her rural youth. Throughout her life, Asawa remained devoted, as she put it, to "observing plants, the spiral shell of a snail, seeing light through insect wings, watching spiders repair their webs in the early morning, and seeing the sun through droplets of water suspended from the tips of pine needles while watering my garden."

While still at Black Mountain, Asawa realised that her desire to "give structural form" to her images meant her destiny lay in sculpture. A trip to Mexico in 1947 unlocked the door to this three-dimensional world when a craftsman in Toluca showed her how he wove baskets out of looping wire.

Her translation of skills developed by local artists and craftspeople puts Asawa in a lineage of modernist practitioners, from Picasso – who stole visual concepts from objects made in Africa and Oceania – to Anni Albers. Anni Albers was also present at Black Mountain, alongside her husband Josef, and her adoption of weaving methods used by artisans in Peru is fundamental to the potent, jazzy equilibriums of her textile art.

The looped wire permitted Asawa to create sculptures that evoked translucent natural phenomena, such as spiders' webs, dew on

Above
The Sculpture of Ruth Asawa: Contours in the Air, a 2006 exhibition at the de Young Museum in San Francisco

grass blades and dust-ladders of sunlight. With their porous, transparent skins, these diaphanous shells acted as cages for shadow. "The shadow will reveal an exact image of the object," Asawa noted with satisfaction. Nowhere is this clearer than in Bonhams' beautiful offering, where the shadows flicker like internal ghosts haunting the outer form.

Once she had her signature method, Asawa explored new tributaries. By assembling a central stem of hundreds of wires, then dividing them into single branches, she created the geometric, abstract expressions she described as "tied-wire sculptures". In a move typical of her playful, unfussy temperament, she collaborated with an industrial plating shop to work out how to alter her sculptural surfaces chemically. The result is electroplated works with rough, time-worn patinas. In shades of copper-green, underwater-blue, and wind-dried sand, these sculptures are reminiscent of coral, bark and driftwood, sumptuous testaments to Asawa's ambition to create "living, organic forms."

Despite having found her aesthetic, Asawa found the hardships of her life were far from over. Certainly, her gender and ethnicity counted against her in the mid-century US art scene. She and her husband, the architect Albert Lanier, with whom she had no fewer than six children, based themselves in San Francisco, where mixed marriages were legal, unlike in many states. But Asawa struggled to ship her fragile works to New York, then the hub of contemporary art, for display. Aside from the expense, they were often damaged in transit. These problems, allied perhaps to her own growing commitment to public service, in particular, education, saw Asawa shift her focus towards outdoor art commissions and social projects.

Her open-air sculptures include the mermaid fountain, her first representational work, that graces Ghirardelli Square on San Francisco's waterfront. But perhaps her most spectacular achievement was the foundation, in 1982, of a public high school devoted to the arts: it is now called the Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts.

Asawa died peacefully in 2013. It seems unlikely that she resented the shift across her career from glossy gallery and blue-chip museum to more collective, grass-roots projects. An artist who once said, "Art is for everyone... not something that you should have to go to the museums in order to enjoy", Asawa lived her life "to the full", according to Ridgway, and, ultimately, always regarded her "school and community work as most important".

Those of us beyond her West Coast orbit, however, must be grateful that Ruth Asawa's vision is dancing on more distant shores.

Rachel Spence writes for the Financial Times*, among other publications, and is a poet. Her latest collection of verse is* Call and Response *(Emma Press, 2020).*

Sale: Post-War and Contemporary Art
New York
Wednesday 1 July at 6pm
Enquiries: Sonja Moro
sonja.moro@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/contemporary

Stern words

Irma Stern's debut exhibition was vilified, but this formidable woman went on to become one of South Africa's greatest modern painters, writes *Maev Kennedy*

Opposite
Irma Stern (1894-1966)
Swahili Woman, 1945
signed and dated 'Irma Stern/ 1945'
oil on canvas, in the artist's
original Zanzibar frame
25⅝ x 22⅛in (65 x 56cm)
Estimate: $950,000 - 1,200,000
(£750,000 - 950,000)

In 1920, the artist Irma Stern, aged just 25, returned to hold her first solo art exhibition in her native South Africa, a year after her first exhibition in Germany. She certainly created a stir.

The art-loving elite in Cape Town in 1920 still came mainly from a deeply conservative British Colonial background. Stern's work was far from the ladylike flower paintings and charming landscapes her compatriots might have expected and welcomed. Instead, its fierce brushstrokes, severe lines and searing colour – influenced by her art education in Germany and her encounters with Max Pechstein and the young Expressionist artists of the Novembergruppe in Berlin – were denounced as "lunatic" and "insults to human intelligence". The outrage went further. Because of her admiring nude studies, regarded as an affront to human decency, the police were challenged to investigate. A typical review was headlined, "Art of Miss Irma Stern: ugliness as a cult".

Stern responded indignantly: "Everything that is new – and almost everything is new to these narrow-minded people – is simply laughed at, scorned and afterwards imitated."

By the time of her death in 1966, Stern had carved out a stellar reputation, but even by the standards of earlier decades, a charge of ugliness is hard to understand looking at her work *Swahili Woman.* Painted in Zanzibar in 1945, it shows a noble figure enfolded in beautiful, traditional hand-painted robes, slightly smiling and apparently lost in thought.

The Zanzibar paintings, mainly portraits of Arab subjects with striking features, have been among Stern's best-loved works, sought by collectors from the start. She gave them distinctive frames, made from strips of deeply carved wood recycled from antique doors on the island. As early as 1947, one of the paintings was bought from a touring exhibition for the French national collection; it is now in the permanent collection at the Pompidou Centre in Paris.

Even among the many works created in one of the most productive periods of Stern's life – during the long expeditions in the 1930s and '40s to Zanzibar and the African interior – *Swahili Woman* was clearly special to Stern. It was exhibited in Cape Town in

> "Her admiring nude studies were denounced as an outrage to human decency"

1946, featured in several international exhibitions, and became the cover of her lavishly illustrated *Zanzibar* journal, which like its *Congo* counterpart was published to acclaim. However, for 20 years she kept bringing *Swahili Woman* home to hang on the walls of her studio in Cape Town.

The painting was not sold by Stern until 1965, when she permitted the South African collectors, the Rosenberg family, to acquire it for the very respectable price of 300 guineas – their third piece of Stern's work. Lilian Rosenberg recalled the artist's undisguised hostility when she accompanied her husband to

This page
The formidable Irma Stern,
in her garden

Left
Seated nude with oranges
signed and dated 'Irma Stern / 1934' (lower right)
oil on canvas
88 x 83cm (34 5/8 x 32 11/16in).
Sold for £1,700,000 in 2011

negotiate buying *Swahili Woman*: Stern gave her the most uncomfortable chair, and completely ignored her throughout the visit.

Now coming from a private collection in London, the painting will be offered in Bonhams' African sale in September.

