

# Hidden treasure: where to buy a pregnant dinosaur and a royal commode

Chelsea's Treasure House Fair offers a fascinating and eclectic array of objects d'art for the modern Medici



One of Louis XV's lacquer à la Française commodes by Mathieu Criaerd, c 1745

Nancy Durrant | Monday June 24 2024, 12.01am, The Times

The literal translation of the German word *wunderkammer* is 'room of wonder'. It's an apt term to describe the Treasure House Fair, opening at the Royal Hospital Chelsea this week.

Now in its second year the event differs from most other art fairs in that it cleaves closely to Prince Albert's vision for the Great Exhibition of 1851 (an unexpected aim, to be sure, but an intriguing one). The exhibitions showcase not just excellent artworks and examples of craftsmanship in furniture and the decorative arts but also rare and whimsical natural wonders, from perfectly preserved dinosaur fossils or meteorites to unusually large and rare precious stones.

Its list of dealers is like a who's who of old Mayfair — family businesses such as Ronald Phillips, Richard Green, Wartski, Adrian Sassoon, Butchoff Antiques, MacConnal-Mason, Koopman Rare Art and Adrian Alan will be exhibiting alongside the likes of Osborne Samuel and Godson & Coles. International names feature, too, including the New York jewellery and antique silver specialists SJ Shrubsole, the Parisian gallery Univers du Bronze (which does more or less what it says on the tin) and Monaco's Maison d'Art.

Conceived last year as a successor to the much-mourned Masterpiece

Conceived last year as a successor to the much-mourned Masterpiece fair, Treasure House's co-founder Thomas Woodham-Smith explains that what makes this fair special is essentially the vibe.

Many art fairs hum with a sort of frenzied undercurrent of fear and competition. Treasure House on the other hand thrives on “the feeling that it is partly collegiate. It's all the dealers in it together, and [it's] partly sybaritic, in that we like to think of ourselves as more like a festival than an art fair, with things going on, people coming to the restaurant, the bar, for the good fellowship and meeting up with people that they haven't seen for years. It's a social experience.”

The fair's Sculpture Walk, which takes place within and without the main tent, will return, showcasing work by 20th and 21st-century female artists from Barbara Hepworth and Emily Young to Mona Hatoum and Sophie Ryder.

In its first edition highlights included a silver clock commissioned by Charles II from Thomas Tompion (known as the father of English clockmaking), which was sold by Carter Marsh to a new UK-based client for £4.5 million, and a work by the early-20th-century Italian sculptor Rembrandt Bugatti, which was sold by Sladmore for about £1.5 million. But who are the collectors at a show like this? According to Woodham-Smith it's both complicated and simple.



Mutti: the 180-million-year-old female ichthyosaur

### **Fossil of a 180-million-year-old pregnant ichthyosaur**

“What is a collector these days?” he asks. “If you just collect antiquities or arms and armour or just modern British art we're really not for you. We present ourselves — and I think we are probably the last one in the UK — as the interdisciplinary fair. We pitch ourselves to what you might call the modern Medici: the people who collect anything if it's at the apogee of its moment, its production, its design, its reputation.”



Exceptional people who appreciate excellence, then: “I think if you want to be taken by surprise, that’s what you come to Treasure House for.”

It certainly has some surprising — and exceptional — items for sale. Here are eight highlights.

This unique fossil of a female ichthyosaur — a large marine predator that ruled the seas as much as 250 million years ago, about 20 million years before the emergence of the dinosaurs — clearly shows the two offspring she was carrying. It was found in Germany and has been predictably nicknamed Mutti (mum).

*Stone Gallery, the Netherlands; £1.1million*



The 100.08-carat diamond

### **100.08-carat oval-shaped D Colour, type Iia diamond**

Very few polished diamonds pass the 100-carat mark and this one is particularly exceptional due to its significant size and transparency. The categorisation type Iia means it lacks measurable levels of impurities such as nitrogen, giving it that dazzling pure white colour.

