

# Antiques Trade gazette

The Art Market Weekly

koopman rare art



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## Harrington Mann's mystery woman

and striking portrait of a woman drew competition weatts' (26% premium) sale uska Hempel's ion. ing an auction for Scottish Harrington Mann (1937), the picture previously hung in the room at the designer's family in Wiltshire. Grade II listed house provided lots with 214 lots appeared in a stand-alone in Newbury on 15. ed and dated 3ft 10in x 2ft (116cm x 86cm) oil on canvas the subject set against a plain ground wearing a cubbing coat and a riding crop.

*Continued on page 5*

1920s portrait Harrington Mann, at Dreweatts.



## Impact of art gallery collapse revealed by administrators

by Laura Chesters

Nearly 50 people are hoping to reclaim pictures they had consigned to failed art gallery Trinity House Paintings.

The Cotswold dealership went into administration in June (as reported in ATG No 2599) and according to the 'statement of administrator's proposal' that was filed on August 10 to Companies House, 47 named individuals claim title on paintings left with the gallery.

The company has £6.3m in unsecured debt and is likely "there will not be

*Continued on page 4*

## Furniture

Homely tea caddy serves as intriguing auction lot

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**Victorian art:** Evelyn De Morgan goes for gold using unusual medium – page 22-23

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# natural history collecting? It rocks

Over the past decade the buyer profile has widened as fossils and minerals become decorative objects

by Les Allitt

...hunters in the US complete summer digs, dealers in preparation for their autumn season.

...two groups may not have contact, but as a craze for natural history items grows, they have never been so closely linked. Collectors are embracing new ways of displaying rocks, minerals and fossils in their homes, prizing them as pieces in interior design. Key items can be bought from specialist dealers. However, the world of natural history is gradually spilling into the traditional art and antiques trade.

...Ana Valdés Vignoli of Carol Vignoli, specialist in Uruguayan ceramics and shipwreck pottery, is one of the exhibitors at the recent Berkeley Fair Square (from September 27-October 1), returning to the fair for the last edition in 2019.

...It's risky for me to try that fair because my pieces are very different from what you normally find at an antiques fair but everyone was very interested and attracted by something new," Vignoli tells ATG. She works with a mix of collectors, including architects, interior designers and museum curators, offering "bespoke natural history formations to be sourced for a specific end location in mind, be it a home office or a gallery".

...Interest in natural history items is growing but it is changing. Over the past few years or so the buyer base has expanded rapidly. Scientific artefacts are valued more than ever for their educational and decorative qualities, and are often the pieces in a collection that are often larger or punchier to make more impact.

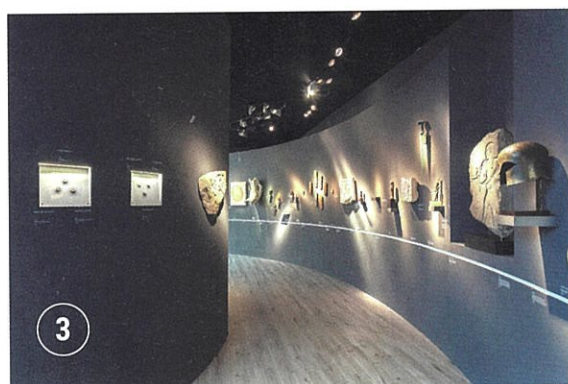
...John Evershed-Martin, a specialist in decorative arts from the 17th and 18th centuries, found a buyer for a 17th-century clock offered for a five-figure sum at the recent summer's Treasure House Fair. The buyer can have one piece and give it the reverence and it becomes



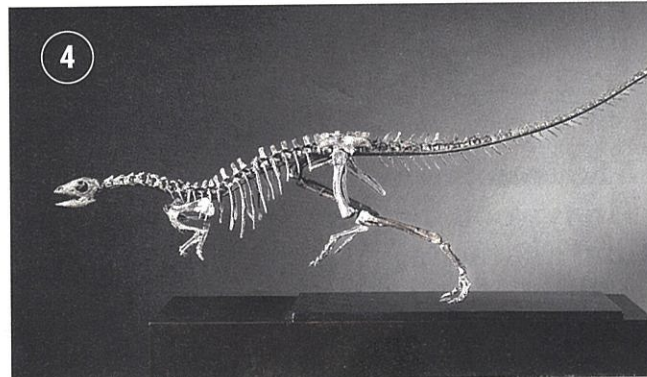
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The trend reflects the rise of the cross-collecting, interiors-focused buyer who is as likely to position an ammonite alongside a piece of contemporary art as another fossil.

At the same time it reflects a much older collecting impulse.

The first formal European collections, compiled by nobles of the 16th century, also prized a balance between naturalia (items from nature), mirabilia (unusual natural phenomena) and artificialia (human-made wonders).

These were often gathered and displayed in a *kunstkammer* or cabinet of curiosities.

Freya Simms, CEO of LAPADA.

## Started with Sue

It all started with the dinosaurs. In the nearly prehistoric days of 1997 Sotheby's sold Sue, a *Tyrannosaurus Rex* skeleton, for \$7.6m, then a record hammer price for a dinosaur fossil.

Thanks to the *Jurassic Park* film franchise and possibly to the rise of tech billionaires looking for new ways to spend their money and decorate their ultra-modern homes, the natural history collecting trend gained strength in the 2000s.

