

Gallery Notes

SUMMER 2016

JOHN MITCHELL
FINE PAINTINGS

DETAIL

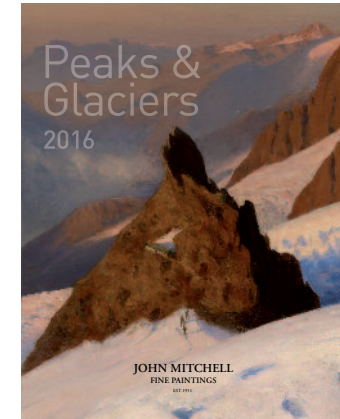
Fanny Burat

A garland of flowers including roses, morning glory, an opium poppy and a red admiral butterfly

See pages 16-17



The pace of change has, if anything, quickened since our last *Gallery Notes* a year ago. Most importantly for us, the decline of Old Bond Street prompted us last year to move to our new premises at nearby Avery Row, thus completing the flight of established art dealers in recent years from this once elegant street. The success of our fifteenth *Peaks & Glaciers* exhibition earlier this year, and the favourable reaction of clients to our new first-floor space, have re-assured us that we have not strayed too far from the beaten track. We warmly invite our readers who haven't yet been to do so!



Meanwhile, the annual cycle of art fairs, so integral to the art trade in the last twenty years, is in upheaval. The European Fine Art Fair in Maastricht, for years the premier event in the world of Old Master paintings, perhaps no longer has the cachet it once enjoyed, and its organisers have felt compelled to launch a New York version later this year. Some argue that there are too many fairs, but it is clear that if it is a sufficiently illustrious event the *aficianados*, old and new, cannot afford to miss it. *Masterpiece* is just such a show, and in the space of a few years has become a spectacular, high-

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quality fair commensurate with London's much-vaunted status as a 'world city.' For that reason, and because all the featured pictures will be on display on our stand (B17), we are delighted to designate this *Gallery Notes* our 'Masterpiece Edition'.

Although I used the term above, it is now fashionable to drop the 'Old' from the term Old Master paintings, on the spurious grounds that buyers are deterred from historic paintings if too much emphasis is placed on the very thing that makes them historic! The real reason for this New York-led trend is that it allows the earliest European paintings to be offered for sale with ones that until recently would have been called 'modern'. There is now a thriving market for only the very best Old Masters, and ones which have not been seen in recent times. Because of the scarcity of such work, by necessity they have to be combined with later treasures, and not only pictures, to be

shown to be appealing. This explains the rise of the 'eclectic' display in galleries, at fairs and in auction houses, and it is a welcome development to us, given our firm's historical sphere of activity across several centuries. More than ever before considerations of quality override all others in what we deal in.

The dates of the paintings and watercolours offered here span less than a century, and it is purely by co-incidence that France is the dominant theme. It is also an unlooked-for parallel that, in the wake of last winter's R.A. exhibition on Liotard, we should feature works on vellum, a fascinating medium which was re-explored in the context of the great Swiss artist's pastels. Vellum has been in the news again since then, as the House of Lords has recently voted, regardless of expense, to continue recording their transactions on parchment in the age-old fashion. The **Redouté's** spellbinding quality (pages 4-6) seems to reward the faith which this greatest of flower painters placed in it as his medium of choice. Like him, **Pillement** (pages 10-13) is no debutant to *Gallery Notes*, but familiarity with an artist does not preclude one from renewed admiration of his pastels. **Victor Gilbert's** dashing cat and its mistress (pages 18-19) create a charming composition which adheres to our long-held aim of seeking out an artist's more imaginative pictures.

We look forward to sharing our paintings, drawings and watercolours with you in our gallery and at *Masterpiece*.

James & William Mitchell
June 2016

Edward Lear (1812-1888)

A View of Cannes with the Massif de l'Esterel in the distance

pen and ink, and watercolour on paper

13¼ x 22in (35.5 x 55.5cm)

signed and dated 1865, and variously inscribed with colour notes

PROVENANCE

With Agnew's, ca. 1980, no. 36696





Pierre-Joseph Redouté (1759-1840)

A Sprig of Spring Flowers – hyacinth, narcissi, camellias and a pansy

graphite and watercolour on vellum, in a gold-leaf oval framing line

15¾ x 11 in. (40 x 28 cm.)

