



REVIEW ART MARKET

HOW DOES THE WIND BLOW?

Sales were brisk and robust at the recent Winter Antiques Show in New York, and a bit of Americana moulded in copper and iron sold for a staggering \$1 million

THE Winter Antiques Show at the Seventh Regiment Armory in New York City has an emphasis on Americana, as might be expected, and this is one reason that I have yet to visit it. However, it is one of the oldest and most prestigious fairs in the American calendar, and it also boasts serious art and antique dealers from Europe, as well as from the United States. Reports out of this year's 52nd outing, which ran from January 20 to 29, indicate that business was good.

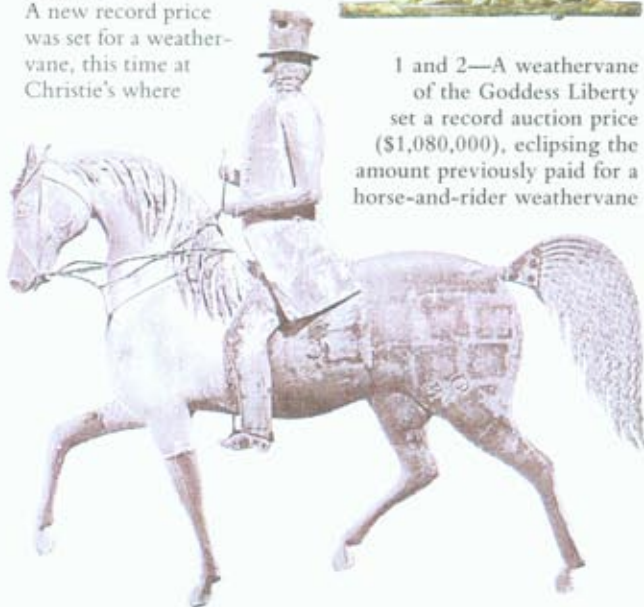
Every country has a particular fondness for its own artefacts, which often seem unremarkable to others. I cannot resist quoting at length from one of the last columns written by my predecessor Frank Davis, in *COUNTRY LIFE*, February 22, 1990: 'New York sales, devoted entirely to American folk art, ranging from the amusingly crude to the would-be sophisticated, always attract a large crowd, and occasionally make me rub my eyes in astonishment at the prices paid. The latest thing in this category to come my way was this horse

and rider in a sale at Sotheby's, a weathervane of moulded and gilded copper and zinc, very rare of course, and I gasped at the price of £465,116 (Fig 1). Its date is about 1860, judging by the rider's hat and coat, and one cannot consider it a work of art as normally illustrated on these pages. Nonetheless it is good fun.'

After the latest Americana sales in January, Frank would again be rubbing his eyes and gasping. A new record price was set for a weathervane, this time at Christie's where



1 and 2—A weathervane of the Goddess Liberty set a record auction price (\$1,080,000), eclipsing the amount previously paid for a horse-and-rider weathervane



\$1,080,000 was paid by a collector for a gilt and painted moulded copper and sheet iron vane of the Goddess Liberty (Fig 2). The auctioneers were somewhat taken aback, as they had expected only up to \$90,000. At Sotheby's, the most expensive weathervane was a less desirable carved and painted pine example dating from around 1850, which reached \$33,000.

Despite being separated in time and distance by some 2,500 years and miles, and in culture by an measureless chasm, one can imagine that the 19in-long Egyptian bronze-and-wooden figure of an ibis (Fig 3), which was the star of London antiquities dealer Rupert Wace's stand at the Winter Show, might appeal to a similar taste as the weathervanes. Of course, the figure is a much more sophisticated piece, but the wood at least would have been painted when it was new in the Late Dynastic period, around BC500. In fact, the way it has weathered has given it an almost naturalistic, feathered look. It was strategically displayed on an aisle, and was snapped up by an American private buyer at about \$220,000.