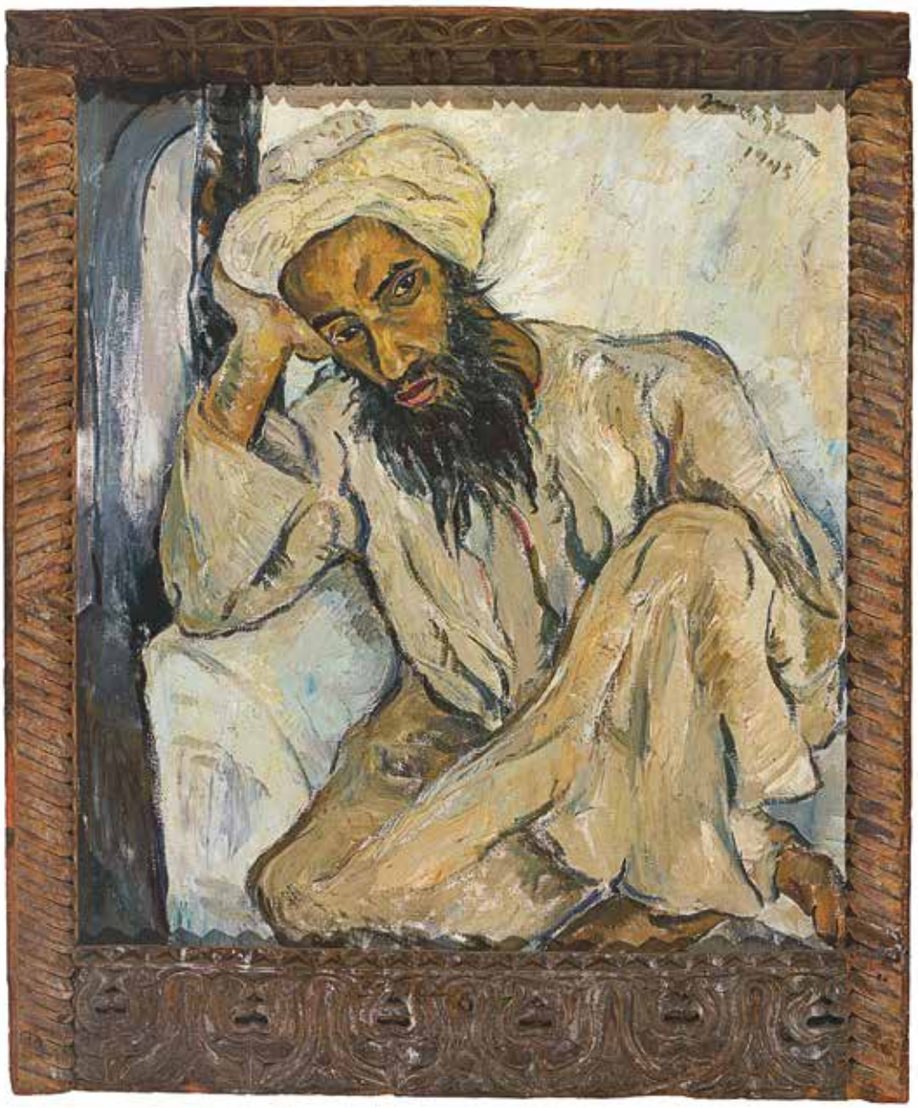
In her early years, Stern was fortunate that she never needed to earn a living from her art. Later in life, when she was hand-picking patrons like the Rosenbergs, and forcing them to wait years for the privilege of acquiring her work, she certainly could have supported herself through her sales, though by then she was independently wealth by inheritance.

"She started to paint at the age of three, and her earliest memories were of colour"

She was born in 1894 of prosperous German-Jewish parents, in the small town of Schweizer-Reneke, in Transvaal. In a radio interview in 1961, she claimed that she started to paint at the age of three, and that her earliest memories were of colour – of the brilliant blue sky above the yellow plains of the High Veld.

Stern's mother moved her two small children to Cape Town during the Boer War, during which their father was interned by the British because of his perceived pro-Boer sympathies. The family later returned to Germany and travelled extensively in Europe for several years. By the outbreak of the First World War, Stern – who said she never contemplated any occupation other than being an artist – was studying in Germany, first at the Weimar Academy and then, when she found that too conventional and restrictive, at the Levin-Funcke Studio, where she encountered ambitious young artists bent on smashing conventions.

Stern's disastrous initial reception back home in South Africa in 1920 did not dent her confidence, though it took years before she could sell anything. By 1950, having exhibited almost every year at home, and usually also in London and other European galleries, loaded with international prizes and honours, she



Left
Irma Stern's oil painting *Arab Priest* (1945), which achieved £3,044,000 at Bonhams' South African Sale in 2011

was chosen to represent her country at the Venice Biennale, an honour repeated in 1952, '54, and '58.

By all accounts, she was a formidable woman, and clearly sometimes quite hard work. She described herself as having the appearance "of a well-dressed lady, but inwardly I run more and more wild". There are no self-portraits except for a single pencil sketch, but one early photograph – taken in her glorious garden – shows her staring straight to camera with a strikingly no-nonsense air.

In 1926, Stern married an academic, Johannes Prinz, her former tutor, who became Professor of German at the University of Cape Town. The marriage barely lasted six years before ending in divorce: she kept the Firs, the handsome house her father had given them as a wedding present.

Stern did have a devoted companion, Dudley Welch, who was also her assistant for decades – one touching story was that he held up Stern's painting of a Madeira fishing scene for her to study as she lay dying in a hospital bed. But otherwise, Stern's life had her work at its centre. She was involved in all aspects from framing the pictures, organising and hanging the exhibitions, and choosing the lucky purchasers.

Her output was formidable. She wrote, "The pictures fell into my lap like ripe pears falling on to the grass at autumn. It was as though waves laden with fertility were breaking over my head." She thought about the paintings deeply until they were clear in her head, she said, but, once they were on the canvas, "I never change a line".

Cape Town and even her garden did not provide nearly enough fuel for Stern's fire. She took long trips into what she regarded as the "real" Africa, travelling extensively in South Africa but also visiting Senegal, the Congo, Zanzibar and North Africa. She collected local crafts and materials by the crate – frequently exhibiting them alongside her own work – and filled sketchbooks that inspired scores of paintings.

> "Her driver would shout out the joyful news, 'Bring out your old rubbish, the mad woman will buy it"

She boasted of an almost psychic connection to the people and the landscape of the heart of Africa, writing: "The sound 'Congo' makes my blood dance, with the thrill of exotic excitement; it sounds to me like distant native drums and a heavy tropical river

Above
Stern's studio in her Cape Town house, now part of the Irma Stern Museum

Above right
Stern's *Watussi Woman* (1942) achieved £1,161,250 in Bonhams' Modern & Contemporary African Art in 2011

flowing, its water gurgling in mystic depths."

"It is all like prehistoric days when man was still in his childhood. It is here in the jungle that I meet man completely nude... in no way divorced by clothes or huts from nature."

As she arrived into remote rural settlements, her driver would shout out the joyful news "Bring out your old rubbish, the mad woman will buy it", and on one occasion she recruited the people of an entire village to help push her stalled car. Although she was noted for her love of food, she wrote cheerfully of the necessity of having all meat thoroughly boiled before serving, to kill whatever bugs had been crawling in it earlier.

In Zanzibar, she found a different stimulus in the narrow streets and ancient houses of Stone Town, and the striking faces and distinctive robes of its residents. She recruited many models in the souk near her rented lodgings; she also bought extensively in the souk, acquiring antiques and contemporary crafts, but striking hard bargains, reckoning to get the prices down to at least a third.

Her Cape Town home, still full of her paintings and of treasures brought back from her travels, has been a museum since 1971. Its large, elegant and opulently furnished rooms are painted in jewel colours, with her own added painted decoration covering surfaces including cupboards and doors. The rooms – hung with pictures to the ceilings, as in her day – include the dining room where colour-coordinated dinners were regularly served to friends, with matching tableware, linen and food. When she was working in the lemon-yellow-walled studio, doors open to the jungly garden, often working at her easel from early morning until late at night fuelled by strong black coffee, endless cigarettes and occasional brandies, she hung an imperious "Do not disturb me please" framed notice on the door.

By the time of her death in 1966, aged 71, she was South Africa's best-known and best-regarded artist, and her reputation has been rising steadily in the 21st century.

"The artist creates in order to become free of himself, only to find himself again in the end", Stern wrote, with justified pride.

Maev Kennedy writes for The Guardian *and* The Art Newspaper.

Sale: African Art
New York
Tuesday 2 July at 4pm
Enquiries: Giles Peppiatt +44 (0) 20 7468 8355
giles.peppiatt@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/macaa

Right
Miniature portrait of Augustus the Strong (1670-1733), Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, circa 1720.
Attributed to Charles Boit (1662-1727)
enamel on copper, with gilt-metal pierced floral scrollwork frame surmounted by a crown,
7.1cm
Estimate: £1,000-1,500

Of Meissen men

It was under the auspices of the brutish, priapic Elector of Saxony that Europeans finally unlocked the secrets of China's exquisite porcelain, as *Andrew Currie* explains

Augustus II, the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, was popularly known as 'Augustus the Strong' because of his astonishing physical strength. He could break a horseshoe in half with his bare hands and his variant on the cruel sport of fox-tossing sounds particularly unpleasant, especially for the fox. These days, however, his name more associated with a gentler achievement: the founding of the Meissen porcelain factory in 1710.

