

## dealers' dossier



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# Young folk today know how to catch the eye

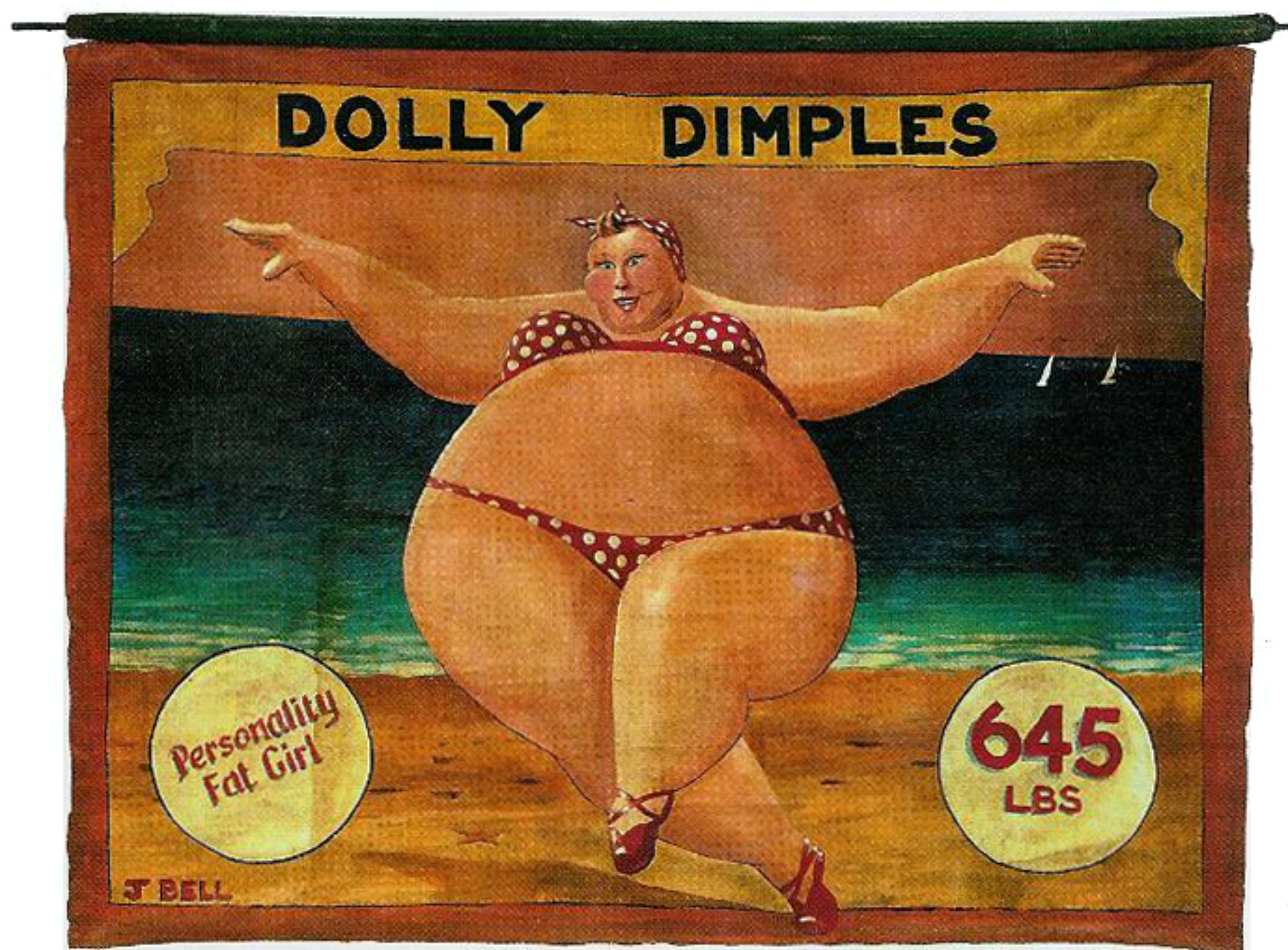
■ Dealer reaps the rewards of being an early adopter

**THERE** is nothing dainty, neat or polished about the charismatic *Robert Young*. And the same is true of his annual Folk Art Exhibition, now in its 12th year and on from May 12 to 21 at his suitably enigmatic shop at 68 Battersea Bridge Road, London, SW11.

Robert, a frustrated artist at heart, first started dealing rather by accident in 1977 and, while well versed in the academia of antiques, his approach has always been instinctive rather than studious.

Although his brand of folk art has now become fashionable both in the UK and across the Pond, it certainly wasn't in the 1970s and early 80s, and for the first decade the business struggled rather – a far cry from the lavish *Masterpiece* and the *New York Winter Antiques Show* where Robert now takes stands.

He credits his wife **Josyane**, originally an interior decorator, with that innate French style and confidence in simplicity that has hewed the Robert Young



**Above:** this vast English fairground artwork by J. Bell, c.1950, advertising *Dolly Dimples*, painted in oils and house paints on canvas, measures 4ft 9in x 6ft 3in (1.45m x 1.9m) and is priced at £2800 in Robert Young's 12th annual *Folk Art Exhibition*.

aesthetic to something altogether more minimalist and chic than if he were left to his own devices.

This latest folk art exhibition showcases just over 50 items, including hand-carved and painted decoy birds – that beloved staple of folk art devotees – whirligigs, weathervanes, early primitive furniture, treen, trade and tavern signs, and naive paintings.

The Youngs are great believers in leaving things in their original condition – no painting, polishing or stripping back allowed – and have always been drawn to the raw surface patina of these functional, well-worn objects, as well as the simple and surprisingly contemporary sculptural lines inherent in early crude pieces such as comb-back Windsor chairs. In fact, there's a group of four, 18th and

19th century plank and stick chairs in this exhibition, all English, in a variety of forms and woods.

Many of the items are not intrinsically valuable and, frankly, of low birth, made by artisans not artists and overlooked as mundane everyday items in their early life. Take, for example, a wool merchant's trade sign in the form of a lifesize ram, a full-bodied Herefordshire bull made as a butcher's trade sign, and a sailor's work panel depicting two ships at sea in naive style, made from driftwood carved and applied to a recycled packing case panel.

Of low birth they may be, but the simple charm and history of these items makes them popular now with some affluent collectors, and prices range up to five figures.

[www.robertyoungantiques.com](http://www.robertyoungantiques.com)



This flying duck-form whirligig, made of painted wood with metal fittings, is English and dates from c.1930. Measuring 21in (53cm) high, it will cost £1600 from Robert Young's *Folk Art Exhibition*.

**Below:** the top of this X-frame tavern table is saturated with names, dates and initials scratched into it over the past couple of hundred years. The c.1820, 7ft 11in (2.41m) long pine table, with traces of original paint and scrubbed plank top, will cost £6800 from Robert Young.