signed and dated 1819

with Louis XVI carved and gilded frame

PROVENANCE

Auguste de Marmont (1774-1852), Duc de Raguse, Maréchal de France et de l'Empire;
thence by descent in his family until 2016

Last summer I accompanied some clients to Cambridge to see the Fitzwilliam Museum's exhibition, *Watercolour: Elements of Nature*. Here was an opportunity to see some of the treasures from the Museum's Prints and Drawings Department which are not normally on display. Among them were two large Redouté watercolours from the Broughton Bequest, one of a magnolia and the other of a peony. The individual vellum sheets were almost certainly intended to be bound together in an album as they are inscribed and numbered in a certain way. Furthermore, there are rectangular gold framing lines which intersect, and are briefly obscured by, the extremities of the flowers and leaves; combined with the rich, unfaded colours, this *trompe l'oeil* effect seemed to bring the flowers to life and showed how ageless Redouté's finest work can be.

In our 'Autumn 2013' edition of *Gallery Notes*, when we last published a Redouté, I reminded readers of the paradox of this 'Raphael of flowers': in spite of his reputation as one of the greatest flower painters in history, it is prohibitively difficult to see his *original* work – hence the significance of the display of two watercolours in Cambridge last year. When, I wonder, were Redoutés like these openly presented in a museum in Britain? The element of the unexpected is one of the stimulations of picture dealing, and I could never have imagined that within six months we would be handling this, the finest Redouté watercolour the firm has had in thirty years. I have no hesitation in writing this. The deep strength of the colours, the tonality and the piercing detail are in themselves extraordinary; but what further distinguishes this particular watercolour is the latent artistry. No dry botanical study, this; instead Redouté's unique talents are put to work in pure celebration of the glory of flora – and by implication, perhaps, the promise of the season of spring. Liberated from the more prosaic, dry technique he adopted for botanical documentation, Redouté works up a posy of flowers for the sheer virtuoso joy of it. In palette, balance of composition, use of light – all is harmony.

This unstretched sheet of vellum belonged originally to one of Napoleon's marshals, and stayed hidden away for nearly two centuries in his ducal album of drawings at the Marmont family seat in the Loire. The way it has been stored, therefore, offers an object lesson in the preservation of watercolour: the undiminished pigments and vitality are testament to

Redouté's faith in the durability of the medium of watercolour on vellum, of which he became one of the greatest exponents. Some may argue that, like some disturbingly well-preserved artefact from one of the Pharaonic tombs, this treasure, having been studied and marvelled at, should now be returned to its sequestered life in an album deep in the Loire. I maintain, however, that the humble genius from the Ardennes would want his little masterpiece to be seen as much and as often as possible. With modern conservation materials and glass – and an element of care in selecting a position for its display – that is now very much an option.

A fuller account of the astonishing story of Redouté's life, in particular his connections with kings, queens and Empress Josephine, was given in that 2013 *Gallery Notes* and need not be re-offered here. Instead let us simply revel in this supremely elegant and pure 'group portrait' of some of the artist's beloved subjects.

JFM

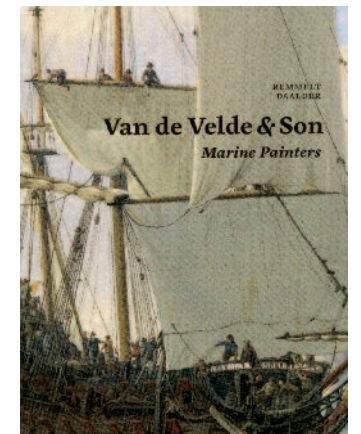


Willem van de Velde the Younger (1633-1707)

The royal yacht 'Mary'

pen and wash drawing
6½ x 9¾in (16.5 x 25cm)
signed with initials 'W.V.V.'
with antique Louis XIII frame

PROVENANCE
Henry Weldon, New York.



We are pleased to draw your attention to the publication of Remmelt Daalder's new book on the Van de Veldes, available in both Dutch and English editions (see photo). Please call for further information.

Alphonse de Neuville (1835-1885)*A Grenadier of the Garde Imperiale, circa 1870*oil on canvas
13 x 7½in (33 x 19cm)

Alphonse de Neuville was born in St. Omer in the Pas-de-Calais and studied in Paris under Francois-Edouard Picot. In a relatively short career he became well-known for his large paintings of recent military engagements, most notably in the Crimean, Franco-Prussian and Zulu wars, examples of which can be seen today in institutions as diverse as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Heritage Museum in St Petersburg. His depiction of the shattering defeats suffered at the hands of the Prussians added to the sense of humiliation in France and, by indirectly stoking the desire for revenge, de Neuville came to be praised for his patriotic work.