Like many European monarchs, Augustus (1670-1733) greatly admired Chinese and Japanese porcelain. This had been exported to the West since the early 17th century, but the secrets of its manufacture had never been unlocked. In 1700, in the quest to make his own 'white gold', as porcelain was known, Augustus first engaged the services of mathematician and scientist Ehrenfried von Tschirnhaus. When von Tschirnhaus died, the torch

"Augustus II, the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, could break a horseshoe in half with his bare hands"

passed to his assistant, Friedrich Böttger, who had come to the Elector's attention in the early 1700s with a foolhardy and entirely spurious claim to be able to turn base metal into gold. Augustus had kept him

Left
An important Meissen silver-gilt-mounted tankard, circa 1725-30
20.2cm high
Estimate: £30,000-50,000

Right
A highly important tapestry portrait of Augustus the Strong, circa 1713-29
Most likely made in the workshop of Pierre Mercier in Dresden, wearing a scarlet coat and tricorn hat, the Order of the Golden fleece, and other orders
85 by 66cm in a later giltwood frame
Estimate: £8,000-12,000

a virtual prisoner ever since, and Böttger, possibly mindful of the fate of those foxes, had reluctantly complied. But it was Böttger who, in the end, delivered a prize even greater to his master's heart than limitless wealth: the mastery of making porcelain.

Augustus's passion for Meissen – he called it *maladie de porcelaine* – has been shared by many over

"Böttger delivered a prize greater than limitless wealth: porcelain"

the centuries, from the crowned heads of Europe, to whom he made strategically self-promotional gifts, to some of the great contemporary collectors. The private collection of Meissen to be sold in London in July – the third such sale from the same owner – makes it easy to see why: it contains wonderful things.

There is the figure of Augustus the Strong himself, for example, made around 1720. It is a small, elegant piece and exceedingly rare: no other has come to auction in 30 years.

Or there is the very early and delicate Böttger Stoneware covered bottle vase, which was made between 1710 and 1713, when the factory was in its infancy. It was once in the collection of the Margräfin Karoline Luise of Baden-Durlach, herself a remarkable woman, for whom the word 'formidable' could have

been invented. Fluent in five languages, she was also a good musician, a talented artist, and a regular correspondent with the great thinkers and artists of her time, among them Voltaire and Goethe. She would brave storms and downpours to drag her entourage – hills around Baden-Baden in search of rare minerals for her 'Cabinet of Minerals'. The bottle vase remained in the collection of the Margraves of Baden until its sale in 1995.

From its founding in 1710 until 1865, the Meissen factory – or the Royal-Polish and Electoral-Saxon Porcelain Manufactory to give it its full name – was situated in the Albrechtsburg, on a hill high above the River Elbe. The late Gothic castle, built on the site of a 10th-century fortress, remains a place of pilgrimage for Meissen devotees to this day, and the collection includes a charming and very rare Meissen slop-bowl from around 1723-1724, with a view of the Albrechtsburg on one side and the Elbe on the other.

Augustus kept the technical details of his great discovery close to his chest, though he lost little time in ensuring that word of his triumph got around – he sent messages in seven different languages to his fellow monarchs boasting that he was now a match for the Emperor of China. By the middle of the 18th century, however, porcelain was being made by Doccia in Florence, Capo di Monte in Naples, Sèvres near Paris and Nymphenburg in Bavaria. All these factories developed new advanced techniques and produced brilliant, much-admired designs, but for many Meissen remained, and remains, the king of porcelain – and Augustus the Strong (with some help) its one true progenitor.

"She would brave storms in search of rare minerals"

Andrew Currie is Deputy Director of Press at Bonhams.

Sale: Important Meissen Porcelain from a European Private Collection
New Bond Street, London
Wednesday 22 July at 1pm
Enquiries: Nette Megens
nette.megens@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/porcelain

Opposite left
A very rare Meissen Böttger stoneware black-lacquered octagonal vase and cover, circa 1710-19
14.4cm high
Estimate: £50,000-80,000

Left
A very rare large Meissen Augustus Rex vase and cover, circa 1730-35
Estimate: £20,000-30,000

Opposite below
A very rare pair of Meissen tortoise-shaped boxes and covers, circa 1728
16.5cm long; 7.5cm high
Estimate: £25,000-35,000

Right
An early Meissen figure of Augustus the Strong as Imperator, circa 1715
10.5cm high
Estimate: £40,000-60,000

Left
Jeejeebhoy on an Indian postage stamp from 1959

The merchant prince

Juliet Fitzgerald admires a rare portrait of the first Indian to be knighted by Queen Victoria

At first glance, the portrait is of a middle-aged man dressed in traditional Parsi garb – a flowing *jama* (a floor-length double-breasted coat) and *pichoree* (a waist cloth) of linen and cotton, as well as *nokh jutti* (pointed slippers) and a tall *pagdi* on his head. He sits on a chair in a lavish interior. In the background, there's a glimmer of a heavy gilt frame, a sumptuous Kashmir shawl casually draped on a table. But this

> "The accumulation of wealth is not the focus of the portrait – it's the medal pinned to his left breast"

accumulation of wealth is not the focus of the picture. One could argue that even the portrait of the man himself – Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, Baronet – is not the main motivation for the commission. It's the medal he has pinned to his left breast.

Known far and wide as 'the Merchant-Prince of

Main image
Attributed to Lamqua
(active 1820-1860)
*Portrait of Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, 1st Bt (1783-1859), c.*1844
oil on canvas
19 x 26in (48.3 x 66cm)
Estimate: $70,000 - 90,000
(£50,000 - 70,000)

Opposite
An artist working in a studio in Hong Kong

Above *Engraving of the Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy Hospital in Bombay* (1843) by C. Rosenberg, after W.J. Huggins

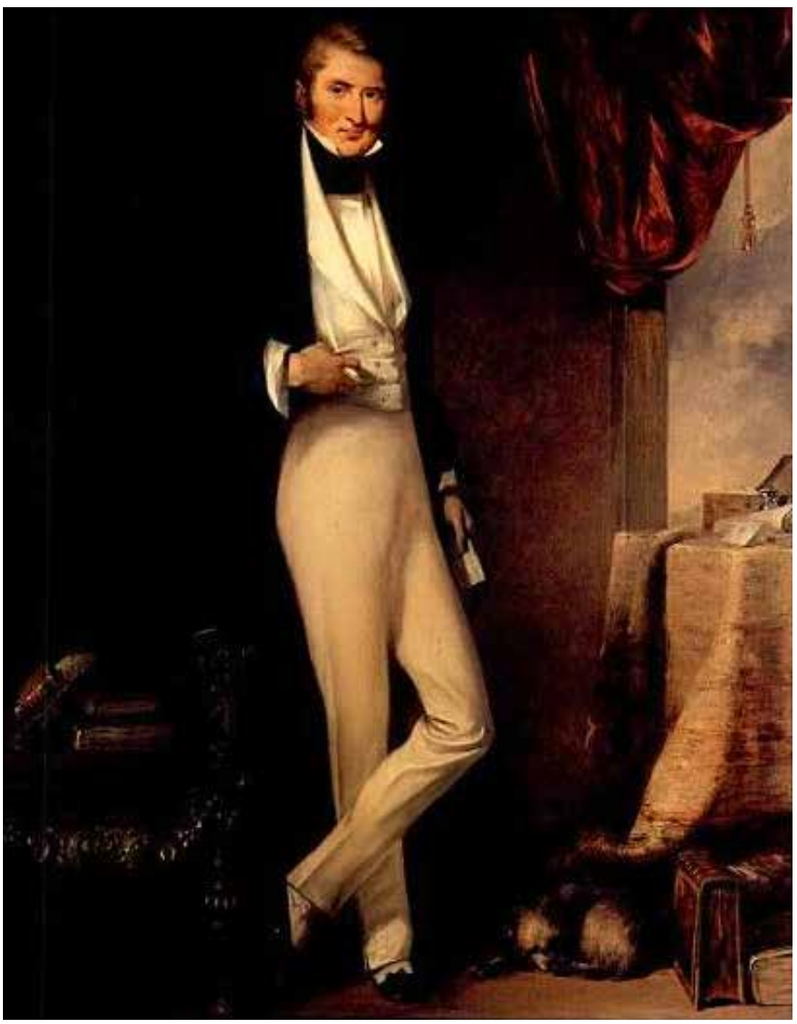
Bombay', Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy had already been knighted by Queen Victoria in May 1842 – the first Indian to be so honoured. In December 1842, he "received a further mark of her Majesty's approbation of his generosity and public spirit in the shape of a gold medal set in diamonds". He was justly proud of the medal – which bore the image of the Queen and, on the reverse, an inscription: 'Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy,

