

# Adler led avant garde into the British art world

Refugee artist provided first-hand experience

by Alex Capon & Roland Arkell

Among a number of works by modern European artists attracting attention in the UK regions over the last few months was a work by the Polish Jewish artist **Jankel Adler (1895-1949)**.

Adler was at the cutting edge of German painting in the 1920s-30s before his work was declared 'degenerate' by the Nazis.

Fleeing first to Paris in 1933, his arrival in the UK in 1941 injected real-world experience of European Modernism into a British art scene accustomed to receiving the avant-garde second-hand.

Before moving south to London in 1943, Adler, who had left the Polish Army due to ill health, spent two years in Scotland. He joined the Glasgow New Art Club and stayed briefly in the artists' colony in Kirkcudbright when preparing for a solo exhibition at the Redfern Gallery.

Created amid the horrors of the Second World War, with Picasso a primary influence, his paintings such as the typical *Mädchen Mit Katze* (Girl with Cat) from 1942 offered at **Lyon & Turnbull (26/25% buyer's premium)** in London on April 26-28 were not 'easy listening'.

The post-Cubist composition, using bold tones and colours to realise volume, perspective and mass, was deemed at the time to be a significant part of Adler's oeuvre.

The 2ft 8in x 3ft (81 x 91cm) oil on canvas was selected for reproduction in the 1948 monograph on Adler written by the printmaker Stanley William Hayter, by which time it had been acquired by the British and European Modern art collector Peter Watson.

A similar period work titled *Venus of Kirkcudbright* was sold for £140,000 at Christie's in 2015 with another oil

from this period, *The Baal Shem Tov's Daughter*, bringing £95,000 at the same auction house in 2013.

The L&T painting had an estimate of £50,000-80,000 and led the sale at The Mall Galleries when it took £84,000.

Featuring 63 works from some of the most progressive art movements of the 20th and 21st centuries, the sale titled *Avant Garde: Art from 1890 to Now* was led by Simon Hucker, former Sotheby's specialist who joined the L&T team late last year.

## Early Vuillard

John Tunnard's recently rediscovered *Composition*, 1947 sold at £34,000 was reported in ATG No 2594.

Another solid result for a work on paper was the £26,000 (estimate £10,000-15,000) bid for a small 8 x 10in (20 x 26cm) watercolour by **Édouard Vuillard (1868-1940)** featuring the artist's mother.

It was painted during the initial decade of the artist's career, at a time when Vuillard and his widowed mother lived and worked together from series of modest rented apartments; he using his bedroom as a studio while she ran a dressmaking business from the dining room.

A work that remained with the artist until he died, it was initially sold as part of the artist's estate in 1940. It was acquired by the vendor's family in 1977 and, said Hucker, "had been off the map for decades until we had it authenticated by Archives Vuillard. It will now be included in the forthcoming supplement to the artist's catalogue raisonné".

The auction also included a drawing by **Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920)**, on the market for the first time in 91 years, which sold on the low estimate at £40,000. The delicate pencil sketch of a girl lacked wall power but had all the hallmarks of



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Modigliani's 'Cycladic' style and came with a good provenance.

The drawing was originally in the collection of the Modern British painter Christopher Wood, who first visited Paris in 1920, just a few months after Modigliani had died. Wood later sold the drawing to his London dealer, Alex Reid and Lefevre Gallery – at the time the place to go for contemporary European art. In 1932 the dealer sold this drawing to a private collector. It had remained in the same family ever since.

## 'Neglected genius'

Lyon & Turnbull's Modern Made sale that followed on April 28 included a good Post-war sculpture offering with works by George Kennethson, Elizabeth Frink and Denis Mitchell.

However, it was led by a series of pieces by **Robert Adams (1917-84)**, an artist who has been described as "the neglected genius of Post-war British sculpture".

While not widely known outside of artistic circles, he was one of the

foremost names of his generation. The four sculptures here had been acquired by the owner in the 1960s from the Gimpel Fils gallery in London.

The largest was a 9ft (2.73m) high steel installation titled *Three Circular Forms (Wall Sculpture)* which was included in Adams' one-man presentation at the Venice Biennale in 1962. As his biographer Alastair Grieve writes in *The Sculpture of Robert Adams* (1992), the artist was given two light, airy galleries in the British Pavilion, one to show historic work, the other for more recent pieces conceived with the Biennale in mind.

This example was guided at £8000-12,000 and made £24,000. Only a handful of Adams' sculptures have sold for more. In March this year Sotheby's sold *Slim Bronze No 3 (Large Version)* for £32,000 while in 2019 Christie's sold *Crescent Edge* for £36,000. Both of these works were later, dating from 1973.