British campaigns, too, caught his imagination, never more dramatically than in his vast, 9-foot wide *The Defence of Rorke's Drift*, 1879 (Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales), in which the desperate close-quarters fighting of that epic clash is suggested in graphic detail.

Our study may have been cut out of a larger canvas, as there is an addition along the left-hand edge, and it is typical of the highly-finished sketch made in this period by an artist preparing a large-scale work.

Lastly, in working to identify the soldier's uniform and era, I revealed my own ignorance! The French had always used bearskin caps, but it was only after Waterloo that the Grenadier Guards, and subsequently the other British Foot Guard regiments, adopted the bearskin in commemoration of their victory.

JFM



Jean Pillement (1728-1808)*A Capriccio of Shepherds in a Mediterranean Landscape*

pastels on gessoed canvas
 28¾ x 38in (73 x 97cm)
 signed and dated 1790

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Neil Jeffares in his 'Prolegomena' to *Pastels & Pastellists* (2016), published online at www.pastellists.com

Pillement's work has graced editions of *Gallery Notes* for more than fifty years and yet, just when we felt we had come across the finest pair of his pastels we were ever likely to see (see illus. below, and in *Gallery Notes* Summer 2015), this example comes to light – of equal quality as the pair, but much larger and, in palette, distinct. As we will see with John Russell on pages 14-15, in the eighteenth century pastel was almost exclusively the province of the portraitist: there were no history pictures in the medium, few still lifes and, as Neil Jeffares has pointed out, Pillement was the only pastels specialist consistently doing landscapes – and certainly larger ones than anyone else. The notice opposite suggests that Pillement himself was every bit as proud of his pastels (or 'Crayons' as they are referred to in the language of the age) as he was of his oil paintings, and, after many years of extolling to readers of *Gallery Notes* the equal merits of his pastels, we are gratified to be able to hear it from the artist himself!

Until recently Pillement's pastels were invariably catalogued both by curators, dealers (including ourselves) and auction houses as being variously 'on linen', 'on paper laid down on linen' or 'on paper, laid down on canvas.' In numerous cases, including that of our present offering, this was wrong. The pastel was in fact drawn and worked directly onto a *prepared* canvas, and it is thanks to Neil Jeffares' tireless scholarship that a lot more is now known about the exact method of preparation, and the reasons why it was chosen. Our pastel has survived unmolested in any way for more than two centuries, and it fell to us recently to remove, one crumbly flake at a time, the original cardboard backing which protected the



Mr PILLEMENT, Painter to the King of POLAND, being returned to London, after an Absence of 12 Years, begs Leave to acquaint the Nobility and Gentry that his study of Painting, Drawing, and Crayons being greatly improved, he proposes soon to make a publick Exhibition of the Works he has brought over with him: consisting of 33 Drawings in Chalk, Oyl, and Crayons; among which are two Large and Capital, in a manner entirely new, and invented solely for the Cabinet of the Empress Queen.

from the *Daily Advertiser*, 3 June 1772 (quoted by Jeffares, see Bibliography)

12 reverse of the canvas. The photo below shows what we found and what looks like the back of an oil painting, complete with stretcher. (The original strings were evidently to protect the cardboard from pushing against the verso.) On the front, meanwhile, looking at the edges of the pastel, it is clear that the canvas was prepared with some kind of fine plaster or gesso. Jeffares has ascertained from Chaperon's *Traité de la peinture au pastel* (Paris, 1788) that this gesso was composed of fish glue, ground-up marble or pumice stone, and chalk. Pillement was already an expert pastellist by 1788 and one wonders what he would have made of the publication of this manual! Nevertheless gessoed canvas was clearly the finest medium to work one, for as Chaperon notes: 'Le pastel prend très bien dessus & cette méthode réussit au mieux.' ['The pastel takes to it very well and this method succeeds best.']

However interesting we may find this technical underpinning, it must, from our point of view at least, be subordinate to the merits of the pastel as a work of art. There seems to be no difficulty here: because the pastels have survived so well, with only minimal discolouration, we are able to enjoy this sunlit, light-hearted essay in the picturesque, so popular among the grand tourists of the eighteenth century.