"Jeejeebhoy was knighted by Queen Victoria in May 1842 – the first Indian to be so honoured"

Bart., from the British Government, in honour of his munificence and his patriotism'. Not surprisingly, he chose to wear it in many portraits, one of which served as a source for statues and prints – and even a stamp produced in his honour.

The honours didn't stop there: in 1855, Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy was granted Freedom of the City of London, then, in 1857, a hereditary baronetcy was conferred. Jeejeebhoy died two years later.

Below
George Chinnery's portrait of William Jardine, *c*.1820s



Opposite
Print of the Residence of Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, 1st Baronet from *The Illustrated London News*, 1858

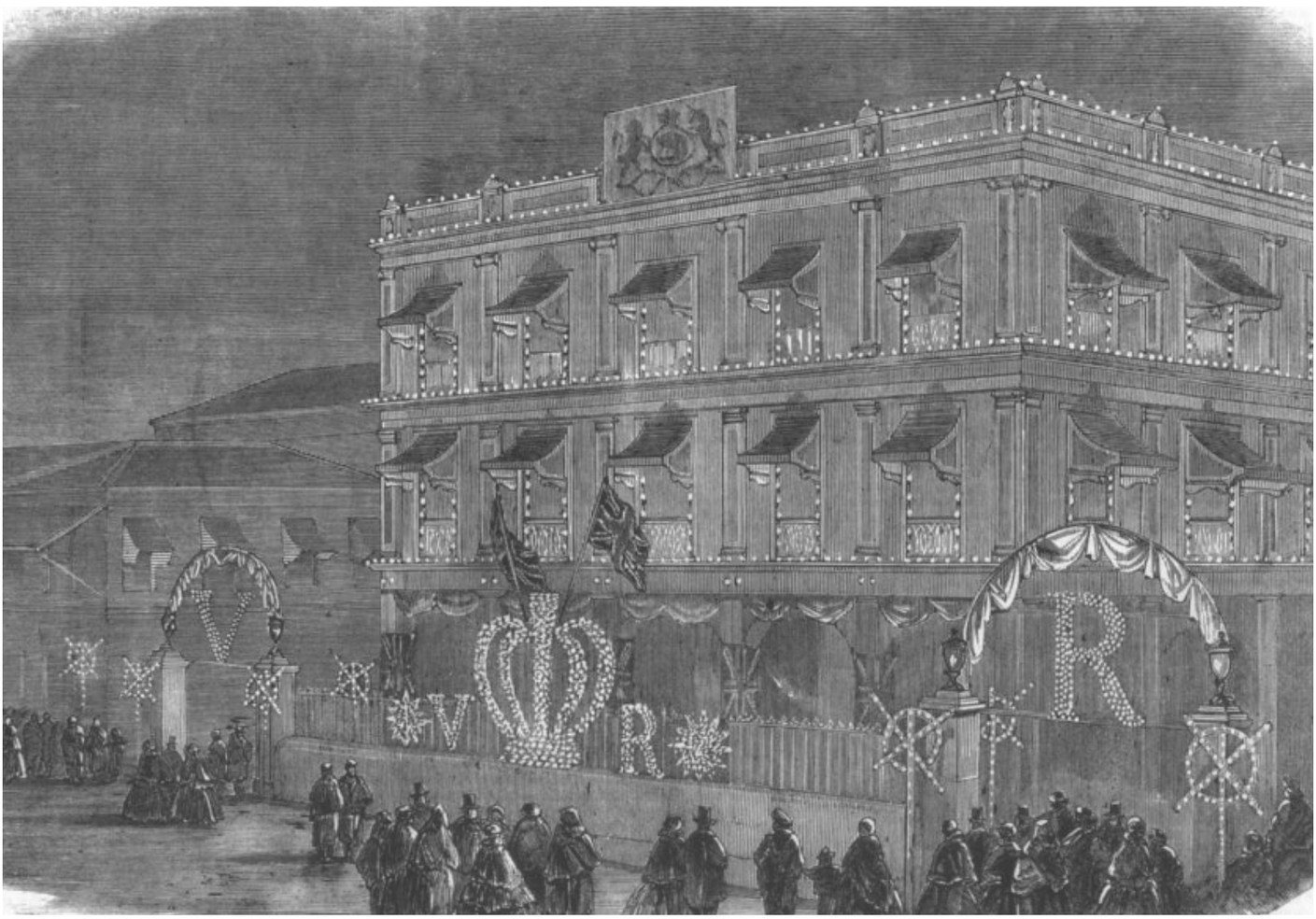
Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy's life story is a rags-to-riches tale that seems worthy of a fairytale. A Parsi, he was born in Mumbai in 1783 and, an orphan with little formal education, he went to sea, making five journeys to Canton up until 1806. It was on one such voyage, aboard the East India Company ship *Brunswick* in 1804, that he met the Scottish physician and trader William Jardine, who would become a lifelong friend – and a significant business associate.

By 1820, Jeejeebhoy was a ship owner with his own business, working his trading contacts throughout the East. A decade later, he and his eldest son Cursetjee were trading with Magniac & Co., which was superseded in 1832 by Jardine, Matheson & Co., the company co-founded by Jeejeebhoy's friend Jardine and James Matheson, another Scot. Jeejeebhoy's trade with them "dwarfed all the others" between 1827 and 1843, accounting for more than $2 million each year.

Business success was by no means the only measure of the man: Jeejeebhoy had hardly started his business before he embarked on philanthropy on a huge scale. In 1822, he paid off the debts of all debtors in the Bombay civil jail, and went on to finance hospitals, colleges, waterworks and causeways, as well as championing the education of women.

The portrait of Jeejeebhoy, to be offered in New York's Fine Chinese Paintings and Works of Art in July, is attributed to Lamqua (Guan Xiaocun), the best known of the 19th-century Cantonese artists working in the Western manner.

Lamqua had a studio in Canton, on New China Street in 1820, and later worked in Macau and Hong Kong, painting in a style that reflected the influence of George Chinnery (1774-1852), the English artist who lived in India and, later, Macau. Lamqua himself gained recognition in the West after having his paintings exhibited in London and the US. One of his most remarkable paintings, of a similarly high quality as this portrait, was done from a print after Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque*, and signed. The sensitivity and



“In 1822, Jeejeebhoy paid off the debts of all debtors in the Bombay civil jail”

luminosity of both strongly suggests the same hand.

This painting, among the most sympathetically executed of all Lamqua’s works, is one of the rarest portraits of an Asian merchant, and a remarkable visual record of a remarkable man who achieved remarkable things.

Juliet Fitzgerald is a freelance writer.

Sale: Fine Chinese Paintings and Works of Art
New York
Tuesday 21 July at 10am
Enquiries: Bruce MacLaren
bruce.maclaren@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/asianart

The world's most expensive handbag ►

The world record for the most valuable handbag is currently held by the 1001 Nights Diamond Purse (pictured right) by the internationally famous jeweller Robert Mouawad. In 2010, the bag had an original price of $3.8 million. Incorporating 4,517 diamonds (105 yellow, 56 pink, and 4,356 colourless) with a total weight of 381.92 carats, the bag was hand-crafted by ten highly skilled artisans, working for a total of 8,800 hours.

