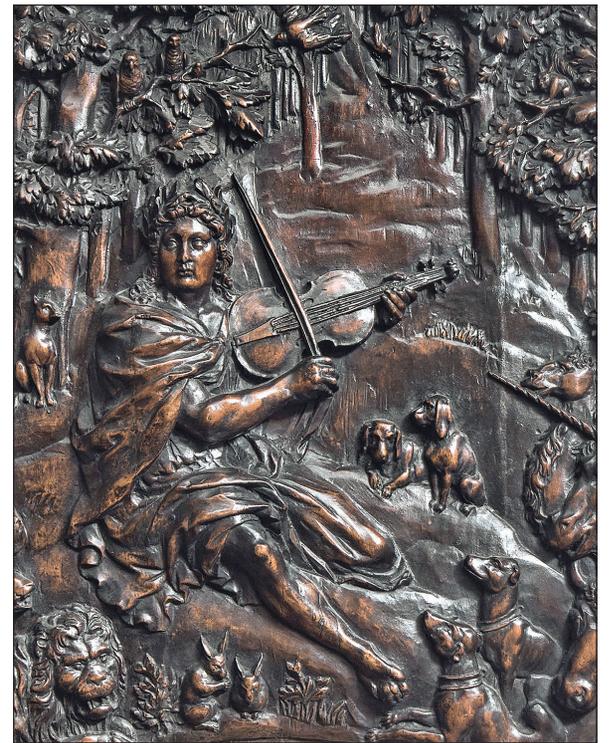
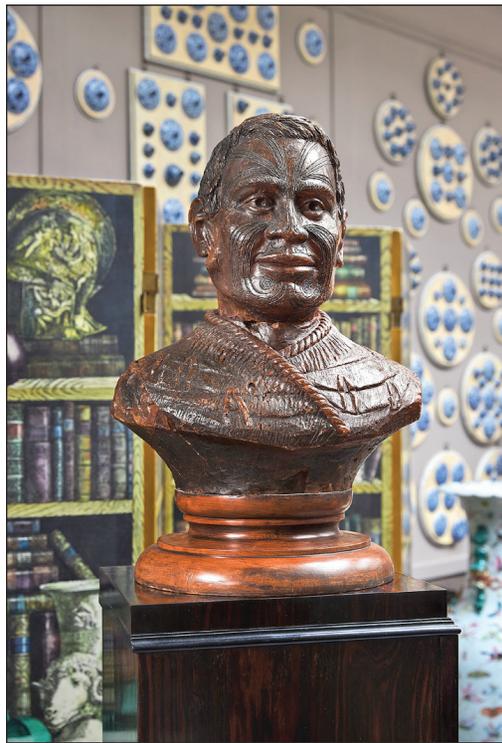


Peter Petrou's Collection At Sworders Feb. 24—

Five Decades Of Art & Antiques Dealing: A Disease Curable Only By Death



LONDON — Peter Petrou's five decades in the art and antiques world form a story as compelling as the objects with which he has long been synonymous. Guided not by fashion but by instinct — “a disease curable only by death,” he jokes — Petrou has spent his life championing pieces that defy category, logic or expectation.

Outward Bound, a sale to be conducted by Sworders on Tuesday, February 24, starting at 10 am, gathers works from his stock and personal collection: objects chosen over a lifetime of looking, thinking, feeling... and match-making. For Petrou has always believed that dealers are custodians, not conquerors.

His path was hardly preordained. Born to Greek parents in 1950s London, he dutifully studied law before abandoning it for an apprenticeship with Charles Guillois, the French war hero turned furniture dealer. “Objects carry histories,” Petrou learned early. “Our job is to listen.” By the 1980s he was trading at Alfies and Camden Stables; by the 1990s he had secured a coveted shop on Westbourne Grove, frequented by everyone from George Harrison to Barbara Streisand. His stands at Olympia, Grosvenor House, PAD and the venerable Winter Show became legendary for their theatre, their daring

juxtapositions and their unmistakable Petrou magic.

Trying to define the “Petrou aesthetic” is a fool's errand. His eye ranges freely: Egyptian mummies beside Black Forest carvings; Polynesian artifacts conversing with Roman fragments; natural wonders set against Modernist lines. Dyslexic since childhood, he found clarity not in words but in materials: “If I saw something 20 years ago, I can remember it today.” That visual memory became his superpower.

He shared that philosophy generously with younger dealers — none more so than a young Jay Arenski, to whom he explained the two golden rules of the trade:

Rule Number One: There are no rules.

Rule Number Two: There are exceptions to every rule.

It remains the closest thing Petrou has ever offered as a manifesto.

His stories are legend: the red Volvo Estate with 400,000 miles; the Harley Street scans of elephant-bird eggs; the Egyptian mummy strapped to the roof rack and later sold at Christie's for £810,000, the buyer rumored to be Sheikh Saud Al-Thani. Profit, he insists, was never the point. “Dealing is a vocation. We're custodians. Our job is to find the

right homes for extraordinary things.”

Among the highlights of Outward Bound are a monumental Seventeenth Century limewood carving of “Orpheus Charming the Animals,” formerly owned by Yehudi Menuhin; a tantric Tibetan gilt-bronze Shadakshari Lokeshvara, once in the Kienzle collection; and a rare Nineteenth Century kauri-gum bust of Tamati Tamaiwhakanehua, the Māori chief who signed the Treaty of Waitangi.

The next chapter unfolds in Brittany, where Petrou plans to spend more time with his three goddaughters and in the garden-house library he has built to house his 8,000 book and catalog reference collection. Those who know Petrou well, know that his vast shelves of books — auction catalogs, monographs, obscure ethnographic studies — are his army. Not trophies, not ballast, but weapons in the hunt: tools for verifying a hunch, deepening a mystery or unlocking a forgotten attribution. The thrill of the chase is not complete until the footnotes surrender their secrets. As Petrou says, “A collector without a library is like an explorer without a map.”

For wherever he is, he will keep looking. That is the constant: the eye, the instinct, the curiosity and the delight in placing the right object with the right person at the right time. The matchmaker's gift.

Outward Bound is not a farewell but a continuation: an invitation to acquire works

from a dealer who has proved, time and again, that the best objects choose their custodians and that beauty, above all,

deserves a home.

For information, www.sworders.co.uk or www.bada.org/dealer/peter-petrou.

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