

Baer collection comes to market

The influential dealer and his wife amassed an impressive array of art and antiques

by Alex Capon

Views of France, both rural and urban, provided an interesting facet to the sale of the collection of Sir Jack Baer and his wife Diana.

The late art dealer, who helped develop the historic London gallery Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox into an international force, had an evident fondness for pictures of the French landscape as well as Parisian cityscapes.

Hazlitt's became known for selling French art and works by the Barbizon school in particular, something that was underlined when 22 lots from his collection were offered at **Sworders' (25% buyer's premium) Old Masters, British and European Art** sale.

Sir Jack died in 2016 but the works offered at the Stansted Mountfitchet saleroom on September 27 were consigned by the family following the recent death of Lady Baer.

Along with pictures sold in **Sworders' Modern and Contemporary Art** sale a week later (see facing page) and a small number of items at the **Fine Interiors** sale on September 13-14 (including a set of nine Florentine, pietra dura panels that made a stunning £130,000 – see *Pick of the Week*, ATG No 2560), the works had been removed from the couple's house in Kensington, 9 Phillimore Terrace.

The property had been filled to the brim with furniture, works of art and pictures – the latter including many small-scaled paintings, drawings and



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prints in particular.

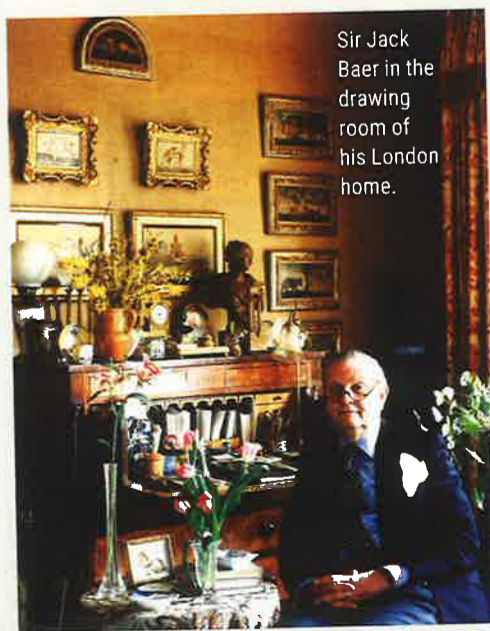
The lots met a good reaction with **Sworders** reporting bidding from his former clients, fellow dealers and even family members. Against attractive estimates, all 22 lots sold with all but three lots going above predictions, raising a combined

hammer total of £81,200.

Hugely respected

"Generally I think people have been encouraged by the fact they are generally fresh to the market and from a good collection," said **Sworders' head of paintings Jane Oakley**. "Sir

Jack was a hugely respected figure in the art world which lent cachet to his property. The combination of his discerning eye, their freshness to the market and the impeccable provenance proved a winning formula and inspired buyers to dig deep." Nineteenth century French



Sir Jack Baer in the drawing room of his London home.

Sir Jack Mervyn Frank Baer (1924-2016) is remembered as one of the leading picture dealers of his generation.

Born into a family of German Jewish émigrés, he was educated at **Bryanston School** in Dorset, where fellow pupils included a 'rather frightening and sophisticated' boy called **Lucian Freud**. After later studying at the **Slade** and serving in the **RAF** during the **Second World War**, he had a brief apprenticeship with the **Piccadilly-based art dealer Max de Beer**. When this ended abruptly after de Beer was jailed for fraud, Baer decided to set up his own operation.

His decades-long relationship with the **Hazlitt Gallery**, a business dating back to 1752, began when he was asked to help in its closure after the owner, **Hungarian dealer Max Hevesi**, unexpectedly died in 1947. But it was instead agreed that Baer would take over the business and, after a series of successful exhibitions in the 1950s-60s focusing on **French Barbizon School painters**, as well as **Italian Baroque and Rococo paintings**, he greatly bolstered the reputation and influence of the gallery.

In one thrifty acquisition, he acquired a collection of 35 **European paintings** in **New York** in 1955 by then out-of-

favour artists such as **Corot, Millet and Rousseau** on the day that the **Foreign Exchange Controls** were removed, paying just **£10,000** and then selling them for vastly greater sums in **Hazlitt's** exhibitions.

In 1973, a merger created **Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox**, followed by the opening of an affiliate gallery in **New York**. From 1977 to 1980, he was chairman of the **Society of London Art Dealers** and, as a member of the **Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art** and **Chairman of the Acceptance in Lieu Panel**, it was said he helped save around **£150m** of art for the nation. He received a **knighthood** in 1997.

In 1970, he married **Diana (née Downes Baillieu)**, a watercolour artist, **RADA** trained actress and the daughter of the novelist **Mollie Panter-Downs (1906-97)**. For 46 years the couple collected everything from **19th-century French drawings, folk art, contemporary ceramics, textiles, porcelain and decorative objects**, many of them bought from **local antiques dealers, shops and fairs**.

In 1992, he stood down as **managing director of Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox** but remained as chairman until 2001.