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The Moon at Olympia

With it comes to him, these days maintain that but and because they are fashionable and not some strange, alluring cultural ambitions set on educating the poor targets. But a lot of culture does not come from, particularly when it is exhibited there. Which is the case with the London dealer **Allen Bennett** who deals in **Bennett Fine Art**.

Allen is a party for who is keen to spread the word and encourage more people to write poetry. To this end he has organised a poetry competition, the winners of which he will announce, with the reading out of the poems, on his stand at the London International Fine Art Fair at Olympia in early June.

At the fair he exhibits an 1881 painting by the French artist **Henri Luce** (1844-1900), which was inspired by the poem *The Moon by Shelley*. The subject of the poem should relate to the moon.

There will be over 18 and under 18 categories and prizes of editors of Shelley's poems, a case of champagne and theatre tickets will be awarded by the dealer.

He has enlisted the help of London schools, some private academies from the world of creative writing and he is looking to hear back from the poet laureate **Carol Ann Duffy**. He has also been in touch with **David Letter**'s public relations people, who are promoting the fair.

This must be the most ideal way these come across for an exhibiting dealer to promote himself, to be participating and the fair. And, of course, in Allen's case to promote his art pieces, poetry. I can see the dealer will be only too happy at this occasion, which will see his writing, and fellow exhibitors will be delighted if the thinking poetry books also turn out to be art books.

That's all the rage, folk!

■ Pioneer Robert Young reaps rewards as newcomers move into his specialist market

■ Sophisticated urban decorators embrace the naive rustic image

EVEN Robert Young, the London dealer who, more than anyone else, has pioneered the rise of European folk art in the UK, is astonished at the current popularity of his speciality.

On the eve of his 11th annual exhibition of *Antique Folk Art* at his gallery at 68 Battersea Bridge Road, he tells me that over the past ten years he has noted the unprecedented growth of interest in these pieces, especially with younger clients.

And over the past three years he has seen the field become not just voguish but one of the really hot sectors of the antiques market.

The decorators have noted European folk art, and it is interesting that the majority of buyers are sophisticated urban rather than folksy rural collectors.

All of which bodes well for the forthcoming annual exhibition, which has its preview evening on Election Night, May 6, and then runs until May 15. This is the 11th selling show but it is the 27th catalogue, publications which themselves have now become collectors' items.

There are just over 50 pieces in the catalogue, priced up to around £15,000, but there are at least 130 pieces on offer during the show.

Robert Young says: "Great folk art makes you smile. There is invariably something slightly quirky in the perspective, proportions, graphics or colours of these pieces that almost defines the genre."

Created or painted by untrained hands, its "kookiness", says the dealer, is partly responsible for the current popularity of what has hitherto been an under-appreciated field.

Original 'as found' condition is another desirable attribute of genuine folk art and is apparent in the wide range of pieces in the show.

There is an original 19th century painted toll bridge sign from the Lake District; hand-carved wooden pigeon decoys, Norwegian ale bowls, love tokens, weather vanes, trade signs, pieces of vernacular furniture and some very play-worn toys, definitely not in mint and boxed condition.

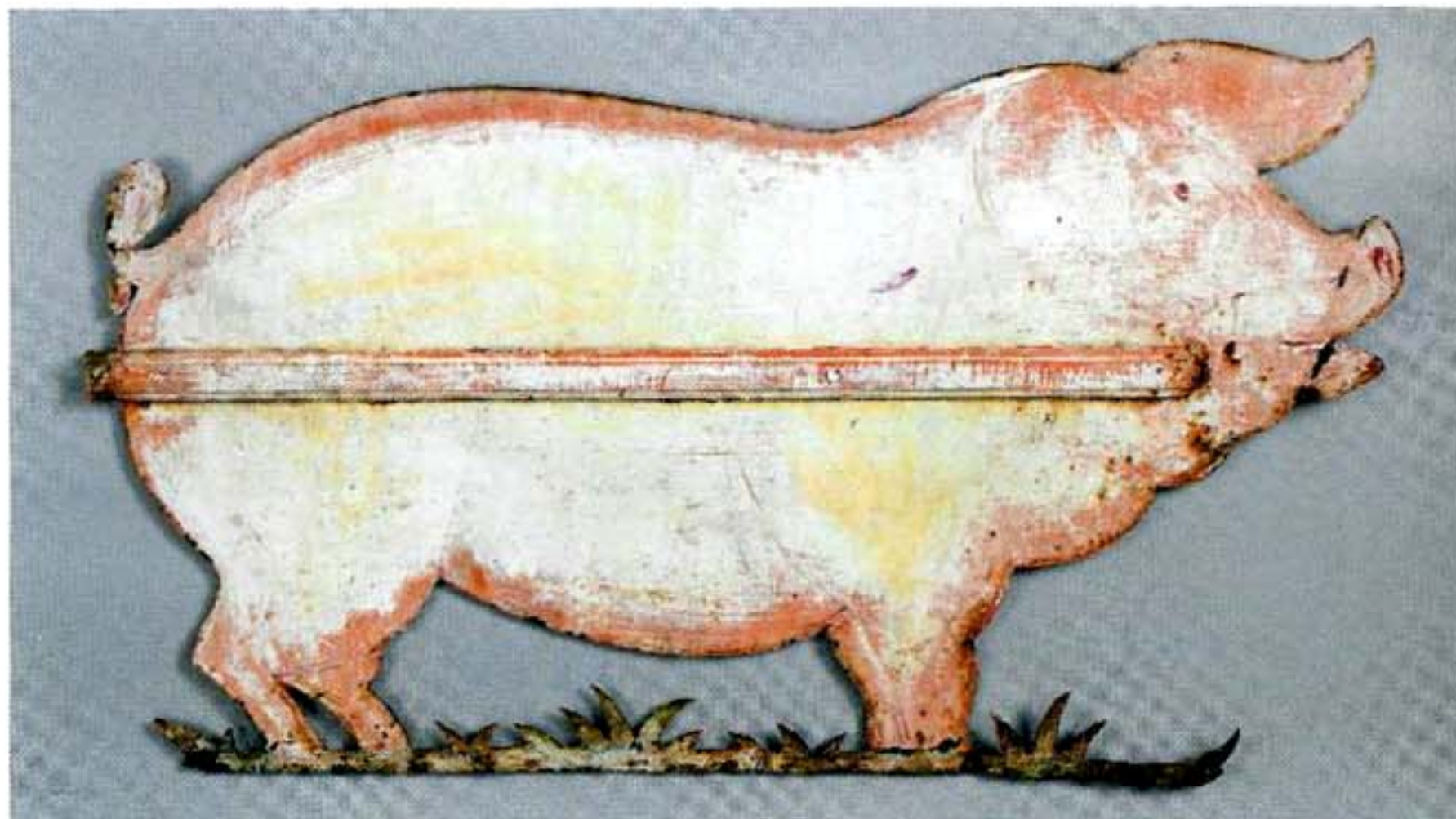
These pieces are individual but, as the dealer points out, they also have a curious compatibility with contemporary art and interiors, another factor which beguiles many of the new collectors and furnishers in this field.

