

Art of the Channel and a discovery

Atmospheric drawings from either side of the Channel capture the imagination, and a forgotten artist is thrust into the limelight at last

I HAVE often thought that a fascinating exhibition could be made on the theme of the Channel in art from the Bayeux Tapestry to date. It is both a barrier and a highway, and it links the countries on its shores as much as it divides them. There would be armadas and fishing fleets, coasters and liners, beaches, bathers and piers, French artists working in England and English in France, Blériot and the Battle of Britain, smugglers and fossil hunters.

A pair of 20th-century British painters who should be included are Paul Nash and Walter Sickert. Two stretches of coast are particularly associated with Nash. He first visited Dymchurch between Rye and Folkestone in 1919, when he was trying to calm his mind after his experiences

in the First World War. With the marsh, sea and shingle, it is a world apart—the perfect spot for Kipling to locate the 'Flit' of the Old Gods from England—and the defensive seawall holding back the force of the tides fascinated Nash. For a while in the early 1930s, he lived at Rye. During the Second World War, he returned to the subject, giving it a symbolic role.

In 1934, he and his wife, Margaret, moved down the coast to Swanage in Dorset, and there he found similar structures, including The Cobb, the sea-walled harbour at Lyme Regis. Increasingly, he was suffering from asthma, and Margaret had given him a Kodak camera, which he used when he was unable to sketch for any length of time. He took a number of snaps of The



Fig 2: *The Blind Sea Captain*, 1914, by Walter Sickert. £59,520

Cobb, and the top lot in Bonhams' modern British sale at the beginning of this month was a 14½in by 21½in wash and pencil drawing (Fig 4) he made from them.

It is an extraordinarily effective piece of work, with the interaction of the sinuous curves of the waves and the thrusting, lance-like lines of the walls. It is a near-Futurist display of irresistible force and immovable object, and it powerfully conveys the movement. It had been modestly estimated up to £18,000, but, in the event, it sold for £148,800.

The two Sickerts in the sale sold for £59,520 each. He, of

course, is most closely associated with the French coast, and with Dieppe in particular, where he lived for many years. In later life, he made great use of newspaper photographs as bases for paintings, but *The Blind Sea Captain* (Fig 2), probably painted in 1914, and exhibited only in 1930, after which it disappeared from view until recently, was the culmination of his own sketches. The 43in by 25in canvas shows an old man and woman walking arm in arm along the quay, mother and son or husband and wife, it does not matter, and it has been surmised that its first sequestration was



Fig 3: Privately owned table with Spring chairs, £15,000, by John Makepeace, at The Millinery Works

because he felt that a subject that could have been regarded as sentimental was inappropriate as the war broke out. It is a gentle picture, showing his respect for Degas.

The second Sickert, a 36in by 25in canvas, has been in a private collection since 1944. It, too, shows Dieppe, but probably four years earlier. Although the title is *Celebrations, Dieppe*, it is a near empty street leading to the Hôtel de Ville. There are Union Flags, indicating, perhaps, the Coronation of George V. It is painted in a sketchy manner that gives an impression of vigour, despite the afternoon feeling of the scene.

A completely forgotten Modern British artist has been resurrected by Robert Young Antiques

of 68, Battersea Bridge Road, London SW11. Robert and Josyane Young spotted the collection of more than 500 pictures at a 2007 auction in Beccles. After trawling through 40 pictures by the unknown artist, they were forcibly struck by his extraordinarily sensitive use of colour. Then, on further examination, it appeared that some of the other pictures were the work of children. They became even more fascinated by the collection and ultimately purchased every single picture (Fig 1). Stanley Dyson (1920–2007), a working-class boy from Whittington, near Chesterfield, Derbyshire, developed a love of drawing and Pevsner, and, after

wartime service in the navy, he took an assisted place at Liverpool City Art School. He then returned to Whittington and taught art in Derbyshire for 16 years, before retiring to Norfolk and giving up painting. He never exhibited or sold anything.

His own work has a naïve streak that obviously appealed to his pupils, who responded vigorously. The exhibition, which runs until April 23, should be as refreshing as it is pleasurable.

Two exhibitions of work by 'highly sophisticated contemporaries are also likely to prove popular. 'Studio Silver Today' is a collaboration between the Goldsmiths' Company and the National Trust at Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire. As well as telling the history of the company through antique pieces in the house, there is a display of work by Theresa Nguyen in the Marble Hall. She is as much a modeller and a sculptor as a smith, making beautifully textured undulating pieces by a process of folding and hammering

Fig 5: Parissa centrepiece, 2009, by Theresa Nguyen, at Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire



(Fig 5). British born and trained, she will be demonstrating her skills during the exhibition, which continues until October 29.

Until April 15, there is a show devoted to John Makepeace (Fig 3) at Somerset House, and his furniture is also represented in the exhibition '21st-century Furniture III: The Arts and Crafts Legacy', which includes 70 pieces by 40 of the UK's leading designer-makers (until May 1 at The Millinery Works, 85/87, Southgate Road, Islington, London N1).

At last, a replacement for the much-missed Hall Textile Fair—The London Antique Rug and Textile Art Fair, from tomorrow to April 3, at The Showroom, 63, Penfold Street, Marylebone, NW8. The inaugural exhibitors come from London and southern England, but we may expect this one to flourish and expand.

Next week
Landseer and a royal selection



Hughes Diboris

Pick of the week

From April 8 to May 14, there will be an important selling show in Paris of 20 sculptures from the Dogon culture of central Mali (such as *Matarnité dogon*, right), which produced some of the most revered of all African art. The Galerie Alain Bovis, 8, rue de Beaune in the Carré Rive Gauche (of which more before long), is conveniently close to the Quai Branly museum, where concurrently a major exhibition is devoted to the culture.

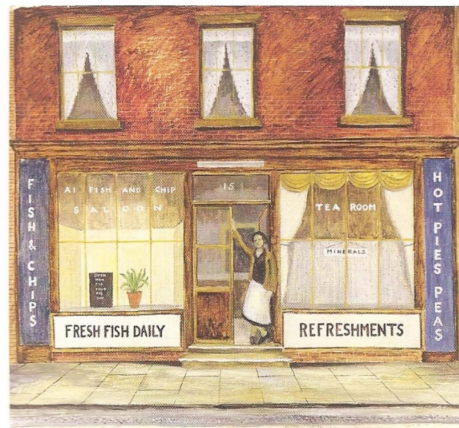


Fig 1: *Fish and Chip Saloon (detail)*, Dyson, with Robert Young



Fig 4: *The Cobb, Lyme Regis*, 1934, by Paul Nash. £148,800