Opposite
Grace Kelly in 1956 – shielding the early signs of pregnancy from the paparazzi with her beloved Hermès *sac à dépêches*, thereafter universally known as the 'Kelly bag'.

Below
Hermes Tri-Colour Kelly
Estimate: £3,000 - 5,000
($4,000 - 7,000)

A handbag?

The history of the handbag is a tale of women's growing independence, argues *Alexandra Shulman*. Lady Bracknell would *not* approve

There is a rock painting in the caves at Tassili n'Ajjer in Algeria that includes a figure leading a goat, and from the crook of their elbow dangles a bag. Who knows what it contained. But there it was, some time previous to 8000 BC, a smallish bag – companion to daily life.

Many millennia later, handbags have become considerable business, as necessary in many ways as that goat would have been. Although for some years they have been the main driver for many luxury companies, in the total span of fashion history the handbag is a relative newcomer – compared to shoes, coats, hats and dresses. Handbags only really came into existence, in the way we now regard them, around the end of the 19th century. Their status grew in direct proportion to women's social mobility, becoming an essential accessory as carrying a bag was a sign of affluence rather than drudgery.

My handbag of the moment, in green leather by Anya Hindmarch, holds an iPhone, three pairs of spectacles, two leather notebooks, a bottle of water, earphones, a paperback book, car and house keys, yesterday's newspaper, two hairbands, a makeup bag, three credit cards and some loose change. It is a 21st-century bag – hauled around from day to night, containing my personal survival arsenal.

To house all this paraphernalia, it needs to be substantial. But the first handbags were minute, delicate fabric reticules that hung from the wrist rather than hefty things to be slung over a shoulder. Miniature, but of huge consequence, since carrying these reticules was a marker of how, for the first time, it was deemed acceptable for women's 'stuff' to be seen in public, rather than held in pockets stitched onto the underside of clothes.

Women led small lives. They scarcely travelled, were rarely without a chaperone, and were usually entirely financially beholden to men. It was when this unsatisfactory state of play started to radically change that so too did their bags. By the start of the 20th century, increasing numbers of women began to be employed, and as a result moved around more, even if that was only from the home to the city centre. The more privileged would have keys to their own property and carry cash for shopping in the new department stores that were growing up in the cities.

As the consequences of the First World War demolished the social hierarchy, women's lives were transformed. The death of a generation of young men necessitated a female workforce, the suffragette movement demanded emancipation, and the

Symbol of feminine power

Britain's first female prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, became so associated with the handbag she carried that her scolding of cabinet ministers became known as a "handbagging". In 2018, Westminster Council turned down proposals for a public statue of Lady Thatcher over concerns about the design "not reflecting her role as PM" – and suggested a handbag should feature in any revised design.

Hidden signals

One of the social functions of the hand-held fan was to make discreet signals. The Queen revived the practice with her handbag, using it to tell staff when she wishes to be moved on from a conversation. She is said to own more than 200 of the hard-wearing Launer designs, including vintage styles inherited from the Queen Mother.

popularity of handbags grew to accompany this new world outside the home. In tandem, the bags became status symbols themselves. You have only to look at some of the exotic clutch bags of the 1920s to see how ornate and precious they could be – like jewellery designed to be envied.

For the first time, women began to apply make-up in public, bringing out beautiful compacts, papers of rouge, tubes of lipstick and small vials of perfume. They began to smoke, carrying slim cigarette-cases and elegant lighters. They had busier and more independent lives, which required small engagement diaries that travelled with them rather than sitting at home on their correspondence desks. All of these things needed to fit into their handbags.

By the 1950s, as the austerity of the aftermath of another world war disappeared, fashion was growing into a substantial business. Ready-to-wear clothing was expanding, while designers like Christian Dior, Cristóbal Balenciaga and Coco Chanel became famous names, recognised even by those who couldn't afford their sumptuous clothes. Or the bags that they began to design to complement those clothes. Bags that were given their own names, like the bon-ton Hermès Kelly or Chanel's quilted leather 2.55 – both offered at the Bonhams Designer Handbags and Fashion sale in London in July.

It was during the 1990s that handbags grew into the vastly popular item that we know today, covering acres of floor space in stores, and page after page on shopping sites. This is less to do with what we carry in our bags than with the increase of brand-name recognition, particularly in luxury. Prada's nylon tote, the Fendi Baguette, the Hermès Birkin – these were items that became an essential part of the fashion lexicon not just in one market, but around the world. It-girls shared the spotlight with It-bags, and the handbag became the pillar of luxury fashion houses' expansion into new markets like Russia, India and Asia. Once handbags were like trusty retainers, something we kept around for ages, but now few people carry the same style of bag for long – with the notable exception of the Queen and her black leather Launers. Women literally own handbag wardrobes.

It was perhaps predictable, given the high visibility of bags, that they would ultimately become such big business. They are seen with us everywhere, placed on tables, carried on arms, used indoors and out, summer and winter. They are an easily recognisable status symbol and also a hugely convenient item to buy somebody else – a big factor in the success of the handbag market. Bags don't need to fit. Unlike clothes, most bags suit most people. They are a delightful and often generous gift, but not as personal as jewellery, nor as difficult to judge as clothes. In short, when you think about it, there is nothing, really nothing at all, not to like about bags.

> "There is nothing, really nothing at all, not to like about handbags"

Alexandra Shulman was Editor-in-Chief of British Vogue *for 25 years until 2017. Her latest book is* Clothes… and Other Things that Matter.

The exhibition Bags: Inside Out *runs at the V&A until 31 January 2021.*

Sale: Designer Handbags and Fashion
London
Thursday 16 July at 2pm
Enquiries: Meg Randell +44 (0) 20 7393 3876
meg.randell@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/handbags

The Louis Vuitton Speedy

Originally created by special request for Audrey Hepburn, 'The Speedy' was the first handbag produced by Louis Vuitton. Made as a smaller interpretation of the brand's popular Keepall bag, it has remained unchanged in design since its launch in 1930.

The Gucci Jackie

Gucci's 'Jackie O' bag was an immediate hit when it was launched in the 1950s. Regularly spotted under the arm of the US President's wife, the bag was renamed by Gucci after the First Lady in 1961. When Alessandro Michele joined Gucci, he chose Kate Moss to front the New Jackie bag campaign in 2014. The advert, shot in the style of airport paparazzi, showed Moss using the bag to shield herself. It was seen as a homage to Jackie Kennedy's characteristic style and reserve in the face of public attention and the glare of the media.

The Birkin

In 1984, Jean-Louis Dumas, the Head of Hermès, found himself by chance sitting on a flight next to Jane Birkin, the English model, singer and actress. Birkin complained that she could not find a bag large enough to carry her daughter Lou's bottles. Dumas took note, designing a deep and supple holdall on the back of an Air France paper bag. Hermès would name the bag 'the Birkin'.

Popularity

One of the world's most popular bags is the Longchamp Le Pliage bag, with ten sold every minute. Inspired by origami, it was named after the French verb 'to fold'.

The Kelly

Grace Kelly started using the Hermès *sac à dépêches* during the filming of Alfred Hitchcock's *To Catch a Thief*, but it wasn't until she was Princess of Monaco that she would make the bag famous worldwide. While pregnant with Princess Caroline, Kelly used the oversize Hermès bag to shield her stomach from the paparazzi. After a photograph of her using her *sac à dépêches* in this way made the cover of *Life* magazine in 1956, the company renamed the design 'the Kelly bag'.

The first It-bag

According to British *Vogue*, the Fendi Baguette is the first official It-bag, made popular by Sarah Jessica Parker's character Carrie Bradshaw in the HBO series *Sex and the City*.

The world's oldest handbag

In 2012, archaeologists at a site near Leipzig uncovered what they consider to be the world's oldest handbag. In a grave dating from 2500 to 2200 BC, excavators found more than a hundred dogs' teeth, arranged tightly together. They believe them to be decoration for the front of a bag, the fabric or leather of which had disintegrated. It reveals an aesthetic consideration beyond pure function, suggesting bags like this were fashionable with the upper echelons of the time.

