

All Things Auctioneering

With Cato Crane Valuers & Auctioneers and John Crane Fine Art



A warm welcome always awaits you

May I begin this issue's antiques page by wishing everyone a slightly belated Happy New Year.

Most people are wondering what the year holds in store and I am no different. The economy is buoyant for some sectors of the marketplace, but maybe not so for others; the same applies to the home and international marketplace for antiques and works of art.

The \$45,000,000 paid for the Leonardo da Vinci portrait indicates that some people are prepared to speculate large sums of money, for speculation it surely is – nothing more.

Our first auction this year in January was fairly mixed in quality and range and prices indicated this, but, as usual, objects of high-quality made high prices. They always do! It was, however, noticed that teak furniture, which would have been consigned to the skip or landfill ten years ago, was making more money than good antique furniture. It is now the best time in my lifetime to acquire good antique furniture.

My tip for 2018 is to search for good solid oil on canvas pastoral paintings, making sure they contain figures and animals and tell a story! I think nowadays, these pictures will give a room a feeling of permanence and stability in this strange world of internet and TV transience in which we live. However, buy artists of note and take advice before parting with money. If you have a lot of knowledge and trust your own

judgement, then scour the auction rooms. If you don't have experience, please ask someone who does and has at least 30 years' experience. We ask advice on occasions from authorities in specialised areas in London – not one of them is under 65!



Pottery Ewer

I have recently discovered an interesting impressed inscription stamped on the base of a somewhat elaborate pottery ewer: it says 'Art Union of London'. In the c19th, as now, it was fashionable for wealthy people to demonstrate their perhaps newly acquired refined tastes for the finer things of life by their support of the arts – music, literature, sculpture, painting and so forth – and to assist the creators of these works.

The wealthy of Liverpool and Wirral were, of course, first in the field to show their refinement and to raise awareness by creating many public galleries for the benefit of all. In 1834 Liverpool and Edinburgh were the first cities in the UK to form Art Unions. London followed in 1837. For an annual subscription of one guinea (equivalent to £650 in today's money), you could become a member. Every year each member would receive a small mass-produced work, usually in the form of an engraving of a major new work, but the main prizes in the annual art lottery were for newly produced works up to the value of £150, a work of substantial value. The range of art prizes was later broadened to include sculpture and pottery.

By the 1860s the London Art Union had 20,000 members, so in today's money it had the effect of injecting



Doulton Lambeth Ewer

£13,000,000 of monetary support for the arts into the art market.

White unglazed Parian Ware figures by Copeland were extremely popular as 'prizes'. By the end of the century, interest and support had declined, falling to 5,000 in 1900, and the London Art Union ceased to operate in 1912. The Doulton Lambeth ewer illustrated is in our auction in March. You don't need to belong to an Art Union to acquire this piece as it will probably make £300–£500 – less than the original value of the annual Art Union subscription equivalent in 1834.

During the several hundred home visits I make every year, there are only a few properties which do not have the ever-popular Royal Doulton figures on display on windowsills, mantelshelves over the fireplaces, or in pride of place in display cabinets. Each year we offer many of these figures for sale. The examples of recent manufacture bring only a handful of pounds each; earlier and more elaborate models start to rise in value. The models of Henry VIII and his six wives command a few hundred pounds in auction.

The once-popular Royal Doulton Toby Jugs can be frequently discovered, and the most commonplace ones have only a small resale value these days. If, however, you happen to have the model 'Red Haired Clown' character jug you would be pleasantly surprised at its current value.