

Sketches inspire a dynamic duo

Stephen Ongpin and Sophie Camu hold joint display as London Art Week showcases dealers

Report by Frances Allitt

IN London, one big city on one small island, it is possible to find works spanning the history of art, and not just in the major galleries.

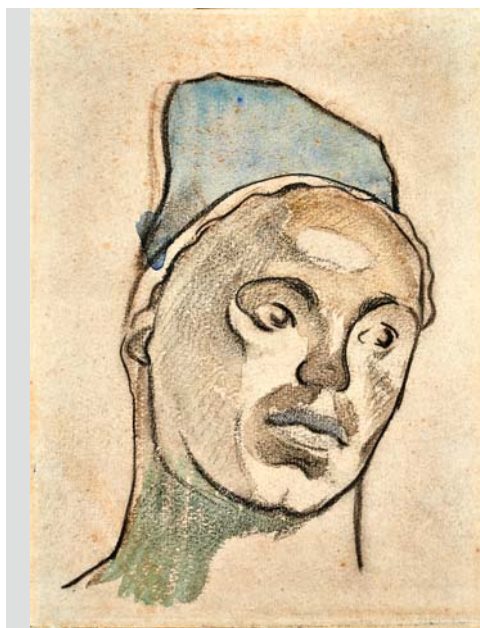
Once a year, a cluster of dealers in Mayfair and St James's celebrates pre-Contemporary works with a series of shows.

The galleries bring out some of their best stock, underlining a range within the commercial gallery sector that mirrors that of London's overall art collection.

This year, from July 1-8, London Art Week (LAW) 2016 showcases the collection of nearly 50 dealers specialising in anything from antiquity to the 20th century.

See page 40-41 for LAW auction previews.

londonartweek.co.uk



Left: sketch by Paul Gauguin of the head of a Breton woman. Completed during his final trip to Brittany in 1894, following his visits to Tahiti, it depicts a local woman wearing a typical Pont-Aven headdress.

It is possible that the model for this is the same as the only subject from the area who ever agreed to pose nude for him – though she reportedly insisted on keeping her hat on despite being otherwise naked.

Gauguin regarded his drawings as highly personal, calling them “my letters, my secrets”. Measuring 10½ x 8in (27 x 20cm) the work is priced at **£380,000** at Stephen Ongpin and Sophie Camu's exhibition in London Art Week.



Stephen Ongpin and Sophie Camu...

IT'S pouring with rain as Stephen Ongpin and Sophie Camu navigate the back roads from Ongpin's Mason's Yard gallery to a nearby coffee shop.

Both are positioned so that the proofs of their exhibition catalogue are kept dry, in prime position under the umbrella between them.

Later, as they discuss their exhibition over warming cups, the

sense of partnership and shared interest in the subject of their joint exhibition pervades their conversation.

Ongpin has been a dealer for nearly 30 years, with 10 of them in his own gallery. Camu is an art consultant with a background in Impressionist and Modern art with Sotheby's.

Each brings a distinct and critical eye to the subject of their show at Ongpin's St James's gallery, *Drawing Inspiration: Sketches and Sketchbook Pages from the 19th and 20th Century*.

In selecting the pieces for this broad field, the two relied on taste as

well as importance. “We both had to like whatever we brought in,” says Ongpin, though, he adds, they could easily have had twice the number of works on display, so eager were people to sell and lend works.

With the 60 they settled on, the show explores why and how British and French artists sketched during the past two centuries.

“Really, sketching came to fruition in the 19th century with artists going out en plein air and studying nature rather than copying in the studio,” says Camu. The quick records they created of their encounters give many sketches a personal dimension.

“The appeal of the sketch for a lot of collectors is that it's as close as you can get to an artist's first ideas; you can see them working out their ideas very quickly,” says Ongpin.

His fascination with these working processes shows in the images selected.

Works such as Henry Moore's *Madonna and Child* demonstrate the early stages of the artist's process that would eventually result in a three-dimensional sculpture. It involves quick but repeated attempts to capture his subject – a tenacious but unhurried way of working.

A 1921 view of Saint-Tropez by Pierre Bonnard is a small, private work, showing on one side a quick sketch of the town and bay and on the

other, Bonnard's packing list. “Five handkerchiefs and only two pairs of socks,” Ongpin points out, delighted.

Like many of the works in the exhibition, this piece was part of a sketchbook later separated into individual sheets. Such works have a heightened sense of intimacy as these books were often carried on the artist's person.

“It's the most unselfconscious way an artist will express themselves because quite a lot of these works weren't meant to be split up or exhibited, so the artist is totally free to show their ideas. It's very intimate,” says Camu.

The intimacy of each of the works is in contrast with the scale of the exhibition. A total of 64 will be hung salon-style on the walls of the gallery, forming a larger than usual show for Ongpin, whose exhibitions usually come in at around 50 works or fewer.