Below
John Singer Sargent (1856-1925)
Mrs John C Tomlinson, *c.*1904
oil on canvas
62 x 42in (157.5 x 106.5cm)
Estimate: $200,000 - 300,000
(£150,000 - 230,000)

Left
Benjamin N. Duke, Mary's grandfather, acquired the 1009 Fifth Avenue mansion (across from The Metropolitan Museum of Art) in the early 1900s, and it remained in the Duke family for more than 100 years. John Singer Sargent's portrait, opposite, was hung in the drawing room

Charity began at home

The Dukes were a family of extraordinary wealth – and exceptional generosity. *Jack Pickering* relives the high life of the early 1900s

It is hard to comprehend how rich the heirs of the great fortunes were in the early years of the 20th century, an era that became known as 'the Gilded Age'. In the 19th century, the Dukes' entrepreneurial spirit had seen them for one particular year earning the equivalent of more than 1% of the GDP of the entire United States. Scions of a family of grand American philanthropists, Mary Lillian (1887-1960) and Angier Duke (1884-1923) would spend their time at fabulous hotels like The Breakers in Palm Beach, Florida, when not at one of the family estates. What else were rich young things to do?

For most people, it is difficult to imagine, say, walking on a whim into Cartier on New York City's Fifth Avenue and purchasing $123,840 worth of precious jewels, including a "diamond choker composed of round diamond links and three oval motifs at intervals, each motif having a large round diamond in center" ($18,500) and a "fancy shaped diamond pendant and chain" ($38,500). Yet this is precisely what Mary Lillian Duke Biddle was able to do on 17 November 1931. On that single day, in the early years of the American Great Depression, she spent the equivalent of $1,932,465.51 in today's money, and she would return to Cartier to add further items each day that week.

So it may come as a surprise that, like the patricians of old rather than the air-headed socialites that typified their own social set, Mary Lillian and Angier were great patrons of the arts. Mary Lillian was a devotee of the opera and

> "Mary Lillian and Angier both sat for portraits by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida"

theatre. She and Angier both sat for portraits by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, and the siblings mixed in the same glittering circles as John Singer Sargent, Joseph Urban and Florenz Ziegfeld Jr.

The Dukes were a family of extraordinary wealth – and exceptional generosity. Mary Lillian established a

The fine art of living

Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans (1920-2012; shown with her grandfather, Ben, and mother, Mary Lillian) accomplished an extraordinary amount. As a powerful member of The Duke University Board of Trustees and the first female chairman of The Duke Endowment, she helped guide these institutions to their current success. This part of the US was once characterised by racial segregation. Semans' accomplishment was fostering inclusivity in her university, city and state. It was more than just her responsibility, it was her passion. In the early 1950s, Mary was elected to the Durham City Council, then rose to become the city's mayor pro tem, both firsts for women.

For Mary, art was essential to life – telling stories, promoting a greater understanding of others, and bridging cultures and lifestyles. She was an accomplished piano player and maintained lifelong friendships with painter John Koch and composer Iain Hamilton. However, she had no truck with elitism: to encourage access to the fine arts, she helped found the North Carolina School of the Arts in the 1960s – the country's first public conservatory. She also created The Mary Duke Biddle Gallery for the Blind at the North Carolina Museum of Art, where sight-impaired visitors could experience a museum, feeling masterpieces by artists such as Rodin. In 1971, with her husband, she received the North Carolina Award, the state's highest civilian honour.

charitable organisation in her own name: since 1956, the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation has disbursed approaching $45 million to worthy causes. And their informed commitment to fine art continued into the next generation. Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans, Mary Lillian's daughter, purchased a portrait of Mrs John Canfield Tomlinson by Sargent on sight at a "decorator's showcase on 63rd Street" in 1961 – perhaps it reminded Semans of her childhood and her mother's milieu. This evocative work is (along with works by John Koch, Thomas Sully and Thomas Eakins) among the many treasures from the Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans Foundation offered at Bonhams American Art sale in July, in addition to works in Old Master Paintings, and Fine European Ceramics both in the same month.

"In this defeat, the Dukes saw opportunity"

It all makes a fascinating contrast with the life of Mary Lillian and Angier's uncle, James Buchanan Duke, who was arguably the most consequential individual in the entire history of North Carolina. Along with his older brother Benjamin Newton Duke (Mary Lillian and Angier's father), James Buchanan created the modern cigarette in the mid-1880s. Twenty-five years later, in 1911, their company – the American Tobacco Company, then one of the largest in the world – lost a monopoly lawsuit brought by Roosevelt's administration. Yet, in this defeat, the Dukes saw opportunity. They diversified their portfolio, damming the rivers of the Carolinas to create the region's first electric grid, in the process founding the Duke Power Company (now Duke Energy, and still the largest investor-owned utility in the US).

Given men of this calibre, the philanthropy of the family comes as no surprise. These efforts were largely led by Ben Duke, but it was his brother, James B. Duke, who left the most significant philanthropic mark. In 1924, James created The Duke Endowment, one of the nation's largest private foundations, and thereby endowed Duke University. That endowment – with additional support from the family – has enabled the university to become one of the most prestigious in the world, while Duke University Hospital is globally recognised as a leading healthcare provider. Through programmes supporting education, healthcare, children's and family services, and the Methodist Church, The Duke Endowment has improved the lives of countless Carolinians.

Jack Pickering is a writer and biographer.

Sale: American Art
New York
Wednesday 29 July at 2pm
Enquiries: Jennifer Jacobsen +1 917 206 1699
jennifer.jacobsen@bonhams.com
bonhams.com/americanart

1
Thomas Eakins
(1844-1916)
Baby Girl Playing and Seated Boy with Book: A Double-Sided Work, 1876
oil on board
12 x 10in (30 x 25.5cm)
Estimate: $15,000 - 25,000
(£12,000 - 20,000)

These intriguing studies were painted back-to-back by Eakins on a single piece of artist board. On the front, a baby girl plays with her toys; on the back (not shown), a little boy, engrossed in his book, sits on a tiny chair. Eakins was a very significant figure in American realism – as well as a photographic pioneer, who conducted important experiments in the attempt to capture movement on film – and Mrs Semans seems to have been aware of his stature, collecting works also by his close associates (including Robert Henri).

1

2

3

4

2
John Koch (1909-1978)
Siesta, 1962
oil on canvas
30 x 25¼in (76.5 x 64.1cm)
Estimate: $40,000 - 60,000
(£30,000 - 45,000)

An important figure in 20th-century realist painting, Koch is best known for light-filled paintings of urban interiors, frequently his own Manhattan apartment. His works often juxtapose Classical allusions and modern settings. Both intimate and distancing, *Siesta* draws the viewer into a familiar world that nonetheless remains inaccessible. It featured on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1964 to illustrate an article titled 'Sex in the US: Mores & Morality'.

3
John Koch (1909-1978)
Summer Night, 1965
oil on canvas
77¼ x 43in (196 x 109cm)
Estimate: $80,000 - 120,000
(£60,000 - 90,000)

Another dramatically lit work by Koch. It makes you feel as if you've arrived from a backroom to join the family sprawling over their Colonial Revival verandah, finally feeling the cool of the night after a humid day. Koch was a family friend – and clearly a cherished artist: the Duke collection had six of his pictures.

4
Thomas Sully (1783-1872)
Sarah Coxe, 1813
oil on canvas
36 x 29in (91.4 x 73.7cm)
Estimate: $7,000 - 10,000
(£5,000 - 8,000)

Famous for his historical art (adapted for use on US coins), Scully was also a great portraitist, whose clientele ran from presidents (both Jefferson and John Quincy Adams) to musicians. The elegant red shawl in this picture highlights Scully's mastery of texture and quick, loose brushwork.

