



**1**  
Manner of Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer 1636-1699, Still life of flowers in a vase on a ledge, oil on canvas, 62.5 x 52cm. Rosebery's, London. Mar 08. HP: £400. ABP: £470.



**2**  
English School, 20thC, Still Life of Flowers in a Vase on a stone ledge, lake beyond, oil on canvas, ornate gilt frame, 74 x 61cm. Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Nov 05. HP: £500. ABP: £588.



**3**  
Dutch School, 17thC, still life of flowers in a glass vase on a stone ledge, the reverse with an indistinct label, oil on panel, 17 x 14.25in. Hy. Duke & Son, Dorchester. Jul 06. HP: £1,600. ABP: £1,882.



**4**  
Jan Vos, (early 19thC) A Still Life of a Vase of Flowers and Grapes on Stone Ledge, signed, oil on panel, 52 x 39cm. Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Jul 05. HP: £4,600. ABP: £5,410.



**5**  
Helen Cordelia Angell Coleman, (1846-1884) Still life, roses in a blue vase, signed, watercolour, 18 x 12in. Clarke Gammon Wellers, Guildford. Nov 05. HP: £1,200. ABP: £1,411.



**6**  
In the manner of Oliver Clare, still life study with basket of primroses beside bird's nest with eggs and other wild flowers, oil on canvas, indistinctly signed, 37 x 27cm, gilt gesso glazed frame. Locke & England, Leamington Spa. Sep 07. HP: £480. ABP: £564.



**7**  
'Meg Roses', oil on canvas, signed Cecil Kennedy, (1905-1997), 49.5 x 59.5cm. Ambrose, Loughton. Jun 02. HP: £49,000. ABP: £57,636.



**8**  
Cecil Kennedy (1905-1997), British, still life study of anemones, berries & spring flowers, green glass vase on a stone ledge with ladybird, signed, gilt gesso glazed frame, oil on canvas, 49 x 39.5cm. Locke & England, Leamington Spa. Jul 06. HP: £6,500. ABP: £7,645.

## Flower paintings can be a good long term investment

by Chris Murray

As summer has just passed and we are enjoying autumn, I thought it might be a good moment to look briefly at a genre which, though rich in fine works, is often overlooked: flower painting. On the whole, flower paintings are often less susceptible to the marked fluctuations seen in other areas of the market, and many, given their quality, are still very good value. Buyers with a discerning eye and a long-term view of the market might want to look more carefully at flower paintings. Here I'm referring to artistic or decorative painting. I'll look at flower illustrations at a later date.

The genre emerged in Holland at the end of the sixteenth century, popular because it combined a sensual delight in the riches of nature with a keen interest in botany, exotics brought back via trading links with the far-flung corners of the world had already made Holland a centre for flower growing. Typically, they show a rich profusion of blooms against a dark background (1), and sometimes include insects, snails, glassware, classical vases, and, despite their exuberant sense of life, a few fallen petals or withered leaves as symbols of mortality: the glories of this world are all too brief.

Original works by established masters can of course be very expensive though often not as expensive as comparable works in more popular genres, but the form was so successful that it was repeated largely unchanged for centuries in Holland and in France, indeed, into modern times (2) so there are plenty of affordable works available. However, this repetition of basic formulas does mean that it can sometimes be difficult to date a work without a close and informed inspection, so when buying it is important to ensure the description is accurate. Things may not be what they seem.

Simpler, more informal arrangements also flourished (3), and likewise for a long time, many of the later practitioners achieving considerable acclaim (4). As the latter illustrates, the same names (in this case Jan Vos) often recur generation after generation, so again care is needed when assessing a painting. Which Vos is it?

The Victorians preferred more informal arrangements, often painted in watercolour, which, with its subtle, luminous colours, and effects ranging from small and exact detail to pigments dissolved on damp paper, is a medium well suited to the subject. The flower studies by Charles Rennie Mackintosh are superb examples of the use of watercolour. One of the most popular Victorian subjects was the small assortment of wild flowers with a wicker basket or bird's nest. Those by Oliver and Vincent Clare are prized, prices are usually in the thousands, but there are many in the same style that are far more affordable (6). In general, Victorian art of this kind has not done well over the last few years, but of course this means that if you have an eye for quality, it may be an opportune time to buy.

The twentieth century in Britain saw a return to the more formal set pieces, though now on a more modest scale, the aim being elegance rather than profusion. An important figure here is Cecil Kennedy, whose works can soar to extraordinary heights (7). However, it is unwise to assume that a Kennedy, even a good one, will reach such values: most at auction sell for around £6-8,000 (8). Certainly a sound investment. A similar artist, with a more sharply focused style, is Gerald Cooper (9), whose paintings generally achieve a little less than works by Kennedy.

One of the most unusual twentieth-century British flower painter was Lawrence (Laurence) Biddle. Typically, he places a small arrangement some distance from the viewer and set against a broad and ill-defined background vaguely suggestive of sky. The result is often quite Surrealistic (10). The £600 paid for this striking example is in fact rather low: though he's not to everyone's taste, he is collected and his works can reach £3-4,000.

Another arrangement that became popular during the early twentieth century was the 'flowers with figurine,' which were usually an opportunity for the artist (as so often with flower paintings) to display a skill in depicting different materials, notably the lustre of ceramics and metal, the texture of fabrics, and so on. The figurine often introduces a sentimental note, as in



Gerald Cooper, *Mid Summer Flowers*, signed on board, label verso dated 1981, 24 x 20in, gilt frame. Hartleys, Ilkley. Jun 06. HP: £4,600. ABP: £5,410.