But for a show running during LAW, bigger can be better. “It gets really busy. During LAW we have 70 or 80 people in the gallery a day, which is a lot,” says Ongpin with emphasis.

It isn't just private collectors coming into the gallery either. The two dealers recall that during their first joint exhibition, which they held at Ongpin's gallery two years ago, a number of museums came in. Off the top of their heads, they tick off those that bought from them during that



Above: this 5 x 10in (13.5 x 24.5cm) drawing by Eugene Boudin, *Crinolines*, is in watercolour over an underdrawing in pencil and is dated 1865. This, and another by Boudin on show in the *Drawing Inspiration...* exhibition, contain colour notes and were completed during a beach visit. *Crinolines* is priced **£25,000**.



Above right: Claude-Emile Schuffenecker sketched this scene of the cliffs at Etretat, Normandy in the 1880s or '90s. It is completed in pastel on buff paper and measures 10 x 12in (24.5 x 31cm). The scene is among Schuffenecker's favourites and demonstrates his skill with pastel. It is priced at **£6000**.

Above left: this charcoal on paper sketch by Amedeo Modigliani was completed during the five years he worked as a sculptor. This 17 x 10in (42.7 x 26.3cm) work relates to his only full-length sculpture, which he completed in limestone c.1912. Thought to depict the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, the work is available for **£185,000**.

exhibition: National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, the National Gallery of Australia and the National Gallery of Scotland.

"Summer in London is the time to bring out your best stock," says Camu. "Curators come from abroad and they're really pounding the pavement, going to auction houses, galleries and fairs to see as much as possible. We may as well use as much as possible."

Ongpin has provided 80% of the material from his own stock with the other 20% from private sellers.

It is due to the success he had during the last LAW show that he now feels in a position to attend his first *Masterpiece* as an exhibitor.

"I knew we had this show that would take up the whole gallery, and *Masterpiece* has been on at me to exhibit at the fair because there's nobody else doing specialist works on paper," he says. "This year is a good year to do *Masterpiece* because I can leave the gallery devoted to the show."

LAW (July 1-8) starts slightly after

Masterpiece (June 30-July 6). *Drawing Inspiration...*, which opened on June 17, will run through most of the busy summer season, closing on July 28.

Within the coming weeks, then, plenty of time is available for cross-marketing, bringing in clients from a number of different worlds.

"It is a great time of year because you get a lot of groups coming around and collectors who know about LAW, but maybe they don't know what they're looking for," adds Camu.

"With *London Art Week* they come across you and you can teach them about the works and actually spend time with collectors."

Ongpin and Camu had known each other for many years before

they put on their first exhibition together, but it seems to be a formula that works.

After two years of working to set up the exhibition, attending auctions, working with clients and sorting through Ongpin's stock, it's clear the two are still thoroughly inspired by the artists whose works they represent.

stephenongpin.com
camuart.com



Above: Stephen Ongpin and Sophie Camu.



Left: a view of Bacino di San Marco, Venice, with the Church of St Giorgio Maggiore and the Giudecca by Antonio Joli. It will be at **Lampronti Gallery's** exhibition, *Antonio Joli: Views of Italy*, priced **£250,000**.

cesarelampronti.com

More LAW exhibitions...

Right: this archaic Greek bronze griffin protome is available at **Rupert Wace**. Made in the 7th century BC, it measures 8in (21cm) and is priced **£140,000**. Such figures would have decorated the rims of bronze votive cauldrons.

rupertwace.co.uk



Left: this portrait of Wilhelmina Bowlby is a late work by Thomas Lawrence. It is available from **Bagshawe Fine Art** priced at **£68,000**. The red background recalls the Roman wall-paintings at Pompeii, excavations of which were being carried out when the portrait was under way c.1825.

bagshawes.com



Right: this 16th Spanish painting is a memento mori oil on panel showing a skull on a ledge. It is available for **£150,000** at **Agnew's** and is part of their exhibition *Vanitas & Memento Mori* running during LAW.

agnewsgallery.com



Left: *La baie de Lampaul, Ile de Ouessant*, an oil on canvas by Henry Moret. It is available from **Stoppenbach & Delestre** for **£175,000** and measures 21¼ x 2ft 2in (54.5 x 65cm). It is signed and dated to the lower right.

artfrancais.com

Right: this 13th century carved head of a man frowning comes from the Champagne region in France and was given to an ancestor of a former mayor of Reims and then passed down through the family.

Measuring 5¼in (13cm) high and carved from fossiliferous limestone, it is priced **£40,000-50,000** at the *Early European Sculpture* exhibition being staged by **Arcadia Cerri Fine Art** and held at **Robin Katz Fine Art** in Hill Street.

arcadiacerri.com

