Edited by Carla Passino

All roads lead to Rome

Thomas, 14th Earl of Arundel, amassed the first large collection of classical sculptures in the 17th century. Britain's passion for antiquities has endured to this day, albeit with a different approach, as **Carla Passino** discovers

PITY the Roman legionaries flung by the whims of the Emperor to Britannia, where 'the sky from frequent clouds and rain is dull and hazy', according to Tacitus. 'Legion', an exhibition opening on February 1 at the British Museum, explores the Roman army's life in provinces such as the oft-maligned Britain, about which the poet Florus wrote: 'I don't want to be a Caesar/Stroll about among the Britons… And endure the Scythian winters.' (Hadrian, the Caesar in question, replied tersely he would rather be himself than Florus and 'Stroll about among the taverns/ Lurk about among the cook-shops,/And endure the round fat insects'.)

But if the Romans didn't always love this country, Britain has long loved their legacy and the antiquities that go with it. Although British collectors initially lagged behind those on the Continent, Stuart patricians began closing the gap, amassing with gusto ancient coins (Prince Henry) and classical sculptures (Thomas Howard, 14th Earl of Arundel, whose namesake Marbles are now at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford). Interest in classical and other ancient artefacts boomed with the Grand Tour, continued through the 19th century (leading German classical scholar Adolf Michaelis to write 'no other country in Europe can… boast of such a wealth of Private Collections of antique works of art as England') and endures today, albeit with some changes. Lately, not least as a result of controversies over the way in which pieces were acquired in the past, 'buyers are looking for objects that have strong documented provenance,' explains Claudio Corsi of Christie's. 'It provides greater transparency in the legitimate marketplace for these magnificent objects.'

Most items bought today from reputable dealers pose no problem, according to Martin Clist of dealer Charles Ede—he and his team spend much time researching every object's history and authenticity. However, he cautions, 'provenance can also blind the unwary': decades of records don't always mean something is genuinely ancient or trouble-free. Conversely, a lack of illustrious history shouldn't necessarily condemn an object: Mr Clist has made exciting discoveries, including the provenance of a Greek terracotta goddess he found at a London auction a few years ago, after originally spotting it at TEFAF Maastricht. 'I noticed scrubbed-out writing on the back, which led me to think it could have belonged to Gen Pitt-Rivers. At Cambridge University researching acquisition ledgers, I found it staring out at me in a tiny watercolour, next to which was written where it had been found, from whom it had been acquired and for how much. It was a heart-stopping moment.'

> 'Buyers are looking for objects with strong provenance'

Left: **Martin Clist of Charles Ede discovered the provenance of this Greek terracotta goddess.** *Below:* **Attic amphora. Sold at Christie's for £151,200**

Mr Clist has also noticed a change in approach, with a drop in the number of scholarly collectors and a resurgence of the crossover buyer typical of the 1950s and 1960s, 'especially in New York, where wonderful abstract Expressionist paintings might be shown next to, say, Cycladic sculptures—a "boom, boom, boom" of visual statements.' However, Francesca Hickin of Bonhams disagrees: 'There is a mantra that the older generation of collectors is more "academic", but I don't think this is necessarily true.' Last July, at the sale of the late Bodo Bless's collection—a treasure trove of Egyptian and Asian antiquities, including a painted wood coffin from 747BC–525BC (sold for more than £400,000)—she met new collectors who had 'incredibly deep knowledge' about relatively obscure subjects, such as Egyptian stone vessels. Many start from a young age, perhaps fascinated by a coin they found or pieces they saw in museums, 'before realising antiquities can be acquired for a relatively low price'.

In particular, she notes, Roman glass can be very accessible, making it a good choice for new collectors: small drinking cups start at £500, more elaborately decorated dishes or groups of vessels from £600–£800. Other 'starter' options, suggests Mr Corsi, include Greek and Roman terracotta figures—'a great way to buy ancient sculpture'—decorative Attic and South Italian vases and even simple *pilos* helmets. Some of these will go under the hammer (estimate $7,000–$9,000) on January 30 in New York, US, in a sale of arms and armour from the Mougins Museum of Classical Art, which founder Christian Levett is reinventing as FAMM, the first major European gallery dedicated to female artists.

Mr Clist's top tips for new antiquity collectors are to go for quality ('a very good, mould-made terracotta head from southern Italy will give more pleasure than an indifferent marble'); buy pieces they like ('if they gain in value, result') and build a relationship with a reputable dealer. After all, he says, 'we're not monsters, generally'.

