

# London in June

*The art and antiques capital of the world is preparing for its busiest month.*

*Phil Ellis finds out what's on offer, and why they're making such a fuss this year*



*A fine and rare late 17th century walnut-veneered dressing table, 30½" wide, exhibited by Lucy Johnson at the Spring Olympia fair.*

London is widely regarded as the art and antiques capital of the world, and with good reason. Other centres, notably Paris and New York, have much to offer, but London still remains the centre of world trade in art and antiques. As the trade associations are quick to point out, this trade makes an important contribution to the British economy.

However, London's pre-eminent position in the art world cannot be taken for granted. We have become familiar with threats, mainly from Brussels and mainly in the form of the dreaded VAT. There is evidence to suggest that New York is becoming an increasingly attractive place for major auctions to be held and for dealers to be based. As business has become increasingly international in its scope, so the threat becomes increasingly clear.

Fortunately, the London trade is not resting on its laurels. The capital's biggest advantage is that it already has in place an impressive list of events to tempt any dealers or collectors. Yet it has never been marketed as a complete package – until now.

In February of this year, the British Art Market Federation announced that it was backing a new initiative, London in June, which would draw attention to art and antiques-related events in the city. Some 350,000 leaflets, explaining what will be on offer, have been distributed worldwide through auction houses, embassies and the mailing lists of fairs organisers, with particular attention being paid to the United States. The London Tourist Board estimates that the city will attract a total of eleven million visitors in June and that their overall spending is likely to be in excess of £670 million. That's a

lot of people and a lot of money by anyone's standards, but the aim of London in June is to increase the numbers still further.

So what is on offer for those who are tempted to visit London in June? It is difficult to know where to start, as there are some eighty-seven events in all, including major fairs, auctions and other antiques and art-related events. The 'Big Four' auction houses, Sotheby's, Christie's, Phillips and Bonhams all have major sales in that month, including specialist sales. Sotheby's have Victorian Pictures on the 3rd; Christie's have Important French and Continental Furniture on the 10th; Phillips have Fine Musical Instruments on the 25th; and Bonhams have Fine Silver on the 24th. These are just highlights selected at random – auctions in London during the month of June cover every imaginable field of collecting – and that's before you begin to look at the offerings from the multitude of smaller auction houses in the capital.

This is also the month of fairs, now more so than ever. The fairs calendar is (need this be mentioned yet again?) overcrowded. It's not just a question of the number of events, but of the type. There are lots of cheap and cheerful events, rather fewer middle-market fairs, and plenty of up-market fairs. The plethora of up-market events is noticeable in London at certain times of the year, this being one of them. No apologies are necessary, however, for some of the best-known names on the circuit.

The Olympia fair in June has long been an eagerly-awaited event, and is always worth a visit, but all eyes this summer will surely be on Grosvenor House (June 11th-20th). The reason is that the organisers of the fair, held at what is one of London's top Mayfair hotels, are keen to attract a wider audience. This fair has long had a reputation for elitism, as one might expect from a fair founded in 1934 and with such an impressive pedigree. However, it is hoped that this year, younger collectors and perhaps those who had not considered going to Grosvenor House before (because it was perceived as expensive and elitist perhaps?) might be encouraged to give it a try.

Grosvenor House has been moving in this direction for some time, having abolished datelines in 1994. We can still expect the highest quality, however, and this is an excellent fair for the collector to visit if only because it offers an opportunity to see such superb stock. This year's fair will see not only eighty-six eminent dealers, but also loans from the Royal Collection and from the private collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, who is patron of the fair. There will also be important loans from the private collection of His Grace the Duke of

Westminster. This provides a fascinating link between past and present: the modern day Grosvenor House hotel was built on the site of the former London home of the Grosvenor family, which housed one of the great international art collections. Masterpieces by Velazquez, Van Dyck and Stubbs will return to the site of their former home.

London in June is also a good time and place to find specialist fairs. There is one such event that has moved on to a new home this year. The Antiquarian Booksellers' Association fair has moved from Grosvenor House to Olympia (see issue 739) and will be bigger than ever. With more room for modern first editions, as well as the usual stock of fine works from centuries past, this should be a vintage event. Barry Humphries, he of comedy fame, has written the introduction to the catalogue for this fair: Mr. Humphries, when he is not busy making us laugh, is a keen collector and connoisseur, and is an authority on Fin de Siècle literature, the theme for this year's event.

Other specialist events in London in June include a new event, in the form of the Hali International Antique Carpet and Textile Fair. Organised in co-operation with Hali, the international magazine of antique carpet and textile art, which is currently celebrating its twentieth year of publication. Daniel Shaffer, editor of the magazine, was understandably excited at the prospect: "This fair is the very first of its kind to be held in a major city anywhere in the world," he said. "As London is the global capital of the antique carpet and textile trade, it is the ideal venue for this new event. Antique carpets and textiles as an art form easily rival great paintings while costing only a fraction of the price. Now is a particularly good time to buy," he enthused.

The fair will be at Olympia from June 11th-15th and there will be fifty dealers from around the world. On show will be rugs, carpets, tapestries, ceremonial costumes and tent furnishings dating back some 2,000 years.



Yomut Turkmen door rug, Central Asia, 19th century, 62" x 43" approx., which will be exhibited by Samarkand Galleries of Stow on the Wold at the Hali Antique Carpet and Textile Fair.

Another ever-popular specialist event is the International Ceramics Fair and Seminar which takes place, as usual, at the Park Lane Hotel, Piccadilly, from June 12th-15th. It has established a reputation not just as a fair, but as an event that brings together dealers, collectors and academics. The "seminar" tag is not just for show – top lecturers use the occasion to share their latest thoughts and findings on various topics with the world. Those who just want to go along to buy will find dealers such as Garry Atkins, Cohen & Cohen, Brian and Angela Downes, Jonathan Horne, Valerie Howard, Peter Jackson, Roderick Jellicoe and Mallet, to name but a few.

Whatever your collecting and dealing interests may be, London in June can satisfy them. If you should find yourself overwhelmed, then the BAMF leaflet offers plenty of suggestions for other attractions, ranging from Trooping the Colour to Wimbledon to the first test match against South Africa. Actually, the test match in question takes place not in London but at Edgbaston in Birmingham, but as a follower of cricket, I have no objection to the BAMF promoting it. What the American visitors will make of this helpful advice is anyone's guess. Americans are famously mystified by the game, so for our cousins across the pond, there is an old dictionary definition which explains that cricket is a game of "casting a ball at three straight sticks and defending them with a fourth." If that doesn't help, perhaps I should close with a famous explanation of the rules. It goes as follows: "Both teams go out, and one team goes in. Two players are in, until one of them is out. He then goes in, and another goes out to go in, until he too is out. This continues until ten men are out, then they are all out. Both sides then go in, then go back out again when the other side goes in until they are all out." This is paraphrased somewhat, but I'm sure you understand the gist. If not, just stick to antiques. ■



A good set of four graduated tazzas all on moulded Silesian stems set above domed and folded feet, the largest tazza approximately 17" in diameter. Pyramid tazzas were used for desserts either on a separate table or occasionally in a separate room. The trays held glasses for posset, syllabub or jellies or fruit, either preserved or fresh. The top glass was used for an orange or for a pineapple, as pineapples were rare and expensive. This fine glassware is English, circa 1750 and is to be exhibited by Mark J. West at the Grosvenor House Fair.