

Jewels of the new BADA

The Open Art Fair is as high quality as its predecessor, with superb Queen Anne furniture and a Swordfish model

THE organisers of the Open Art Fair, Thomas Woodham-Smith and Harry van der Hoorn, are approaching their first outing since buying the majority shareholding in what was the BADA's annual fair with due caution. Anger among the association's membership was largely due to the secrecy with which the negotiations had been conducted, rather than to the fact of the sale, as many exhibitors recognised it was time for change. It is sensible to make alterations gently and, as Mr Woodham-Smith tells me, this year's fair, at Duke of York Square, King's Road from March 18 to 24, will allow them to find out what will be necessary. A transitional period, might one say?

The interior has apparently been redesigned—Mr van der Hoorn is the owner of Stabulo, stand builders to the world's top fairs—with an emphasis on informality. Although the new title proclaims that exhibitors

no longer have to belong to BADA, most will be familiar to visitors. Only 10% or 15% of about 100 dealers will be non-members this time, among them a couple of Continentals, and the aim is that this should be a cost-effective operation for all, unlike some of the grandest fairs. Catering will be in the hands of Caravan, with Gimlet in charge of the bar.

The range is as wide as ever and quality certainly seems no less. Millington Adams, formerly of Mobberley, Cheshire, now in Wells, Somerset, presents one of the most impressive bureau-bookcases I have seen in a while. It is a Queen Anne mirrored double-dome piece in burr walnut with lesser dome pediments on the sides (Fig 1). The turned walnut finials are apparently original, as are the turned bun feet, and the walnut veneers are beautifully matched. The interior is fully fitted and has hidden jewellery and sovereign drawers.

The dealer proudly, and rightly, states that the unusual mouldings



Fig 1: Queen Anne bureau-bookcase. With Millington Adams

define what might be described as hipped domes—it is the depth of these mouldings and the sweeping movement that they create that is so special'. Together, the domes and finials give a sober piece of furniture an air of Oriental lightness and levity. Almost 7ft high, it is priced at £39,000.

Also sizeable, and with a much more sizeable price—£320,000

—is a pair of *famille rose* porcelain vases and covers from the reign of the Yongzheng Emperor (1722–35) with Gibson Antiques, a 'by appointment' London dealer. The vases are painted with panels of figures, birds, flowers and foliage and the covers are topped by seated hound finials. They come with handsome, but later, scrolled gilt-wood stands.



Fig 3 right: Primroses by William Henry Hunt. With Karen Taylor



Fig 2 left: George Chambers's portrait of his home. With John Bennett. Fig 3 right: Primroses by William Henry Hunt. With Karen Taylor



Fig 4: Erté set design for the 1961 ballet film *Edition Speciale*. With John Adams

Two other 'by appointment' dealers have caught my eye, both with paintings. John Bennett, formerly of Walton Street, has a number of interesting 18th- to early-20th-century paintings, including several of gardens. One should really be offered at the summer Masterpiece Fair, as it shows the Ranelagh Gardens Rotunda, which used to stand where that fair and the Chelsea Flower Show now take place. From 1742 until it was demolished in 1805, the Rotunda was the central feature of Ranelagh. The

work is by Joseph Nicholls, whom the dealer calls 'one of the best English comparatively obscure painters of 18th-century London views', which is about right.

One of this dealer's garden paintings attracts me because it is by George Chambers (1803–40), arguably the best English marine painter of his century. Furthermore, it is not only by him, but contains a self-portrait (Fig 2). Although described here as a country house, it actually shows 6, Park Village West, Regent's Park, W1, into which

Chambers moved in 1833, the year of this 19½in by 24in, £6,500, oil painting, shortly before his election to the Old, now Royal, Watercolour Society. His biographer tells us the house 'combined the advantage of a town residence with country air'. The artist, with palette and brushes, stands by his wife and an older guest, Normally, he painted indoors and 'his colours and brushes were kept in a mahogany case, designed by himself and having the appearance of a piece of drawing-room furniture', but there it is on the garden table.