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Spot the difference

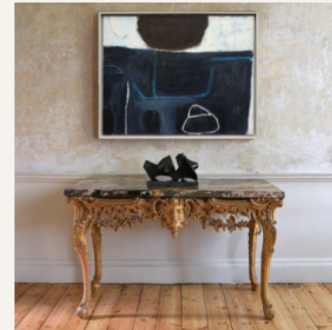
A little dog trots behind a boy, a red-coated rider and his horse in Constable's 1830 copy of Jacob van Ruisdael's *Landscape with Windmills near Haarlem* (about 1655), bounding on its tiny legs towards the right edge of the canvas. The pooch and his companions are conspicuously missing from the Dutch artist's work, but they are not entirely a flight of Constable's fancy. They had been overpainted onto Ruisdael's original, most likely in the late 18th century by art dealer Francis Bourgeois, one of the founders of the Dulwich Picture Gallery (www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk), where both landscapes now hang. 'We think that Bourgeois potentially added in horse, rider and dog to *Landscape with Windmills near Haarlem* in order to make it more appealing to the art market,' says the gallery's director Jennifer Scott (some art historians think Constable didn't copy the dog, introducing it instead into his own version to set it apart from Ruisdael's, but she disagrees). When the painting was restored in the late 1990s, conservators removed the 'improvements'—but their memory survives in Constable's work.

WEIRD & WONDERFUL

KEEPING coffee warm was tricky in Georgian times—unless you were Ernest Augustus, 1st Duke of Cumberland and Teviotdale, later King of Hanover. In about 1800, he received from two of his brothers and five of his sisters a clever 'picnic' set in which two pots, one for coffee and one for milk, sat neatly inside two vessels, each holding water kept at boiling point by an oil burner. Made by silversmith John Emes in 1804, it bore the Duke's arms and the coronets and cyphers of royal siblings Edward, Adolphus Frederick, Augusta Sophia, Elizabeth, Mary, Amelia and Sophia. The set, which will feature in Sotheby's Royal & Noble sale (January 9–17; www.sothebys.com), was eventually acquired by antique-silver dealer Lionel Alfred Crichton, who included it in a selling exhibition in November 1924. It was then that the contraption featured in COUNTRY LIFE, with H. Avray Tipping praising the science (based 'on the water jacket principle of many a modern cooking pot') and 'the lines, mouldings and reserved treatment' of the vessels, which he deemed 'quite in the Adam manner'.

More elegant than a thermos

A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN



ALTHOUGH it seems an unlikely match, abstract art can go remarkably well with period furniture. For Richard Coles of Godson & Coles (www.godsonandcoles.co.uk), the guiding principle is to choose pieces that have pushed the artistic boundaries of their time, as he did when pairing an intricate George II giltwood console table, an angular bronze by Paul Mount (*Two Part Invention*, 1984) and the rich blues and browns of a William Scott oil (*Painting*, 1960): 'There is an exciting dynamic between the table, the sculpture and the painting. Scott was exploring the spatial relationship of the individual objects on a tabletop. This is reflected in the 18th-century table below, with the bronze contrasting the exquisite carving. [It] shows how objects from across the centuries can exist in complete harmony.'

Take five: artworks from 1924

THE 1920s saw an explosion of artistic imagination and none more so than 1924, the year in which André Breton and Yvan Goll launched their competing Surrealist manifestos. Five artworks encapsulate the art scene of the time:

1. Edward Hopper's *New York Pavements*: An illustrator by trade—a job he gave up in 1924—Hopper was a realist, but often painted from an unusual viewpoint: in this work, the human figures, a nun and her charge, are barely on the canvas

2. Wassily Kandinsky's *Contrasting Sounds*: One of the fathers of The Blue Rider, a group within German Expressionists, Russian-born Kandinsky pioneered abstract art, often referencing music

3. Paul Klee's *Carnival in the Mountains*: The loose inspiration was E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, a dark story about a man who steals the eyes of children who won't go to bed. Reworked, the tale was also the base for the ballet *Coppélia*

4. Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*: Infused with a Dadaist taste for the absurd, Léger's experimental film was a 19-minute eclectic sequence of ephemeral images—machinery, kitchen tool, a laden woman climbing the streets of Paris and a Cubist figure resembling Charlie Chaplin's Charlot.

5. Joan Miró's *Harlequin's Carnival* (*above*): the Catalan artist embraced Surrealism from the outset and this work is a fanciful collection of fish, dancing demons, mermaids and a cat (a tribute to Miró's own)