



A sense of style

A forgotten Scottish masterpiece returns and a French fair offers the key to stylish living

WHETHER Victorian art is in or out of fashion, everybody knows *The Monarch of the Glen*, even if only from television or whisky labels. Landseer's 64½in by 66½in stag has recently been in the news, as, in March, it was acquired by the Scottish National Gallery for £4 million, with the help of donations from around the world.

However, how many people have ever heard of *The Lord of the Isles* (Fig 1), painted in 1901 by Margaret Collyer (1872–1945)? At 76in by 50in (88½in by 62¾in with the frame) the canvas is taller, but slightly less in area than Landseer's and the subject, 'an entirely black bull with an enormous spread of horns', is as monumental as the stag.

Collyer seems to have been as formidable as her sitter. She struggled to get training—in a German studio, she learnt more to appreciate music than to paint—and rode out of her unsympathetic father's house to live with her grandmother and battle her way into the Royal Academy Schools.

She paid her way by holiday commissions, including one from the Midlands owner of a harrier pack, who, after dinner, would dress as a Highlander, 'kilt, bare knees, dirk, sporran, plaid... and a bonnet on the side of her head'. With Margaret playing the piano, she then danced reels with her similarly attired butler for exactly one hour—for the exercise.

According to her autobiography, *An Artist's Life*, published unillustrated in 1935, but reissued with photos as *A Vivid Canvas*



Fig 1 above: *The Lord of the Isles* by Margaret Collyer. With Tom Rooth . Fig 2 below: A Richard III groat from the end of his reign. With Spink

in 2008, Collyer made several visits to Scotland, including one to paint Thomas Valentine Smith's beasts at Ardtornish. Every morning, the bull was manoeuvred by six or seven men up the hill to pose on a rock. She was rather

surprised not to be charged, but kept him complaisant by feeding him regular handfuls of salt throughout the day.

After working in a military hospital in France for the first year of the First World War,



she went to Kenya in 1915 and ran her own farm in the foothills of the Aberdares, well away from the Happy Valley set. She did few paintings thereafter, but the Margaret Collyer Challenge Cup for the Best Terrier is still competed for annually at the Nairobi Kennel Club.

Her portrait of Victor VII of Ardtornish, who won several prizes during his show career, will be shown by Tom Rooth, a London-based art and sculpture dealer, at the Olympia Fair, October 31 to November 5. Despite it being painted by a lady, the price is a suitably testosterone-packed £185,000.

Among smaller offerings at the fair will be a Richard III groat (**Fig 2**), mint mark Sun and Rose, dating it to the very end of his reign, struck after 1484. Struck in London, it is in 'good very fine' condition and will be with Spink.

Another of the smalls is a George III silver-gilt novelty fish vinaigrette (**Fig 5**) marked for Birmingham 1817 by Joseph Willmore. A near-identical example is in the Birmingham Assay Office collection and this is with The Old Corkscrew. Somewhat larger and at £45,000 will be an over-scale pair of Chinese *huanghuali* corner armchairs (**Fig 6**) with Kat Adams

Chatou

The tradition of French antiques



Figs 3 and 4 left and above: Chatou's stylish foire. Fig 5 below: Fish vinaigrette. With The Old Corkscrew



markets is that they are *foires à la Brocante et aux Jambons*—ham and flea markets—and an excellent tradition it is. I have nothing against hamburger stalls, and even instant coffee (if *arrosé*), but they cannot compete with the dozen Marennes-Oléron *fines de claires* No 2 that I had with a glass of Muscadet, followed a little later by a *crêpe* with a drop of Norman cider at Chatou (**Fig 3**

and 4) three weeks ago.

The roots of the market go far back into the Middle Ages, but, in the current form, to 1840, when it took place annually, becoming biannual in 1940. In 1970, it was pushed out of Paris by the authorities, but found refuge on Chatou, an island in the Seine near Versailles much favoured by the Impressionists. I visited it there about 30 years ago, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience; many British dealers were also there, to their profit.

More recently, it went into a decline, with less quality and fewer stalls, but great efforts have since been made. Numbers are up again, with many comparatively heavyweight art and antiques dealers among the *brocanteurs*. In fact, the *brocante* seems generally also of a rather higher standard than at many equivalent British fairs. As well as two restaurants, there is also a whole row, the Boulevard Voltaire, devoted to regional gastronomic specialities. Parking is no longer the problem that it was, with new areas and valet service.

This autumn, it ran from September 22 to October 1. I vis-

ited at the mid point, when it was not exactly crowded, but far from empty, and most people I spoke to were happy with the business they had done on the opening days. Obviously, it is a great place for decorators to buy and anyone setting up home should consider it, as there is a great emphasis on stylish living and eating.

As the fair's publicity said: 'A beautiful table setting is not the exclusive prerogative of the elite. True class is eating spaghetti from a gold-trimmed porcelain plate with a silver fork.' Indeed, I found three forks and two 19th-century café glasses to match some I had already.

As one would expect, the 20th century is well to the fore. Contemporary art did not seem particularly impressive, but there are also Old Master drawings and 19th-century watercolours and I found a dealer, Magellan Antiquités, with examples of the Sèvres dinner services made for Charles X, Louis Philippe and Napoleon III.

I will not leave it another 30 years before I visit again. The first 2018 outing, the 96th, will be from March 8 to 18 (www.foiredchatou.com).

Next week Xxxxx xxxxxx



Fig 6: Pair of Chinese *huanghuali* corner armchairs. With Kat Adams