

## Antiques & Art by Anthony J. Lester, FRSA

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On 6th February, The Cotswold Auction Company, in Cheltenham offered for sale a set of false teeth. Estimated at £5,000-8,000, the dentures attracted frenetic bidding from buyers in the UK and

America and were finally 'snapped up' for £23,184 (including premium). Why? Well, they were Sir Winston Churchill's false teeth. This is yet another classic example of the enduring demand for objects having a direct association with luminaries. Such idealisation goes back thousands of years with religious relics – among the most celebrated being the Turin Shroud (Chapel of the Holy Shroud, Turin), Buddha's Tooth (Temple of the Tooth, Kandy, Sri Lanka), which allegedly was taken from Buddha's funeral pyre in 543 BC, the blood of Saint San Gennaro (Naples Cathedral) and the

Holy Foreskin of which eighteen different churches have laid claim to having the skin from the infant Jesus.

Today the 'relics' in demand are often items associated with actors, popstars and sporting heroes – examples being the £3.9m paid for the flesh-coloured dress worn by Marilyn Monroe when she delivered the "Happy Birthday" serenade to President Kennedy and the £288,000 paid for Sir Gareth Edward's jersey worn at the 1973 Barbarians versus New Zealand rugby match.

However, caveat emptor! In July 2012, ten months after Sir Jimmy Savile died, his mementos and personal belongings went up for auction in Leeds. A Jim'll Fix It badge sold for a staggering £2,000 but it was his Rolls-Royce that many devotees wanted. Procured for £160,000, the new owner planned to hire it out for weddings and children's parties. However, as soon as Savile's abuse allegations hit the headlines, the car's value was deemed "worthless."

## Association with luminaries

I have always had an endearing passion for watercolours, which, in 2019, resulted in me writing *Then and Now: Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours* (ISBN: 978 1 906690 70 0). Founded in 1831 the RI staged their 212th Annual Exhibition from 28th March to 13th April at the **Mall Galleries**, The Mall, SW1, and I am privileged to be responsible for selecting one work for an award. This show offers such a diverse range of subjects and styles, plus, with prices starting at £350, this is an event which offers something for everybody. Turning the clock back to 2013 and again, I had the daunting but congenial task of choosing one picture out of 424 at the RI Exhibition, which I deemed "best in show." My choice – a striking and meticulously rendered composition by Thomas Allen (b. 1989). Since then, he has received several other prizes and I have no hesitation in acclaiming him to be an artistic prodigy. I ardently advocate a visit to his solo show taking place between 15th March and 19th April at the **Ronchini Gallery**, 22 Dering Street, Mayfair, W1S 1AN. Entitled *The Hand that Feeds*, Allen underscores the impact of mass consumption and overpopulation has on the land we inhabit. He cogitated upon these concepts during the pandemic: "I spent a year living in a small cabin in ancient woodlands, cooking my meals over an open fire and doing coppicing woodcraft work during the day. As well as teaching me about sustainable land management, the experience planted the seed for the work in this exhibition." The lively and idiosyncratic compositions, mostly generated over the past year, have a salient theme but are incredibly alluring – for example, *Locust Breeder*, echoes the flattened figuration of Ancient Egyptian art, enhancing a layer of mystery to this disconcerting figure who encapsulates notions of gluttony, hunger and panic. Given Allen's consummate draughtsmanship and originality, the price band of £1,500 to £11,000 seems restrained! Another artist making waves in the art world is Tushar Sabale (b. 1979), who was born in India in 1979 and is now based in London. He primarily paints *en plein air* and is a member of The British Plein Air

Painters, The London Plein Air Group and the prestigious Wapping Group of Artists. Until 23rd March, Sabale displays 50 of his vibrant paintings at **Green & Stone Gallery**, 251 Fulham Road, Chelsea, SW3 6HY. All the compositions have been captured at various locations in London, with prices ranging from £650 to £2,500, although a few small works are being offered at an enticing £375.

An artist needing no introduction is Sir Peter Blake, who, in June celebrates his 92 birthday. A prominent figure in the pop art movement, he is, perhaps, best-known for co-creating with Jann Haworth the sleeve design for the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. A less familiar aspect to his creativity is sculpture and until 13th April, **Waddington Custot**, 11 Cork Street, W1S 3LT, throws the spotlight on Blake's three-dimension work. Quirky and endearing, these conceptual creations of assemblages of found objects are elevated to fine art status.

Concluding on 13th April is *Yoi*, an exhibition of works from the Munupi Arts and Crafts Association, located along Melville Island's north-western coastline, north of Darwin. Taking place at the **JGM Gallery**, 24 Howie Street, Battersea, SW11 4AY, London's leading specialists in Aboriginal Australian art, the show features nine Munupi artists. Mainly painted with natural ochres, the canvases possess a unique textural materiality and are irrepressibly powerful and emphatically striking. Prices start at £1,050 for a work by Christine Daisy Puruntatameri (b. 1983), and at the top, £9,800 for a large and characteristically complex composition by Simplicia Tipungwuti's (b. 1979).

The London art market is renowned for showcasing the work of artists from around the world so here are two for your deliberation. On view until 13th April, the **Stephen Friedman Gallery**, 5-6 Cork Street, W1S 3LQ, presents the first solo exhibition in the UK of American artist Woody De Othello (b. 1991). His zany work encompasses sculpture, painting and drawing and includes glazed ceramics, carved wood, bronze, ink and oil paint. The hanging



Coquelicots à la Frontière (£10,500), oil on canvas by Jean-Marie Toulgouat, David Messum Fine Art



Locust Breeder oil on linen by Thomas Allen, Ronchini Gallery



Militaria II, ochre on canvas (£1,950) by Josephine Burak (b. 1977), JGM Gallery



Making Plans, oil on canvas by Thomas Allen, Ronchini Gallery

at **David Messum Fine Art**, 12 Bury Street, St. James's, SW1Y 6AB, until 5th April, offers a rare opportunity to inspect recently rediscovered artworks by Jean-Marie Toulgouat (1927-2006). He was the great-grandson of Claude Monet and was born, raised and died at Giverny, Monet's former house and studio. Toulgouat vibrant oil paintings (£4,850-£42,500) of the flowers and gardens at Giverny serve as a subtle yet distinctive link to the French Impressionists. Between 13th March and 24th April, **The Garden Museum**, 5 Lambeth Palace Road, SE1 7LB, in collaboration with Messum's, will display a further selection of Toulgouat's paintings.