Actors also got involved—Leonardo DiCaprio became a collector, and Russell Crowe reportedly bought a mosasaur skull off him for around \$30,000 during



1. 'A Timeless Study of Curiosity' is included in **Lorforde's** online collection of interior design ideas. The Gloucestershire decorative antiques centre features in the picture here a mammoth tooth, red coral specimen and pair of mounted horns alongside a 19th century mirror, 20th century Chinese ginger jar and a modernist floorlamp.

2. **Carol Tresor** brings this Cretaceous period Excalibur formation central amethyst epimorph after calcite to the LAPADA fair where it is offered for **£75,000**.

3. **ArtAncient's** *Frieze Masters* exhibition of 2019

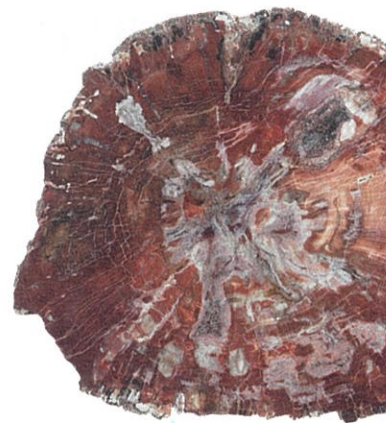
4. **David Aaron** offers this nanosaurus skeleton fossil from the late Jurassic period, c.150m years old. It is available for a **six-figure sum** at this year's *Frieze Masters*.

5. A 12,000-20,000 year old sabre-toothed cat (*Smilodon fatalis*) skull from La Brea Tar Pits, which **ArtAncient** sold to a US collector for a **six-figure sum**.

One way items from the natural world have been showcased historically – other than in collections – is through specimen cabinets or tables.

These are comprised of multiple examples of wood or marble, usually shaped into a repeating pattern as in this c.1850 centre table from the Galle district of Sri Lanka. It is inlaid with indigenous woods and ivory with an inlaid ivory disc at the centre. It is registered with Defra and is offered by **Lennox Cato Antiques** for a price in the region of **£75,000** at the LAPADA Berkeley Square Fair.

▶ [lennoxcato.com](http://lennoxcato.com)



**William Cook Antiques** offers this petrified wood with stand for **£785**. On the website it is "a really decorative and interesting piece equally well in an antique or contemporary setting." ▶ [williamcookantiques.com](http://williamcookantiques.com)



As interest in natural history soars, one formation is enjoying particular popularity: gogottes. These quartz crystal and calcium carbonate were formed out of sand deposits in northern France during the Cretaceous Period and have a distinctive organic shape.

Collected by both Louis XIV at Versailles and the Modern British artist Henry Moore, they were named by French geologist Claude Guillemin who was inspired by characters from the children's book *Babar*.

Recently they have been in the spotlight again. Asian art specialist **ArtAncient** has held two exhibitions on the subject in 2018 and 2022, **ArtAncient** its final *Masterpiece* stand to the formations selling eight examples from £4500-150,000, and folk art dealer **The Home Bothy** sold a collection of small examples for £6800 at the January edition of the *Decorative Textiles Fair* in Battersea (pictured left).

than €400,000 at Aguttes for a mammoth skeleton to match his firm's branding.

Then, in October 2020, Christie's auctioned another T-Rex for \$32m – a huge result for an example less complete than the famous Sue.

"Since then, more dealers and auction houses have begun to enter the market," says Jethro Sverdlhoff, director at London dealership **ArtAncient**. Specialising in antiquities as well as natural history, the dealership started showing at fairs 10 years ago but saw a marked rise in interest around natural history items in 2019 when it staged a show at *Frieze Masters* tracking 4.5 billion years of earth's history through objects.

Sverdlhoff says: "It is this relatively new trend to present aesthetic natural history objects in and among more conventional artworks that is the real drive behind the growth in this market."

fragment of a late Cretaceous period matrix from the Lance Formation in Wyoming to *Frieze Masters* (October 11-15). Containing a mix of fossilised remains, the slab features a large, pristine T-Rex tooth.

### Tighter regulations

It worth noting that the fortunes of some natural history items have differed from that of minerals and fossils recently.

A representative of the *Decorative Antiques and Textiles Fair* in Battersea said that taxidermy and mounted butterflies, once common at the event, have been less obvious recently, replaced by items such as antlers, shells, antler furniture, driftwood sculpture, antique coral and the occasional animal skull. Tightening CITES regulations present challenges in these areas.

However, trading in fossils and minerals also comes with its share of restrictions. Of particular

antiquities, made a splash last year when it brought dinosaurs to two different fairs. First was a triceratops skull which it sold at *Masterpiece* for six figures, then a Jurassic-period *Camptosaurus* that went for £1m at *Frieze Masters*.

Salomon Aaron says that the firm's background in antiquities makes it an ideal trader in fossils. Like ancient art, the sale of prehistoric items can be a lengthy process including "consulting the best experts and methodically approaching all elements to the process from the point of discovery, extraction, assembly, research, study, and presentation".

This year the firm offers "one of the most complete and spectacular examples" of an "iconic and famous dinosaur" at *Frieze Masters*, the species as yet unspecified.

### Generational fascination

Often beautiful and unusual fossils

his grandfather. Today forms of natural world furniture and decorative objects over the past few centuries.

Then there is their appeal. When buyers buy history items, it is in part to the form itself", Evershed-Martin says. "There is a real appeal in the abstraction."

And – up to a certain point – natural objects can have a better value and less complex compositions to their counterparts in abstraction. Another appeal is the fact that here is a link to prehistory sitting in your hands," Evershed-Martin.

Vignoli agrees. "I'm a collector who buys these pieces especially by their cultural fact that these are natural objects formed over millions of years," she says. "Everybody is hypnotised by these natural