

Unbounded talent in half a square mile



Highlights from Master Paintings Week that runs in London's West End from July 4 to 11. Clockwise from far left:

Agnew's will exhibit this sensitive depiction of the Holy Family with the infant St John the Baptist by the Modena painter Bartolomeo Schedone (1578-1615). The oil-on-walnut panel, priced at £650,000, was recognised only last year when it was in Chile and is now on view in London for the first time.

Moatti Fine Arts have just opened a new gallery in the heart of St James's after several years in Paris and New York. The inaugural exhibition of their new London gallery includes this newly rediscovered oil on canvas (laid down on panel) flower painting of 1826 in the Dutch tradition by Jan Frans Van Dael (1764-1840). The painting is priced in the region of £580,000.



The 23 participating dealers with discoveries to unveil

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Despite the problems of supply that are endemic in the Old Master arena, the sheer weight of numbers across the London trade (and here we include the auctioneers) ensures that a remarkable roster of recent discoveries will be on show at MPW.

Agnew's have a very beautiful and sensitive depiction of the Holy Family by the Modena painter Bartolomeo Schedone (1578-1615), recognised only last year when it was in Chile. **Johnny Van Haefften** has an unrecorded still life of flowers by Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625). **Robilant + Voena** have rediscovered *The Bath of Bathsheba* by Simone Pignoni (1611-98), while **Charles Beddington** has unearthed a grisaille sketch of sculptor Martin Desjardins by Hyacinthe Rigaud.

Simon C. Dickinson will show an oil sketch by the talented Neapolitan painter

Luca Giordano (1634-1705), known as 'Luca Presto' (paints quickly). This bozzetto for the fresco on the entrance wall of the church of the Gerolamini, Naples, showing *The Expulsion of the Moneychangers from the Temple*, was painted in 1684 but the canvas is in the same condition as when it left his easel. The impasto remains intact while the strip lining reveals the artist's colour trials with his brush on the back.

A Kermesse or Village Festival by David Teniers II (1610-90) recently emerged in "country house" state from a provincial collection in France. On the back was the wax seal of the Russian family of the Counts Couchelev-Besborodko and, after careful conservation and relining in London, the initials 'CB' were found on the old canvas.

Further research by **Michael Tollemache** has revealed that the painting, sold in Paris in 1869, originally belonged to Prince Alexander

"Although painted in 1684, the canvas is in the same condition as when it left the easel. The impasto remains intact while the strip lining reveals the artist's colour trails with his brush on the back"

Besborodko, the successor to Potemkin as Catherine the Great's chancellor, whose collection was divided between his palace in St Petersburg and his heirs.

Verner Amell, specialists in early Scandinavian paintings, have a concert scene by Dirck van Baburen (1594/5-1624). Dated 1623, it is a smaller and perhaps the prime version of a painting in the Hermitage and will be included in the forthcoming monograph on Baburen, one of the youngest members of the so-called Utrecht Caravaggisti. It dates from when Baburen had returned from Italy and was sharing a studio with Hendrick ter Brugghen.

It has a fascinating provenance, having been owned by Prince Rohan, Vienna who, according to family records, gave it to Dr Alajos Paikert, the Royal Court Physician in Budapest.

Scholarship on this level can be a little intimidating. But it is reassuring that, while names are important, rarely are they more important than the image, the condition and the quality of execution. It is sage advice that it's better to buy a top picture by a lesser artist than a mediocre picture by a great one.

Twenty-three galleries within a space of just half a square mile might be a good place to begin the search.

More highlights from Master Paintings week. Clockwise from top left:

Charles Beddington, specialist Italian view painting who is currently organising an exhibition of Eighteenth Century Venetian Views for the National Gallery, will show this preparatory oil sketch combining two artistic heavyweights of the Louis XVI court. This grisaille on paper laid on canvas is the only known preparatory oil sketch for a Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659-1743) portrait and its subject is the Versailles sculptor Martin Desjardins (1640-94). It is priced in six figures.

During Master Paintings Week Master Drawings London, **Sphinx Fine Art** will be temporarily expanding to fill two large galleries their established premises in Kensington Church Street and The Gallery on Cork Street. Showing paintings and drawings from the 15th to the 19th centuries, their stock includes a John Constable (1776-1837) oil on canvas of East Bergholt House. This view of the back of his birthplace and home, accompanied by a lady riding side-saddle away from the house, belongs to a small group of oil paintings and drawings Constable executed mostly from 1809 to 1811. The price is £300,000.

La cage dérobée ou le voleur adroit by Noel Hallé (1711-1781) was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1763. It is priced at £45,000 by **John Mitchell Fine Paintings**.

Art that is beyond mere fashion comes into its own



Roland Arkell reports

THE timing of the inaugural Master Paintings Week is fortuitous – and not just because it coincides with the flagship auctions of Old Master paintings and the ninth staging of the Master Drawings London initiative.

When 23 of London's top paintings dealers join forces with Christie's and Sotheby's from July 4 to 10 they do so at a moment when good traditional pictures are proving a safe port in otherwise turbulent seas.

Dealers in 'master' pictures – the spread here is from 15th century gold ground painting to the swagger portraits of the Belle Époque – have become increasingly comfortable with their position as the art market's dependable patriarch. They may lack the cool of contemporary art, but remain true to the core values of art dealing – market freshness, provenance, quality, condition and pricing based upon the equilibrium of demand and supply.

Rather like the musician who struggles to have his 'unfashionable' record played against the din of a new movement – they can draw comfort from the



knowledge that a good tune remains a good tune whenever it is written.

And now that the remarkable ascent of contemporary art has come to a juddering halt, Master Paintings Week offers the hope that those great old tunes might receive the airplay they deserve.

So much of the past generation of art dealing has been focused around the fair, it is easy to forget that crossing the gallery threshold offers a different experience: a chance to look at pictures in a more

intimate, less-pressured setting and an opportunity to inspect a much wider selection of works in lower price brackets that might not pay their way at a top fair. There is a sense that many people, even established collectors and museum curators, have forgotten the advantages of buying in a gallery.

"We hope Master Paintings will offer a 'behind the scenes' view of the London art trade," says William Mitchell of **John Mitchell Fine Paintings**.

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There will be much to fire the imagination across many diverse schools of European painting.

A key element of *The Young Thomas Gainsborough* exhibition at English portrait specialist Philip Mould is a wooded landscape painted c.1740 when the childhood prodigy was just 13 years old.

Its rediscovery in the United States – it was catalogued as by a "follower of Salomon van Ruysdael" when it appeared for sale at Bonhams & Butterfield in San Francisco in November 2006 – adds considerably to our understanding of Gainsborough's development as an artist, and resolves the lasting uncertainty over the origins of his best-known early landscape work, *Cornard Wood in the National Gallery*. The full story forms a fascinating chapter in Philip Mould's new book *Sleuth* (See Back Page: ATG No 1893, June 6).

Not all the Mayfair and St James's trade have Mould's eye for publicity but they share his thrill in art historical discovery and connoisseurship.

The buzzword is "accessibility" and the aim is to get people through the doors and make them aware that the dealers are here, not just in June and July, but throughout the year too.

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