Interestingly, whereas the once-seemingly lunatic prices and appeal of



Above: an English c.1880 vintage child's tricycle in painted wrought iron and wood for which **Robert Young** asks £1200.

Below: at the folk art exhibition in Battersea this French weathered painted metal butcher's trade sign, with traces of the inscription 'Charcuterie', c.1890, 3ft 4/in (1.03m) wide, is priced at £3500.



American folk art have gone off the boil, US interest in Robert Young's European folk art has risen, and the dealer has enjoyed major sales at fairs in San Francisco and New York. His is no longer the only exhibition centred on folk art, but it probably remains the most true to its roots.

This year, there is one major change from all previous years in that the Youngs are selling directly from the catalogue. It was the case that everything would be for sale only once the exhibition preview was under way. But this became difficult as international demand increased and some awkward situations arose.

So now items are available from the catalogue on a first-come, first-served basis.

Now Freya finds

All a party at Dickinson's Jersey Street, St James's gallery last week **Freya Simms**, who for some years until last June was **Claydon's** director of Olympia's antique fairs, celebrated her return to the London art world.

At the reception, Freya and global PR firm **Gong Communications** announced a new joint venture, **Muse**, an agency run by Freya dedicated to the arts, antiques and luxury sectors.

Gong founder **Narda Shirley** was unwilling in her plans for her new colleague. "The chance to work with Freya was too good to pass up," she said, adding "We think the time is right for an agency

her new Muse

that takes the best of professional luxury marketing with the exclusivity of the art and antiques world."

Muse has already pulled in clients from the antiques world Freya knows so well, among them Kensington Church Street family business **Butcher's Antiques**, the Kensington Church Street Dealers Association itself and **LAFADA Modern**.

After leaving Olympia, Freya worked for some months with the Tambourant fair organiser **David Letter** in Florida before returning to London.

Meanwhile, as is well chronicled, Mr Letter makes his debut as director of the Summer Olympia fair next month.

Denzil broadens his country philosophy...

FOR the past year, Suffolk dealer **Denzil Gray** has been searching out, and putting aside, some pictures, pieces of folk art and country art for his second Summer Exhibition, which opens on 14th May in a lovely country home.

The summer show opens at 10 South's Dr Sully, Thurston near Bury St Edmunds, on a morning of May 14 and continues until the 15th, Tuesday, May 18.

The dealer has been known for his country furniture, especially his antique farmhouse tables, for some 20 years but he stocks a broad variety of items, generally with an emphasis on practical.

In recent years, though, there has been a preponderance of folk art in 10 South's shop. This comes through strongly in the summer's. Some 40 pieces will be on offer, priced from around £200 to £15,000.

In 2009, not the most expensive but one of the most eye-catching exhibits, is a c.1880 large carved stool along the lines of those by a French woodworker, the leather harness, detachable seat legs and many accompanying decorative details.

It bears the trade emblem of the area for furniture makers who began in 1850 and became a trigger for manufacture in Britain.

Offered at £2000, is the right and the 19th century stool, a table with four legs, which were made out of different woods of a Queen Victoria's time. The Duke of Devon, in his work, which often depicted local figures, one of his right the postman.

On a larger scale, standing 7ft 2 1/2 inches high, is a 17th century Dutch style stool, painted and oak, striped back to its original ground and featuring most of its original joinery.