At L&T, the much smaller works *Rectangular Bronze Form No 6* and *Rectangular Bronze Form No 3*, both conceived in 1955, sold for £15,000



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1. *Mädchen Mit Katze* (Girl with Cat) by Jankel Adler, **£84,000** at Lyon & Turnbull.

2. *La Mère de l'artiste tenant une bouteille et une carafe à bout de bras* by Édouard Vuillard, **£26,000** at Lyon & Turnbull.

3. *Three Circular Forms (Wall Sculpture)* by Robert Adams, **£24,000** at Lyon & Turnbull.

4. *Woman holding a*

*bowl of fruit* by Ernest Neuschul, **£23,000** at Sworders.

5. *Railway workers* by Ernst Neuschul, **£14,000** at Sworders.

6. *A snowy day, High Street, Great Bardfield, Essex* by Edward Bawden, **£19,000** at Sworders.

7. *John Aldridge, watercolour of rocks in a pool in Richmond*, **£16,000** at Sworders.



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and £9000 respectively. Both were made in an edition of just six pieces.

The fourth work by Adams was *Slim Bronze/Hatchet Form* from 1971, also from an edition of six, which made £4800.

### Australian artist

Meanwhile, a group of six works by **Roy De Maistre (1894-1968)** came from the collection of the Australian artist's cousin-once-removed Celia Broadbent, who was his executor and friend. Celia's mother was Camilla Keogh, subject of *La Folie* (1946-47), considered one of de Maistre's major works.



**A series of exhibitions have helped raise Neuschul's profile and his story and now he is becoming increasingly collectable**

All of lots sold for a £41,250 hammer total, led by *View onto the Garden at Compiègne*, a 1947 oil on board which overshot a £8000-12,000 estimate and sold at £30,000.

### Neuschul record

Over in Essex, two works by Czech artist **Ernst Neuschul (1895-1968)** drew demand at **Sworders (25% buyer's premium)** on April 25, both breaking the previous auction record for the artist and going to a bidder in Prague.

Entered for sale by London private clients, first up was *Woman holding a bowl of fruit*, a 2ft 11in x 2ft 4in (88 x 70cm) signed oil on canvas which was thought to depict Neuschul's first wife, the Dutch-Japanese dancer Takka-Takka (real name Lucie Lindenmannovou) who he met in Prague shortly after the First World War.

The couple enjoyed Weimar Berlin together as Neuschul made his name as a painter in the avant-garde New Objectivity movement.

However, as a socialist and pacifist of Jewish descent he was later declared a degenerate by the Nazis and fled first to Russia in 1935 then eventually to the UK.

Estimated at £2000-3000, the portrait attracted strong competition from a number of different Czech bidders and sold at £23,000, a new benchmark for Neuschul at auction.

The other picture was one of his later works showing the lives of working people. Titled *Railway Workers*, it showed a crew using a lever to move a rail into position and was typical of the politically charged scenes that earned him the approval of Soviet Russia. Estimated at £1800-2000, it sold at £14,000.

Sworders' head of Modern and Contemporary art Amy Scanlon said the sums underlined the new levels of interest in the painter who had slipped into obscurity by the end of his life.

"A series of exhibitions, including a retrospective at the Leicestershire Museum and Art Gallery, have helped raise the artist's profile and his story and he is now becoming increasingly collectable," she said.

### East Anglian interest

Elsewhere at the auction some good interest came for local artists, especially the 20 works by **Edward Bawden (1903-89)** which sold to 15 different buyers. A group of 10 trademark prints all found buyers

(reported in ATG No 2592) but a watercolour of Great Bardfield high street on a snowy day also equalled the auction record for any work on paper by the artist.

Signed and dated 1955, the watercolour, gouache, pencil, pen and ink measured 17 x 22in (44 x 56cm) and was in good condition. It had been part of the Bawden exhibition held at The Minories, Colchester, in 1973 which added to its strong appeal as a highly desirable subject for collectors.

Estimated at £7000-9000, it sold to a bidder in the room for £19,000, a sum that matched the bid for another watercolour of the same location sold at Christie's in 2009.

After the sale, Sworders told ATG that the buyer was the Fry Art Gallery in Saffron Walden which secured the work against competition from private bidders.

Two Great Bardfield scenes by **John Aldridge (1905-83)** also surpassed their estimates, selling for £10,000 and £11,000 respectively.

They were outsold, however, by a view of rocks in a pool in Richmond, Yorkshire, that made the second-highest price at auction for the artist when it was knocked down at £16,000 to a bidder in California.