JFM



John Russell, R.A. (1745-1806)

Portrait of Charles Plowden, aged sixteen, with his Dog

pastel on paper, laid down on canvas
40 x 31in (101.5 x 78.5cm)
signed and dated 1797
in the original frame

PROVENANCE

Anna Maria Plowden, sister of the sitter; thence by descent;
Edward, 2nd Baron O'Neill, Shane's Castle, Co. Antrim, by 1873.

EXHIBITED

London, Royal Academy, 1797, no 512

Following the death of his teacher, Francis Cotes, in 1770, John Russell became the leading portraitist in pastels in Britain, and also the last great exponent of the art in this country. He enjoyed a widespread and fashionable clientèle and in 1788 was appointed Crayon Painter to King George III and to the Prince of Wales. At the same time, he delighted in portraying miscellaneous beggars, ferret handlers(!) and ballad singers. His *One of the Porters of the Royal Academy* (1792, Courtauld Institute of Art) was displayed in the *Art on the Line* exhibition at Somerset House in 2001. Russell also embraced the idea of the 'fancy picture', with subjects such as his pastel of *The Fortune Teller* (1790, Tate Britain) capitalising on popular tastes. A man of deep religious conviction, Russell dabbled in alchemy and was also a dedicated astronomer: over twenty years, he studied and drew the moon obsessively.

I am grateful (again!) to Neil Jeffares for establishing that this is the picture listed in a contemporary review of the R.A. exhibition of 1797 as 'C.PLOWDEN, JR with his dog'.

JFM

*Crayon pictures, when finely painted,
are superlatively beautiful...* Francis Cotes





Fanny Burat (1838-after 1885)

A garland of flowers including roses, morning glory, an opium poppy and a red admiral butterfly

watercolour on vellum
 31½ x 26in (80 x 66cm)
 signed and dated 1869
 with fine period 'Louis XV revival' frame

This picture is remarkable not for the éclat of the artist's name but as an example of flower painting from nineteenth-century France. As we have seen, Redouté's favourite medium was watercolour, usually on vellum, and he and his pupils thus carried on the tradition of the *Vélins du Roy*, the collection of botanical designs commissioned by Gaston d'Orléans and continued by Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI. Although not a pupil of Redouté, Mademoiselle Burat's use – and mastery – of this difficult medium nearly thirty years after the death of its greatest exponent shows how pervasive his influence was.

Another wellspring of the rich school of flower painting in France at this time was to be found in the decoration of porcelain, and its 'Mecca' was, of course, Sèvres. Among the most accomplished of all the flower painters working there was Moïse Jacob Ber, *dit* Jacobber (1786-1863), and his dazzling draughtsmanship and brilliant colouring owed everything to the great Dutch still life painters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Jacobber spent over thirty years of his life working at Sèvres and among his many pupils was Fanny Burat.

Before she could begin working on it, this large vellum was dampened and stretched over stiff card and, as it dried, it shrank and created a shallow hollow in the curved space between the vellum and its support, thus affording the artist a drum-like surface to work on. It is rare to find such a large and delicate vellum so well preserved after nearly a hundred and fifty years, not to mention the unfaded pigments of the painting itself. One of Fanny Burat's skills is to paint white flowers on a white background in a three-dimensional way, and the whole, twisting composition is at once both ethereal and convincing. It is typical of that uncommon age that such a talented individual should today be known only by two or three pictures, one of them now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts at Tours.

JFM

Victor Gilbert (1847-1933)
Le Déjeuner du chat

oil on canvas
14 x 10 1/4 in (35 x 27 cm)
signed and dated 1879
with original frame

Victor Gilbert, a born and bred Parisian, is best known for his large paintings of the bustling flower markets in the city's Les Halles quarter. The chance of our finding this canvas, an early and more interesting work, has enabled Victor Gilbert to make his debut in *Gallery Notes*. If his later pictures of the markets and the porters have been associated with Realism, then our intimate and unobtrusive scene belongs to a purer strain of that movement which informed the arts in France at the time. Although Gilbert's compositions would become brighter and more elaborate, here he looks back to Chardin, with a restrained but harmonious palette and an eye for the detail of still life; the painting could easily pass as the work of Bonvin, Vollon or Ribot – all masters of the so-called 'Chardin Revival'. The interaction between the kitchen maid and her furry companion is delightful and, at the same time, makes this a modern picture.

