

All Things Auctioneering

With Cato Crane Valuers & Auctioneers and John Crane Fine Art

It is only recently, when I encountered and was in conversation with Guy Stair Sainy in London, that I recalled a brush with one of the great New York procurers and suppliers (otherwise known as scholarly dealers) of Fine Art of all time. The date was August 1967 and the place was Perama on Kerkyra in the Ionian Sea.

The heat was intense in the olive grove and the only remedy at midday for 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen' was tea in the shade. At the top of the olive grove I noticed a movement and saw a distinguished looking, tall, late middle-aged figure approaching.

He had greying, collar-length hair and was wearing an obviously London-cut light beige silk summer suit, Panama hat with a wider than average brim, and a cravat together with a very slim, tightly rolled umbrella. My newly found acquaintance invited himself to join me for tea and it was obvious by his soft and cultured accent that he was a former British patriot now living in New York.

My tea partner volunteered the information that he had come to the Greek island to visit some friends who owned one of the great London book publishing houses and they had invited him to examine some Edward Lear paintings they had in their collection. I listened with polite interest.



Edward Lear aged about 45

Following a discourse about Edward Lear, the person gave me his business card and sauntered off, winding his way around the ancient olive trees to where Georgio was hooting in his taxi. It was forty years later, with the advent of the internet that I discovered that I had been in the company of the world's foremost authority on the art of Edward Lear!

This was George Dix (1912–1999), who had worked in association with Durlacher Brothers in New York for many years and when they closed in 1967 he operated on his own account until 1992. After his death, the George Dix archive of letters and



By Edward Lear

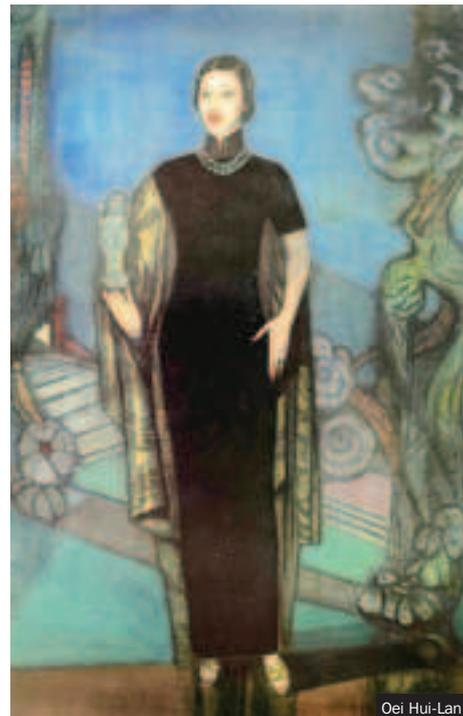
photographs and picture sale records was deposited with Yale University Library and is available to modern day researchers.

Space does not allow me to write much about Edward Lear (1812–1888), but he was a true polymath. The Temple of Athena at Athens is just one work from Lear's the prodigious output while on his numerous travels. He is, of course, best known for his nonsense poetry; his most famous poem 'The Owl and the Pussycat' was written at Knowsley Hall near Liverpool for the 13th Earl of Derby when Edward Lear was invited to visit to paint parrots and animals in the menagerie. Lear's Macaw, a blue South American parrot is named after him; his first volume of parrot images was published when he was only 21. It is also said that the 'pussycat' poem might have been written by the Earl Derby as 'Lear' is an anagram of 'Earl... but that is nonsense too! His death was preceded by that of his 'best friend', his cat Foss who travelled everywhere with him and was buried in his garden at San Remo with 'great ceremony'! Edward Lear's own funeral was sadly attended by only one person, the wife of his physician.



Painted by Edward Lear and published in a volume in 1838

Guy Stair Sainy continues the tradition of the scholarly dealer with a lifetime of experience and has a gallery in Dover Street in Mayfair in London, which is well worth a visit. I have illustrated one of the pictures currently on show at his gallery – a full-size portrait of Oei Hui-Lan, (Mme Wellington Koo), by Federico Beltran Masses painted in 1932.



Oei Hui-Lan

Now, you have hopefully been reading about the very top end of the art market, which is fairly active at the moment although not as easy as it was twenty years ago. At the major London Antiques Fair at Chelsea in June the picture and jewellery and silver dealers appeared to be doing business and were attracting many visitors to their stands. Some furniture dealers were fairly busy, but only those with unusual pieces seemed to have red 'sold' stickers in evidence.

People keep on telling me that 'the antiques business is slow'. I see little signs of that being true, but auctioneers have to be careful not to accept low value goods for auction or too many commonplace antique items. Those are the ones that are difficult to move on. Fortunately, residents in Wirral seem to have been careful and selective in furnishing their houses fifty years ago and if you bought fine quality then, it is still fine quality now and in the main will sell at auction.

I recently discovered a Royal Doulton character jug, commonly known as 'The Red Haired Clown'; its actual name is 'The Clown' and was designed by Harry Fenton and produced from 1937 to 1942