*Provident Jewelry, US; £16.5 million*



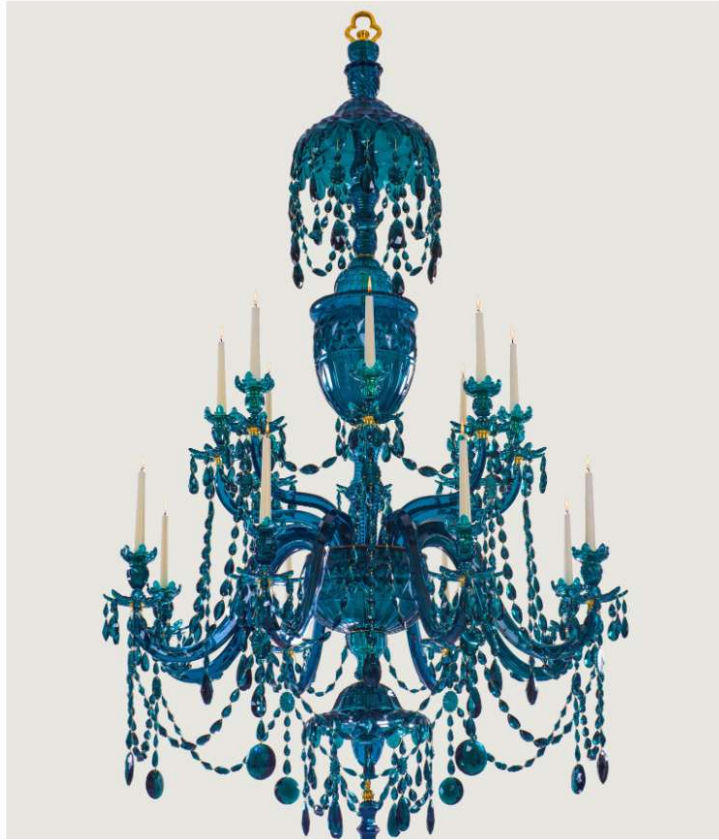
The pair of lacque à la Française commodes

### **Pair of Louis XV lacque à la Française commodes by Mathieu Criaerd, c 1745, made for Madame de Pompadour**

La Pompadour was Louis XV’s official mistress and an important art

La Pompadour was Louis XV's official mistress and an important art patron. This pair of blue and white commodes was made to stand in the Salon Bleu of her Château de la Celle Saint Cloud near Versailles. The dealer Frank Partridge has spent several years researching their provenance and describes them as "the most exciting discovery in French furniture that's happened in years".

*Frank Partridge, London; £2.5 million*



### **George III peacock green 16-light chandelier, made for the Maharaja of Hyderabad in 1785**

This monumental and extremely rare 18th-century chandelier has a vivid colour that makes it look almost contemporary. The light piece is attributed to William Parker, arguably one of Britain's greatest chandelier-makers, and was originally commissioned to hang in the palace at Hyderabad.

*Fileman Antiques, Steyning; undisclosed six-figure sum*



The Alma-Tadema armlet

### **The Alma-Tadema armlet**

This piece was commissioned by the 19th-century painter Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema as a gift for his wife, Laura. Engraved with



Laura's name in Greek script, the heavy, solid gold serpentine armlet is set with turquoise, ruby, sapphire and emerald stones. It features in a number of the artist's most iconic paintings, including *The Sculpture Gallery*, from 1874, in which it can be seen on the arm of Laura herself.

*Wartski, London; undisclosed six-figure sum*



A Fabergé pink guilloché enamel whistle, c 1910

### **Fabergé pink guilloché enamel and gilded silver pendant whistle, circa 1910**

Fab Fabergé was known for other novelties as well as the imperial eggs for which the workshop was so famous. This adorable little whistle was formerly in the Forbes collection – the extravagant publisher and entrepreneur was a lifelong collector of toys.

*A la Vieille Russie, New York; £59,000*



One of four surviving mugs commemorating the coronation of King Charles II, c 1660

### **A 364-year-old Delft mug commemorating the coronation of King Charles II**

Made in Southwark in 1660, this mug is one of only four examples of its kind – one of which is in the collection of the Museum of London. It was made soon after the exiled monarch's return to London on his 30th birthday, May 29, 1660, in a procession that took seven hours to pass.

*E&H Manners, London; £55,000*



Henry — Forte dei Marmi '66/score: 21-5, 21-8, 21-7'

## Henry Moore and the Art of Ping Pong by Michael Ayrton, 1966

The sculptor Henry Moore was a keen table tennis player who pursued an enduring rivalry at the game with his lifelong friends and fellow artists Ben Nicholson and Michael Ayrton. This lively pencil drawing, inscribed “Henry — Forte dei Marmi '66/score: 21-5, 21-8, 21-7”, was made during Ayrton’s stay at Moore’s house in Italy.

*Christopher Kingzett Fine Art, London; £6,000*

*The Treasure House Fair is at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, London SW3, from June 27 to July 2; [treasurehousefair.com](https://treasurehousefair.com)*

Life & Style > Luxury

### Related articles



#### Craft takes over the capital

May 14 2024, 12.01am

Lisa Grainger



#### Behind the scenes at the Loewe Craft Prize

May 31 2024, 12.01am

Fiona McCarthy



#### Strange tales behind the jewels at the V&A

June 03 2024, 12.01am

Rachel Church