JFM



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FINE PAINTINGS

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Each issue of *Gallery Notes* is carefully researched by us for accuracy of comment and the reproductions are as faithful as possible. Often there is considerably more material on an artist than can be included here including expertise and commentaries by independent art historians, so please do not hesitate to let us know if we can be of help in this respect. We would also ask for your help in avoiding wastage. If you do not care to remain on our mailing list or if you change your address or wish *Gallery Notes* to be sent to an address other than the present one, please advise us. *Gallery Notes* is also available as an email attachment and as a download from our website, www.johnmitchell.net. May we, in return, offer our guidance on the acquisition, sale, conservation and framing of paintings, and on their valuation for probate, insurance, CGT or other purposes. An independent view of buying and selling at auction has always been advisable.

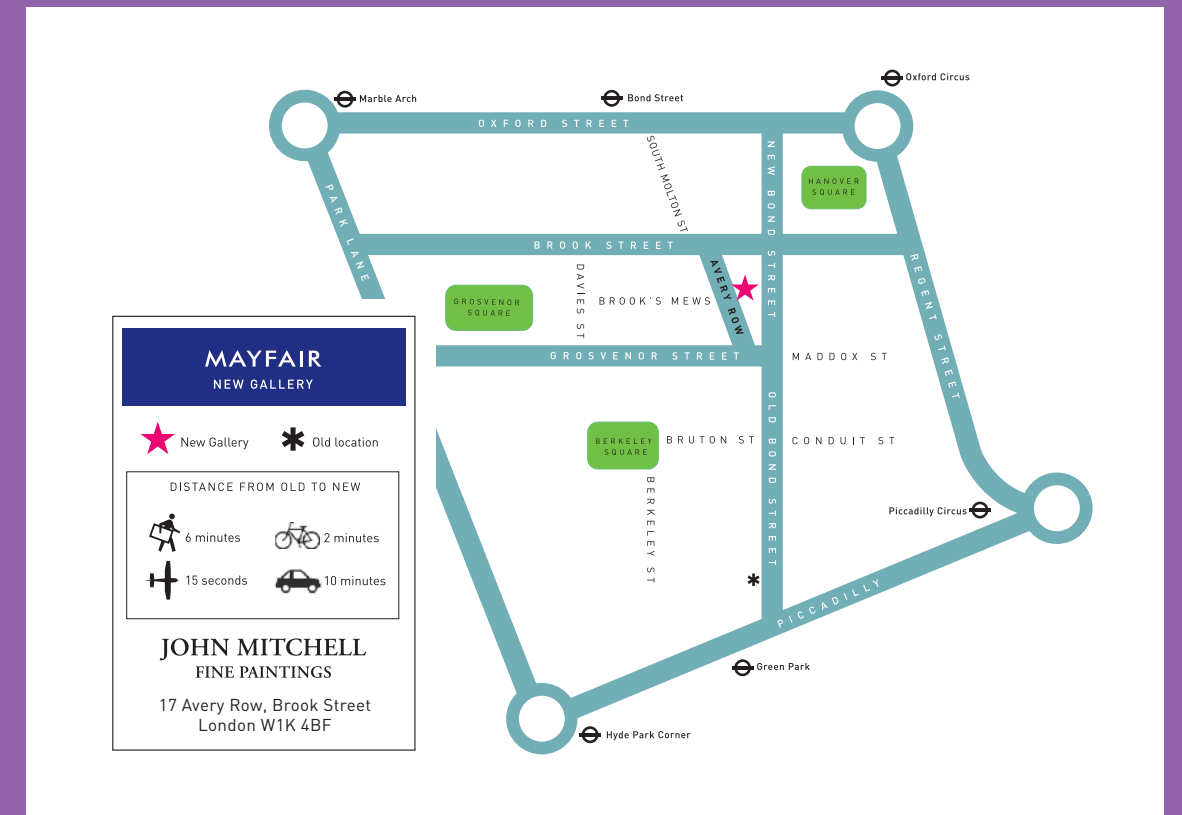
Our policy remains unchanged. Across all schools, periods, and values, we seek, with rigorous selectivity, a high standard of quality in what we buy. Once satisfied, we can offer works with confidence, backed up by long experience, integrity and scholarship. The business is one of long-term friendship and association, not short-term advantage.

We hope that in receiving *Gallery Notes* you will share the interest and enjoyment which they have brought to collectors throughout the world for over sixty years.

For more information on these pictures and more of our inventory not included in the catalogue please visit our website or contact:

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