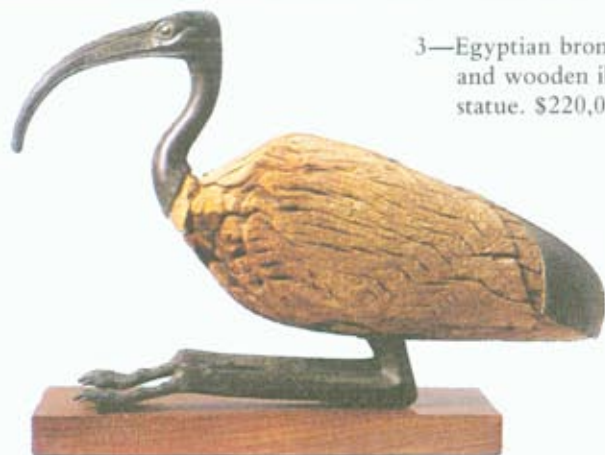
This was by no means all for Mr Wace. He sold more than 50 pieces to collectors from France, Holland, Japan, Switzerland, North America and the United Kingdom. Among them was an Egyptian faience pectoral of the winged goddess Isis dating from the Third Intermediate Period, BC1069–715, which was greatly admired. It went to a British private collector



PICK OF THE WEEK

Leighton House, the palatial home of the Victorian artist Frederic, Lord Leighton, has secured £215,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to catalogue and conserve its holding of his 715 drawings. When it is completed, there will be a rotating exhibition of them, and it is intended to make the house and entire collection more accessible to the public. There are also plans for a conference on Victorian drawing (www.rbkc.gov.uk/leightonhousemuseum).





3—Egyptian bronze and wooden ibis statue. \$220,000

for a price in the region of \$70,000, and a striking Coptic limestone head of a man, from the 4th or 5th century AD, sold for around \$30,000, also to a British collector. An American purchased five items, including a bronze statue of the god Ptah dating from the Third Intermediate Period, from about BC944–600, and another American buyer acquired an Etruscan terracotta votive head of a young man, from about BC 3rd century, for approximately \$35,000.

The cultural miscegenation continued when a Japanese collector was very taken with a group of Romano-Celtic bronze and inlaid enamel *fibulae*, ornamental clasps or brooches in the shapes of various animals such as hounds, hares, panthers, and lions, and bought five. Two other pieces went to yet another Briton: One of the most dramatic pieces, naturally, was a Roman marble relief of actors' masks, dating from the 2nd century AD, priced at \$35,000, and it soon went to an American collector.

Some forms of popular art and artefacts also manage to cross national boundaries with little apparent difficulty. Beside their Americana last month, Christie's offered Mrs J. Insley Blair's collection. This included a number of good Staffordshire pottery pieces, most notably a creamware pew group (Fig 4) described by Jonathan Horne, who bought it for a client, as 'the nicest one on the market for as long as I can remember'—which means at least since 1968 when he set up his Kensington Church Street business.

The pew group dates from about 1745 and cost



4—Staffordshire pew group of 1745. \$168,000



5—Equestrian portrait from Sir Alfred Munnings. \$520,000

him \$168,000 (£98,820).

Over the years, a reliable British export to the United States has been Sir Alfred Munnings, but judging by the December sporting art sales at Sotheby's and Christie's New York, it would seem that the Munnings market is distinctly choosy nowadays. At Sotheby's, eight of the 10 most expensive offerings were by him, but in most cases the prices represented only small advances, if any, on previous sale-room outings.

At Christie's, there were no less than 13 of his canvases, five of which failed to find buyers. However, none of these represented the artist at his peak. The most expensive work certainly did, but to my eye at least, there was something slightly caddish about the supremely elegant

young man on his bay horse. Rather oddly, the identity of this sitter has been lost, despite a provenance going back to clients of the artist. The 28½in by 30in canvas sold for \$520,000, at the bottom of the estimate (Fig 5).

The cheapest Munnings from the sale was one of the few to go well over estimate. It was one of his humorous sketches, a pencil drawing titled *Celebration with Horses in the Clouds*, which made \$12,000. There was also one of his dog portraits, a 16¼in by 14in canvas of a terrier, *Hugo*, that sold at \$42,000 (Fig 6).



6—Munnings's portrait of *Hugo* fetched a tidy \$42,000