Lawrence Biddle, *still life study of flowers in a vase*, oil on board, signed, dated '44, 16 x 12in, glazed white painted frame. Amersham Auction Rooms, Bucks. Aug 03. HP: £600. ABP: £705.



Early 20thC English School, *Still life with china figure of a seated girl and vases of mixed flowers*, canvas 25 x 30in, unsigned. Canterbury Auction Galleries, Kent. Feb 07. HP: £350. ABP: £411.



Louise Pickard (c1865-1928) *oil on canvas*, 16 x 12in. Gorrings, Lewes. Oct 07. HP: £950. ABP: £1,117.



Richard Bawden (b1936) *'Flowers & Patchwork'*, aquatint, signed and inscribed in pencil, artist's proof, 52 x 42cm. Sworders, Stansted Mountfichet. Feb 07. HP: £220. ABP: £258.



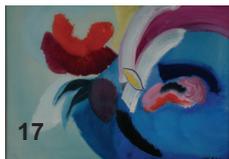
Richard Bawden (b1936) *'The White Jug'*, coloured etching & aquatint, signed in pencil, inscribed, No 76/80, 33 x 43cm. Sworders, Stansted Mountfichet. Feb 07. HP: £200. ABP: £235.



Kenneth Hall, *Floral still life, brush, black ink & watercolour*, signed, 50.7 x 35.7cm, unframed. Rosebery's, London. Sep 04. HP: £900. ABP: £1,058.



Donald Fraser Hamilton, b1929, *'Flowers'*, screenprint in colours, signed, No 81/175 in pencil, Susan Mackechine, b1953, *'Peruvian Lily'*, etching, signed, titled & No 10/40 in pencil. (2) Rosebery's, London. Feb 06. HP: £120. ABP: £141.



John Hitchens (1940-) *oil on canvas*, *'Flowers Into Blue'*, signed, dated 1967 verso, 20 x 28in. Gorrings, Lewes. Oct 06. HP: £460. ABP: £541.



Alexina MacRitchie 20thC, *Still life of flowers in a jug with a plate, jar and peach laid on a table*, oil on canvas, signed, 50 x 40cm. Rosebery's, London. Jul 07. HP: £350. ABP: £411.



Maclaughton Milne, *oil on board*, *Still life of flowers in a jug*, signed, 18 x 15in. Gorrings, Lewes. Feb 07. HP: £2,100. ABP: £2,470.



David M. Martin TSW RGI, *oil on canvas* *'Spring still life'*, signed recto & signed entitled and dated 1994 verso 20 x 24in. Great Western Auctions, Glasgow. Mar 06. HP: £490. ABP: £576.



Norman Kirkham RGI, *oil on canvas*, *Still Life with Peonies, Anemones & Lantern*, signed, 38 x 30in. Great Western Auctions, Glasgow. Feb 07. HP: £1,300. ABP: £1,529.



Mary Gallagher, *oil on canvas*, *Still life with iron*, signed verso, 27 x 36in. Great Western Auctions, Glasgow. Jun 05. HP: £480. ABP: £564.



Des Gorman, *oil on gesso* *'Flowers on a white background'*, signed recto and signed and entitled verso, 17 x 15in. Great Western Auctions, Glasgow. Feb 08. HP: £380. ABP: £446.



this anonymous example (11), which reached a modest £350.

The twentieth century has also produced a wealth of informal flower studies (12). Among contemporary artists working successfully in the genre there's Richard Bawden (13), Kenneth Hall (14), Donald Hamilton Fraser (15), and John Hitchens (16), who pushes the forms towards abstraction ... and many others. Interestingly, Scottish artists seem to have brought a distinctive vitality to flower painting, largely because of the influence of the Scottish Colourists. Their legacy, or sometimes the direct influence of the French artists who inspired them, is expressive brushwork, a concern for artistic form rather than botanical accuracy, and above all a delight in strong colours.

Earlier examples include Alexina MacRitchie (fl. 1885-1932) (18), whose £350 was too low; and the much better known John Maclaughlan (Maclaughlan) Milne (1885-1957) (19), which was also curiously low, up to £10,000 could have been expected (his French landscapes fetch far more than his still lifes).

Later artists include David M. Martin (b. 1922) (20), Norman Kirkham (b.1936) (21), and Mary Gallagher (b.1953) who in the example shown here gives the genre a modern, ironic twist by including a very domestic iron (22). Another contemporary Scottish artist working in this vein is Des Gorman (b.1960), who has yet to acquire a more substantial reputation in auctions. He seems at his best when painting flowers and other still lifes, the paint applied thickly and in strong colours (23). He (and Gallagher) may deserve a little more attention; seldom selling for more than £600, they are still affordable.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that flower painting has attracted countless amateurs, and while a vast majority of their works have little or no quality, there may always be a few of interest, such as 24 below, a delightful naïve study in the manner of the French painter Henri Rousseau.

For those interested in the British tradition, Josephine Walpole's *A History and Dictionary of British Flower Painters*, Antique Collectors' Club, 2006 is an essential guide.

European School 20thC, *Still life of flowers in a vase*, oil on canvas, 92 x 73cm. (unframed) Rosebery's, London. Feb 06. HP: £140. ABP: £164.