

CORRESPONDENCE

London Letter

In the wake of this summer's tragic events there was some concern for London's summer art season. However, this is a resilient city and its inhabitants do not stay fearful or despondent for long.

The first of the major fairs to open its doors was **The Art and Antiques Fair Olympia**, which ran from 26th June to 2nd July. The difficult location remains a perennial problem for this fair. (Here is a useful tip for those who are not in a hurry: several double decker bus routes serve Olympia and there are fine views of London from the upper decks). That said, Olympia this year boasted a record number of dealers and hard work by Mary Claire Boyd and her team created a stylish and welcoming ambience.

Joost van den Bergh's stand attracted an appreciative crowd and here I admired a monumental stucco head of Buddha, *circa* 4th Century A.D. Don Kelly Books was also popular—just the place to find that elusive work on early Chinese jades or Annamese ceramics. At the van Halm stand there was a fine display of Chinese *huashi* wares and here I was touched to hear Wouter van Halm's memories of meeting Tuyet Nguyet, founder of *Arts of Asia* magazine. He described her, correctly, as "a lovely lady".

Masterpiece, now in its eighth year, ran from 29th June to 5th July and visitors will have noted a considerable change of emphasis here. "Cross-collecting" was this year's buzzword and chairman Philip Hewat-Jaboor was keen to break down any barriers which remain between ancient and modern. John Berwald, for example, exhibited not only the fine Chinese works for which he is best known, but also a good selection of Modern British art. Similarly, Patrick and Ondine Mestdagh had their tribal works juxtaposed with Japanese lacquer and curiosities from around the world. Perhaps my favourite display was Amir Mohtashemi's and his scholarly catalogue is a work of art in itself. Here I admired some beautiful Iznik tiles of 16th Century date and a group of botanical drawings, probably from Penang.

This summer's two main themes, "cross-collecting" and the need for a narrative, are precisely those initiatives pioneered by Oliver Hoare. His 2015 show, **Every Object Tells a Story**, created a sensation in the London art world and, two years later, he did it again. His 2017 exhibition retained the same title but was presented in South Kensington, at 5 Cromwell Place, running from 4th May to 5th July.

When it comes to breaking down cultural barriers no one can compete with Oliver Hoare. Here, cheek by jowl, were Man Ray's famous lips lithograph, a bronze Siberian tattooed man more than 2000 years old, a haunting Lele dance mask from the Congo, an ammonite fossil at least 250 million years old, a magnificent Safavid Qur'an, and much, much more... The show was augmented by an inspired programme



Barbara Harding with John Berwald at Masterpiece



Gandhara stucco head of Buddha. Height 52 cm. Joost van den Bergh



Every Object Tells a Story. Oliver Hoare

of lectures, musical evenings, parties and events for young people. I found that several visits were required, with periods of reflection between. Once again, Oliver Hoare's erudite catalogue, laced with wit and wisdom, is something to be treasured.

What was the overall impression of this year's summer season? I found the mood surprisingly positive, although one major question seemed to remain unresolved. It was this: how does the art and antiques community engage with the young, and specifically with the "Ikea generation"? We are told that this generation is content to live with half assembled flatpack furniture

and would never buy anything old or beautiful (their grandparents did that). I suspect that the answer to this question was provided by Oliver Hoare's show and also by the David Bowie auction at Sotheby's in November 2016. Bowie's objects came with glamour attached—and a narrative. The young viewed his sale in their thousands and Sotheby's even had to introduce crowd control measures. There is perhaps a lesson there for dealers, fair organisers and even for the auction houses.

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