Sound of music

The Salzburg Festival is one of the wonders of civilisation. But the cultural experience doesn't stop there, says *Lucinda Bredin*

Left *A city of forts, spires and domes* ***Below left*** *The Mirabell Gardens* ***Above right*** *St Peter's cemetery* ***Right*** *The Dom Platz* ***Far right*** *Salzburg has a collective sweet tooth* ***Above right*** *The Modern Art Museum, the fortress of the avant-garde*

I'm sure there are prodigies who love Salzburg from childhood, but, when I first went, I couldn't leave fast enough. It was too gemütlich for a dishevelled teenager on an Interrail holiday. Every commercial enterprise that wasn't peddling Mozart was flogging chocolate – and, of course, there were a number of shops that combined the two to ghastly effect. But then two things happened: I accepted that people over the age of 40 had the right to roam. And I embraced opera.

The Salzburg Festival, founded in 1920 by Richard Strauss, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Max Reinhardt, is an event that unashamedly revolves around music. However this year, the 100th anniversary, has coincided with COVID-19. Despite the challenges, the festival still has 110 performances in 30 days – with the requisite social distancing in place. In short, the city will be marinated in music throughout August, albeit with audiences wearing masks. In previous years, festivalgoers, some of whom would stay for up to three weeks, developed their own routine in preparation for that night's opera, before walking, bedecked in bling, to the epicentre – the Festival theatre. This year, some restaurants are open as are the museums, but there will be none of the networking during the interval... because all the bars are closed and there will be no break in the performances.

The Festival theatre is an austere building from the 1960s that makes up for its uncompromising exterior with two spectacular halls, one of which is hewn out of rock, with the side of the mountain visible on stage. There, the highlights this year include Franz Welser-Möst conducting a new production of Strauss's *Elektra*, with Ausrine Studyte in the title role, and *Così Fan Tutte*, the only two operas remaining from the original pre-coronavirus schedule.

But for me, one of the chief pleasures of visiting the Festival is to interleave performances with serious sightseeing. This is still possible, as museums reopened in June. Salzburg was an independent Archbishopic – it was only in 1816 that it was definitively handed over to the Austrian Empire. The local salt mines were such a generator of revenue that the ruling Archbishops could indulge themselves by turning a medieval city into a baroque extravagance. When a fire conveniently wiped out the Cathedral in 1598, it provided carte blanche. The resulting Salzburger Dom and the nearby Residenz for the Archbishop are impressively huge and lavish – the Residenz has an enfilade of reception rooms with much gilt, but little furniture. It doesn't really become diverting until you reach a series of Wunderkammern with collections of exotic shells, bizarre scientific instruments and geological specimens. The star of the show is a bronze Eucharistic dove with Limoges enamelling. The nearby Abbey of St Peter and its cemetery swap pomp for atmosphere. The catacombs, which look like anchorite caves, have been clawed out of the mountain. It is well worth going in. A claustrophobic flight of stone steps lead into caverns with rough-hewn slabs that serve as altars.

Salzburg is one of the very few places in the world that has spectacular car parks, which – like the catacombs – have been tunnelled out of the Mönchsberg Mountain. One way of travelling inside the mountain is to take a high-speed lift that was cut through the rock for visitors to the Modern Art Museum. Built in 1998, this defiantly hideous building is like a grey storage unit, plonked on the summit as if rebuking the city below for its beauty. God knows how it was nodded through planning. But, as they say, the best view in Salzburg is when you are inside, since you can't see it. The museum reopens on 20 June.

Given the small size of Salzburg, it is to its credit that it has so many art galleries showing contemporary art – it says something about the tastes of the clientele for the opera, too. For instance, Thaddaeus Ropac has a gallery, at the entrance of the Mirabell gardens, that is a byword for elegance.

One of my favourite works in the city is the *Salzburg Panorama*, which has its own museum. Early in the 19th century, the artist Johann Sattler made the arduous journey up to the Hohensalzburg Fortress that dominates the city's skyline, and drew a detailed outline of the city from five different angles. He transferred the drawing to a vast, 85ft-long canvas, which was fixed to a drum. The result was a painting that captures Salzburg, just as it was that autumn day in 1824. All the clocks show 4 o'clock. There are no railway tracks, and there are cows where one would expect to see Würstel stalls, but apart from that the astonishing surprise is that Salzburg has lived through 200 years of upheaval, including a pair of World Wars – and COVID-19 – and still looks more or less the same.

Lucinda Bredin is Editor of Bonhams Magazine.

When in Salzburg...

Where to stay:
There is a pantheon of Salzburg heroes: Mozart, Herbert von Karajan… and Florian, the concierge at Hotel Bristol. Florian is rightly fêted by festivalgoers. Tickets, restaurants, torn gowns, medical emergencies… he sorts stuff. He has such a legion of fans that this is the only place they will stay. As for the hotel, it has had a recent facelift without detracting from its essential character. (There are still acres of red plush.) Have a look yourself at the website bristol-salzburg.at.

The other hotels high on the list for the Festival are the Sacher, overlooking the Salzach river and located, like the Bristol, in the 19th-century Neustadt, and the Goldener Hirsch in the Aldstadt. This is housed in a 15th-century building on the Getreidegasse, Salzburg's equivalent of a high street, if such a vulgar concept could exist in such a place. For a more country-estate feel, try Schloss Leopoldskron. Formerly owned by Max Reinhardt, one of the original founders of the Festival, it has become more famous now for its lake and ornamental ironwork, both of which feature in *The Sound of Music*.

There's no point pretending that these hotels are anything but humongously expensive during the Festival. In spring months, however, they are surprisingly reasonable.

Where to eat:
Austria has a reputation for restaurants that offer little else than Wiener Schnitzel, Frankfurter Würstel and liver dumplings. This turns out to be almost entirely true – except in Salzburg. In keeping with the sophisticated palates of visitors to the Festival, there are 19 entries in the Michelin Guide, two of which – SENNS.Restaurant and Ikarus – have two stars each. But eating after the opera is always a challenge. Four courses at 10.30pm? Really? Carpe Diem [pictured below], a restaurant-cum-cocktail bar (with its own Michelin star) adopts a flexible approach by serving food in small cones in an ultra-modern setting. Sounds a bit *unusual*, but it actually works. For a place for lunch, go for a fabulous view. Both the Modern Art Museum and the Hohensalzburg Fortress have excellent restaurants and sweeping panoramas. Given the 'new normal' situation, it's always best to check restaurant websites for updated information before going. **L.B.**

The Salzburg Festival
Dates: 1-30 August

The show will go on… Despite the coronavirus, 110 events at 8 theatres will take place. Social distancing measures are in place at all venues. Tickets can be bought directly from salzburgfestival.at. For information about all aspects of Salzburg, contact Salzburgerland Tourist Office (salzburgerland.com).

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88 Queensway
Admiralty, Hong Kong
+852 2918 4321

Edinburgh
22 Queen Street
Edinburgh
EH2 1JX
+44 131 225 2266
+44 131 220 2547 fax

AFRICA

Nigeria
Neil Coventry
+234 (0) 8110 033 792
+27 (0) 7611 20171
neil.coventry@
bonhams.com

South Africa – Johannesburg
Penny Culverwell
+27 (0) 71 342 2670
penny.culverwell@
bonhams.com

AUSTRALIA

Sydney
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Australia
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info.aus@bonhams.com

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Armadale VIC 3143
Australia
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+61 (0) 2 9475 4110 fax
info.aus@bonhams.com

ASIA

Beijing
Vivian Zhang
Unit S102A, Beijing
Lufthansa Center,
50 Liangmaqiao Road,
Chaoyang District, Beijing
100125, China
+86 (0) 10 8424 3188
beijing@bonhams.com

Singapore
Bernadette Rankine
11th Floor, Wisma Atria
435 Orchard Road
Singapore 238877
+65 (0) 6701 8038
+65 (0) 6701 8001 fax
bernadette.rankine@
bonhams.com

Taiwan
Bobbie Hu
Suite 2012, 20F
No.333, Sec.1,
Keelung Road, Xinyi Dist.,
Taipei City 110, Taiwan
+886 2 2757 7070
taiwan@bonhams.com

EUROPE

Austria
Thomas Kamm
thomas.kamm
@bonhams.com
+49 900 89 2420 5812
austria@bonhams.com

