

Art market



Huon Mallalieu

Fig 1: Closed burgonet helmet decorated with tulips and made in the late 1550s. £124,800



Toys for boys

A helmet perhaps made for the Viceroy of Sicily fetches a record price in Del Mar's arms and armour sale

PERHAPS the heyday of spectacular toys for boys came in the mid 16th century with the armour garnitures created for princes and potentates by the greatest artists and craftsmen. As for so many later toys, Germany was a centre of this industry, with Augsburg the centre of the centre.

The Bavarian city was the headquarters of the Fugger and Welser families, bankers to the Holy Roman Empire, and, as a Free Imperial City, it hosted many sessions of the Imperial Diet. Such occasions were often

accompanied by tournaments —and tournaments required armours that were practical and fit for purpose, but, perhaps more importantly, extravagant advertisements of power.

The highlight of an arms and armour sale held by Thomas Del Mar at Olympia Auctions on June 30, was a previously unrecorded helmet from such an armour (*Fig 1*), which made a record price of £124,800. Although itself unknown, this helmet belonged to a garniture made in the late 1550s, of which the close helmet, one gauntlet,

Fig 2 right: Siamese niello and silver-gilt mounted sword, once owned by Lord Mountbatten. £41,600. Fig 3 far right: French 17th-century halberd, with 16½in terminal spear, made for an officer of the Navarre Regiment. £1,560

breast and backplates are now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the US, with a front skirt lame in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and a vamplate in the Musée de l'Armée, Paris. The accompanying saddle was sold at Christie's, London, in April 1985. The helmet had been in a private European collection; presumably, there are still more elements from this garniture to be rediscovered—as Del Mar notes: "The "Eagle" garniture made for Ferdinand II, Archduke of Tyrol, in 1547 comprised 87 interchangeable pieces that could

produce 12 different armours for different forms of combat.'

The helmet, technically a closed burgonet, was etched, gilded and embossed probably by Jörg Sorg the Younger (1517–1603), member of a family of specialist armour engravers. His maternal grandfather was one of the Helmschmied (Helmetsmith) dynasty of armourers and Sorg often worked with his exact contemporary, Anton Pfeffenhauser, who had been trained by the Helmschmieds and was a favourite armourer for the Spanish court, as well as the Dukes of Bavaria.



The two of them created a magnificent armour for Don Garcia de Toledo, Marqués de Villafranca and Viceroy of Sicily, which, as does the helmet, includes tulips in the decoration. Tulips may refer to the Ottoman wars in which Don Garcia raised the siege of Malta and captured Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera, the smallest Spanish exclave on the Moroccan coast.

This was one of many lots in the sale from which part of the proceeds were donated to the Wallace Collection. Other beneficiaries of Olympia sales during the summer have been Westminster Abbey and The Grange Festival. About £50,000 has been raised so far and the scheme will continue in some autumnal auctions.

Another swagger boy's toy, this time from the 19th century, did very well, taking \$41,600 over an upper-estimate \$12,000. The Siamese *niello* and silver-gilt

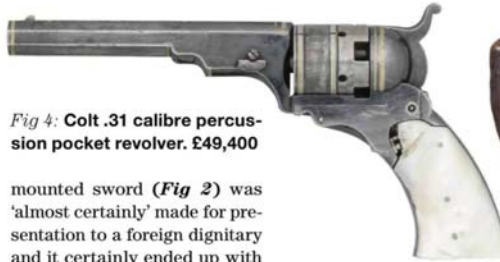


Fig 4: Colt .31 calibre percussion pocket revolver. £49,400

mounted sword (Fig 2) was 'almost certainly' made for presentation to a foreign dignitary and it certainly ended up with one, Lord Mountbatten.

Not quite in the same category was a 17th-century halberd (Fig 3) for an officer of the Navarre Regiment, the second-oldest regiment in the army of the *ancien régime*. A Protestant unit formed in 1558 by Antoine, King of Navarre, it followed his son, Henri, on his perilous path to the French throne. After the Revolution, it became the 5th infantry regiment, which was finally dissolved in 1997. The halberd's 16¼in terminal spear was

pierced with the arms of France and Navarre. It sold for £1,560.

As shown by a strictly utilitarian lot here, the Iron Duke was not the first British commander to stand godfather to a boot. A century earlier, there was the Marlborough cavalry boot, massive and stiff, with voluminous upper cuffs to protect the thighs in battle or out hunting. This pair of Marlboroughs (Marllies?) dating from about 1700 sold for £1,690. (Fig 5) They should not be confused with still more massive postillion boots built of leather, wood and iron, which were sometimes worn singly to protect the leg sandwiched between two carriage horses and were the original 'seven-league boots', that being the distance between staging posts.

The boots were among lots from the collection of the late David Jeffcoat, which also contributed to the Wallace funds. There were several pistols, which demonstrated that not all Colts are alike. Most sold at about the £1,000 mark, but one soared away to \$49,400. Samuel Colt took out his first patents in 1835 and 1836,



Fig 5: Pair of Marlborough cavalry boots, about 1700. £1,690

and this rare .31 calibre percussion pocket revolver (with folding trigger) was made shortly afterwards. Although worn, it had desirable mother-of-pearl grips (Fig 4).

As a postscript to my recent gallery of portraits, here are two diametrically opposite approaches. David Hockney, on sitting for the 16in by 12¼in Lucian Freud portrait (Fig 7) that sold at Sotheby's for £14,905,200, said: 'It was a very memorable and enjoyable experience. I thought his portrait very good indeed—all the hours I sat were layered into it; he had always added, rarely taken anything away. It really shows.' Matisse, however, would have distilled the 21in by 16in charcoal *Visage de Femme* (Fig 6), with Helene Bailly at the Salon du Dessin, from painstakingly detailed studies. ↘

Next week Munnings makes it

Pick of the week

I recently visited the new exhibition spaces at 4, Cromwell Place, London SW7. The organisers of London Art Week took a grand ground-floor room to show one item each for many of their participants and it was a nostalgic pleasure to enjoy a traditional private view among so many good things. Up two floors was another space taken by Stephen Ongpin for a week's exhibition of 19th- and 20th-century landscapes he was showing in addition to the wider range of master drawings at his gallery in Mason's Yard, SW1.

An outstanding discovery for me was the Swedish water-colourist Carl Johan Forsberg (1868–1938) and what he declared his masterpiece, the 20¾in by 28½in *Pax*, 1905 (below). He was deeply impressed by the Rhone Glacier and the Totensee, Lake of the Dead in Switzerland, the more so in that the carriage in which he and his wife were travelling was almost carried away in a storm—thus the tiny figure of Death beside the lake.



Fig 6 left: *Visage de Femme* by Matisse. With Salon du Dessin. Fig 7 right: David Hockney by Lucian Freud. £14,905,200

