



'You couldn't afford it'

Formidable dealer Eila Grahame's personal collection is the subject of a triumphant sale, with the proceeds of many items far exceeding their estimates

ONLY once did I make the gauche mistake of immediately asking the price of something in the window on entering Eila Grahame's Kensington Church Street shop, earning her trademark riposte: 'You couldn't afford it.' Luckily, I was able to stammer out something that showed I actually knew a little about whatever it was I had been looking at. Thereafter, I was acknowledged as an acquaintance and occasionally allowed to buy things.

Even Lucian Freud found her intimidating. He would call in after buying his bread at Clark's across the road and said that she looked like an Inuit soapstone carving, but those who knew her better put her formidable manner down to shyness.

No matter, she had a wonderful eye and great knowledge, some of it acquired from her friend John Hewitt, the leading mid-century antiquities and primal-art dealer. Her specialities were early British ceramics and glass, but she also dealt widely in furniture and works of art.

She died in 2010 and hoped that her personal collection might find a permanent home in her ancestral Scotland—she was a kinswoman of Bonnie Dundee.

Fig 1: Two-handed 1670s tyg or posset pot. £4,064



the 17th-century Jacobite leader—but I am not sure whether this happened. In any event, on November 30, Chefins held a successful sale from the contents of her London and Suffolk homes together with items of stock that had remained in storage. The proceeds are to be divided between the Art Fund and the Church of St Mary of the Assumption, Ufford, Suffolk, where she is buried.

They may have been pleasantly surprised by the amounts that they will have received, as a number of the most sought-after lots turned out to have been estimated far below their value. Most notable was a set of three Neapolitan Doccia dishes painted with Ottoman figures and dating from 1740–5. The catalogue noted that only three others are known, all in museums, which might have prompted a higher estimate than \$6,000. The price was \$88,900.

Figs 2–4: Austrian naturalist Franz Anton von Schiedel's watercolour studies of an octopus, turtle and turtle shell. £13,970 the set

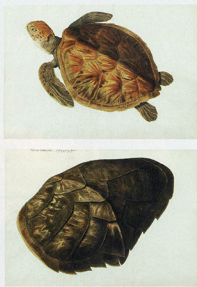


Fig 5: Cork model of the Temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli. £72,390



Another of the most expensive lots, sold for \$72,390 paid by a German dealer whose representative had travelled specifically to secure it, had been estimated to \$5,000. This was a cork model of the Temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli

(**Fig 5**), which was signed by Antonio Chichi (1743–1816). On February 10 last year, I noted that such things were first made for Grand Tourists by the architect Augusto Rosa (1738–84), followed by Domenico Padiglione, who



Fig 6: Tortoiseshell wig comb. £10,160

sive, at \$9,525, was a brown-and-yellow slip puzzle tyg dated 1689 and with three knopped handles, one of which was a drinking straw to the bottom of the bowl. At \$4,064, there was a dark-trace-glassed double-loop two-handed tyg or posset pot dated 1676 and initiated by the potter John Ifield (**Fig 1**).

During the third quarter of the 17th century, there was a small industry in Jamaica producing tortoiseshell-wig combs. The only known maker is Paul Bennett at Port Royal from 1655 and examples are dated between 1671 and 1692. The last one at auction, as far as I know, made \$10,112 (*COUNTRY LIFE*, April 24, 2013). Here, there were two lots, a single comb in a silver-mounted case dated 1688 and with the Jamaican coat of arms and original motto,

Indus stierque servietum, which sold for \$10,160 (**Fig 6**), and two combs in a scented-engraved case, which raised \$7,620.

Another 17th-century curiosity, at \$699, was a pair of green breeches measuring 12½in from waist to hem, which supposedly belonged to Queen Henrietta Maria's celebrated dwarf Sir Jeffrey Hudson (1619–about 1682) (**Fig 7**).

Watercolour studies of shells by François-Jean-Baptiste Minard de la Groye (1775–1855), 'the unsung hero of natural history', did well, but were outshone here by three studies of a turtle, turtle shell and octopus by the Austrian Franz Anton von Schiedel (1731–1801) (**Figs 2–4**), which reached \$13,970.

There were five pieces on offer, of which the most expensive, at \$9,525, was a brown-and-yellow slip puzzle tyg dated 1689 and with three knopped handles, one of which was a drinking straw to the bottom of the bowl. At \$4,064, there was a dark-trace-glassed double-loop two-handed tyg or posset pot dated 1676 and initiated by the potter John Ifield (**Fig 1**).

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**Next week
Founder's kin?**

Fig 7: A celebrated dwarf's pair of breeches. £699



Winter in New York

Two of London's top furniture dealers will have exceptionally fine offerings for visitors to the New York Winter Antiques Show, which has its preview at the Park Avenue Armory on January 19 and runs to the 29th. Ronald Phillips will not only have a pair from the set of 'Gainsborough' armchairs made for Glemham Hall, Suffolk, in the 1750s, which are in the Chippendale manner and covered in the original needlework by Lady Barbara North (£1 million-plus), but a pair of demy-line satrwood and purpleheart commodes (one of which below) probably by Chippendale (£500,000-plus). They last appeared in *COUNTRY LIFE* in an advertisement on August 7, 1975.

The best of the 19th century will be found with Blairman, where the stand will focus on 'art furniture' designed by Bruce Talbert (1838–81). Among the manufacturers who used him were Cox & Sons for furniture and metalwork and Gallow and Holland & Sons for furniture. Like Chippendale, Talbert spread his influence through publications and his furniture shown at World Fairs put his mark on the American 'Modern Gothic' taste.

Here, the display consists of a sideboard (above), clock case, secretaire-cabinet, six drawing-room and two folding chairs and a writing table.