A little flower, rather than garden, piece is with Karen Taylor of London. It is a typical 6¼in by 8in watercolour study of primroses (Fig 3) by William Henry Hunt, who was elected to the Old Watercolour Society in 1826. A charmer, it is also at £6,500.

John Adams, formerly of Pimlico Road, offers a 7in by 15in gouache by Erté (Romain de Tirtoff, 1892–1990), at £7,500, a set design for a 1961 ballet film, *Edition Speciale*, directed by Louis Cuny (Fig 4). It reminds me, mistily, of something I used to read to my children, or perhaps a jigsaw—it would make a good one.

Mr and Mrs Arthur Gaskin met as students at the Birmingham School of Art, married and worked together as artists and then jewellery designers. Usually, they credited themselves together, as above, but the design and making of the £12,950 necklace (Fig 5) with the Peartree Collection was ascribed by

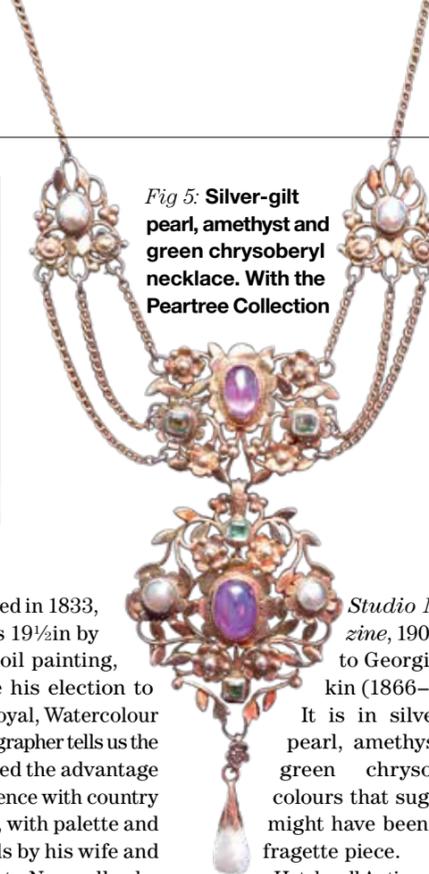


Fig 5: Silver-gilt pearl, amethyst and green chrysoberyl necklace. With the Peartree Collection

Studio Magazine, 1908, only to Georgie Gaskin (1866–1934). It is in silver-gilt, pearl, amethyst and green chrysoberyl, colours that suggest it might have been a suffragette piece.

Hatchwell Antiques of the King's Road Furniture Cave, SW10, specialises in aeronautical items. An exceptional offering here, at £48,000, is a mounted 79in-high French 1:7 scale wind-tunnel development model of an Espadon SO-6025, or Swordfish (Fig 6), designed under the direction of Lucien Servanty. The single-seater interceptor flew for the first time in November 1948.

Online silver specialist Forrest & Fraser is making a stylish entrance to its first-ever fair with a 19½in diameter £20,000 Paul Storr salver of 1829 that carries the arms of Middleton and an inscription to Capt Robert Gambier Middleton, who served under Hood and Nelson.



Fig 6: Wind-tunnel development model of a Swordfish. With Hatchwell Antiques

Next week Flowers for Maastricht

Pick of the week

One of the most popular paintings in the National Gallery—determined by postcard sales, I believe—is Akseli Gallen-Kallela's *Lake Keitele*, and it is certainly one of my favourites. Now, the Finnish master (1865–1931) is also represented in the Musée d'Orsay, thanks to a private sale negotiated by Sotheby's. The painting *Palokärki* (*Great Black Woodpecker*), also known as *Wilderness*, had been intended to go to auction in New York last November, when it was estimated at up to \$2.5 million (about £1.9million). It dates from 1892–94, shortly before the death of his daughter from diphtheria hardened the painter's style and subject matter. Nevertheless, it represents a turn away from a romantic French realism towards the emergent Nordic symbolism in landscape. He was becoming a Finnish nationalist and, for him, the woodpecker represented the spirit of the country emerging from the Russian Empire. The sky hints at his closeness to Munch, with whom he shared an exhibition in Berlin.