Belgium
Christine De Schaetzen
christine.deschaetzen@
bonhams.com
Boulevard Saint
Michel 101
1040 Brussels
+32 (0) 2 736 5076
belgium@bonhams.com

France
Catherine Yaiche
catherine.yaiche@
bonhams.com
4 rue de la Paix
75002 Paris
+33 (0) 1 42 61 10 10
paris@bonhams.com

Germany – Cologne
Katharina Schmid
katharina.schmid@
bonhams.com
+49 (0) 221 9865 3419
+49 (0) 157 9234 6717
cologne@bonhams.com

Germany – Munich
Thomas Kamm
thomas.kamm@
bonhams.com
Maximilianstrasse 52
80538 Munich
+49 (0) 89 2420 5812
munich@bonhams.com

Germany – Stuttgart
Katharina Schmid
katharina.schmid@
bonhams.com
Neue Brücke 2
New Bridge Offices
70173 Stuttgart
+49 (0) 711 2195 2640
+49 (0) 157 9234 6717
stuttgart@bonhams.com

Greece
7 Neofytou Vamva Street
Athens 10674
+30 (0) 210 3636 404
athens@bonhams.com

Ireland
Kieran O'Boyle
kieran.oboyle@
bonhams.com
31 Molesworth Street
Dublin 2
+353 (0) 1 602 0990
ireland@bonhams.com

Italy – Milan
Benedetta Alpini
benedetta.alpini@
bonhams.com
Via Boccaccio 22
20123 Milano
+39 0 2 4953 9020
milan@bonhams.com

Italy – Rome
Emma Dalla Libera
emma.dallalibera@
bonhams.com
Via Sicilia 50
00187 Roma
+39 06 485 900
rome@bonhams.com

The Netherlands
Koen Samson
koen.samson@
bonhams.com
De Lairessestraat 154
1075 HL Amsterdam
+31 (0) 20 67 09 701
amsterdam@
bonhams.com

Portugal
Filipa De Andrade
filipa.deandrade@
bonhams.com
Rua Bartolomeu Dias
no160. 1o
Belem
1400-031 Lisbon
+351 218 293 291
portugal@bonhams.com

Spain – Barcelona & North
Teresa Ybarra
teresa.ybarra@
bonhams.com
+34 930 156 686
+34 680 347 606
barcelona@
bonhams.com

Spain – Madrid
Johann Leibbrandt
johann.leibbrandt@
bonhams.com
Núñez de Balboa
no 4-1C
28001 Madrid
+34 915 78 17 27

Switzerland – Geneva
Livie Gallone Moeller
livie.gallonemoeller@
bonhams.com
Rue Etienne-Dumont 10
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+41 22 300 3160
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Switzerland – Zurich
Andrea Bodmer
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Representatives:
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Terri Adrian-Hardy
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California – San Diego
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brooke.sivo@
bonhams.com
+1 (760) 567 1744
sandiego@
bonhams.com

Florida
April Matteini
april.matteini@
bonhams.com
+1 (305) 978 2459

Alexis Butler
alexis.butler@
bonhams.com
+1 (305) 878 5366
miami@bonhams.com

Georgia
Mary Moore Bethea
mary.bethea@
bonhams.com
+1 (404) 842 1500
georgia@bonhams.com

Illinois & Midwest
Natalie B Waechter
natalie.waechter@
bonhams.com
+1 (773) 267 3300

Shawn Marsh
shawn.marsh@
bonhams.com
+1 (773) 680 2881
chicago@bonhams.com

Massachusetts & New England
Amy Corcoran
amy.corcoran@
bonhams.com
+1 (617) 742 0909
boston@bonhams.com

New Mexico
Terri Adrian-Hardy
terri.hardy@
bonhams.com
+1 (602) 859 1843
newmexico@
bonhams.com

Oregon & Idaho
Sheryl Acheson
sheryl.acheson@
bonhams.com
+1 (971) 727 7797
oregon@bonhams.com

Philadelphia – Pennsylvania
Caitlyn Pickens
caitlyn.pickens@
bonhams.com
+1 (267) 792 3172
philadelphia@
bonhams.com

San Francisco
601 California Street
Suite 150
San Francisco
CA 94108
+1 (415) 861 7500
info.us@bonhams.com

Texas – Dallas
Mary Holm
mary.holm@
bonhams.com
+1 (214) 557 2716
dallas@bonhams.com

Texas – Houston
Lindsay Davis
lindsay.davis@
bonhams.com
+1 (713) 855 7452
texas@bonhams.com

Virginia
Gertraud Hechl
gertraud.hechl@
bonhams.com
+1 (202) 422 2733
virginia@
bonhams.com

Washington & Alaska
Heather O'Mahony
heather.omahony@
bonhams.com
+1 (206) 566 3913
seattle@
bonhams.com

Washington DC Mid-Atlantic Region
Gertraud Hechl
gertraud.hechl@
bonhams.com
+1 (202) 422 2733
washingtonDC@
bonhams.com

Canada

Toronto, Ontario
Kristin Kearney
340 King St East
2nd floor, Office 213
Toronto ON
M5A 1 KB
kristin.kearney@
bonhams.com
+1 (416) 462 9004
info.ca@
bonhams.com

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bonhams.com

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Representative:
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hove@bonhams.com

West Sussex
+44 (0) 1273 220 000
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South-west England

Bath
Queen Square House
Charlotte Street
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Truro
Cornwall
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+44 1872 250 170
truro@bonhams.com

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Norfolk
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Midlands

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Leeds, LS23 6LP
+44 113 234 5755
leeds@bonhams.com

North-west England

Chester
2 St Johns Court
Vicars Lane
Chester, CH1 1QE
+44 1244 313 936
chester@
bonhams.com

Manchester
The Stables
213 Ashley Road
Hale, WA15 9TB
+44 161 927 3822
manchester@
bonhams.com

Channel Islands

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St Mary
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My Favourite Room

Christian Louboutin has his eyes opened to the world

As a child, I would go past the Palais de la Porte Dorée every weekend, but the façade – with its 'stone tapestry' – was so imposing, even faintly scary, that I didn't dare go in. It was only when I heard that inside the building was the largest aquarium in France, that I summoned up the courage to enter. Even then I loved fish.

The Palais had been built as a centrepiece for the Paris Colonial Exhibition in 1931. On either side of the grand hall that stretched the width of the building were two rooms that had a profound effect on me. One was known as Paul Reynaud's Oval Room – a reception room used by Reynaud, who was the Minister for the Colonies. This room had an African theme. It was designed by Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann, using materials that had been brought back from countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and Mali. The other was Marshal Lyautey's salon, which had an Asian narrative and a most beautiful dome, with frescoes showing Buddha meditating and Confucius teaching. There was also superlative furniture, designed by the cabinetmaker Eugène Printz. Everything in both rooms was created to make a statement about the two cultures.

These rooms changed my world. It was my first discovery of different civilisations and different points of view. My family originally came from Brittany, and my life was constructed around a triangle, moving between Paris (where I was brought up), Brittany, and sometimes the north of Spain or Italy. But that's about it. The idea that there was an exotic world beyond, and waiting to be discovered, was intoxicating.

One feature was particularly exciting: a handle in the African salon made from an ivory tusk. There was also a chair with three legs rather than four. It was a revelation that things were not just created for function, but for beauty as well. It triggered my imagination about how there was a spectrum of objects I didn't know existed that could be used for purposes as yet undreamt of.

> "The idea that there was an exotic world beyond… was intoxicating"

This month, there is an exhibition at the Palais about my life and work. Accompanying it is an 'imaginary museum' – a room in which I have gathered objets d'art that have been sources of inspiration, and which links the show to a place where I first experienced aesthetic emotions. I have to thank this museum for setting me off on a journey to discover other cultures, both in real life and in the mind. And, of course, for letting me see the fish.

Christian Louboutin is a fashion designer.

'Christian Louboutin, L'Exhibition[niste]' runs until 26 July at Palais de la Porte Dorée, Paris. palais-portedoree.fr

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