

Profile: Koopman Rare Art

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By Huon Mallalieu

Huon Mallalieu is an historian who writes on art, antiques and collecting for The Times, Country Life and The Oldie. He is the author or editor of many books, including The Dictionary of British Watercolour Artists and 1066 and Rather More, a Walk through History. He is FSA and Hon RWS.

The British and Dutch art and antiques trades have been intertwined since their beginnings in the 17th century when Bathasar Gerbier and Daniel Nijss helped Charles I build his unrivalled collections. Over the centuries many distinguished Dutch dealers have established themselves in London either as branches or their principal business, and they still do so today.

For decades Koopman Rare Art, has been one of London's pre-eminent silver dealers, but it has roots in pre-War Amsterdam, where the father of Eddy and Jacques Koopman dealt in antiques. Eddy, the eldest son, realised what was coming, and in 1938 moved to England where he set up as a silver dealer in Manchester. The youngest, Jacques (pronounced as English Jack) was 9 years old in 1942 when he is parents pushed him out of the train that was taking them to a concentration camp. He survived the next four years in hiding.

After the war, and a period working as a taxi-driver in Canada, he too settled in England and in 1952 set up the London business with Eddy, who retained the small northern shop. The partnership worked well, since in Manchester Eddy could buy stock from old money 19th century collections, and in London Jacques could attract new money buyers. In 1969 they were well enough established to move the southern business to the Silver Vaults in Chancery Lane, taking what was described as "a sprawling establishment" on the ground floor.

Jacques Koopman continued to work at the shop until just before his death in 1991 aged only 60, having earned the reputation of being the "dominant force in the market" and he was followed soon afterwards by his nephew Michael, who had taken on the business. Jacques had believed that good dealers must love what they do and what they deal in. He recognised that quality in Lewis Smith, who had come to the Silver Vaults as a porter, and he became a mentor to the 18-year old. Lewis, who had been collecting and dealing from his schooldays, emphasises that willingness to learn from older dealers and to work all hours are two of the essential attributes for a tyro in the trade. For a while he left to run his own business, but in 1993 he returned to Koopman as a director, working in partnership with Michael's son Timo, and together they have maintained and enhanced the legacy of the founding brothers. As it happens their skills are complementary: Lewis relishes the business of buying and selling, while Timo is in his element in libraries and archives, providing meticulous research as they unveil their latest treasures.

The firm handles English silver from the Tudors to the 19th century, but thanks to Jacques, who had recognised the potential of sculptural pieces, it developed a special expertise in the great makers of the 18th century and Regency, notably Paul de Lamerie (1688 - 1751), Paul Storr (1771 - 1844) and Rundell Bridge & Rundell, Principal Royal Goldsmiths, Jewellers and Medallists from 1797 to 1830. The catalogues of its exhibitions are as impressive as the treasures in them.

Koopman has formed and dispersed many great collections, and worked with an impressive roster of museums in the United States as well as Great Britain and Australia. One of their sculptural pieces that has most impressed me over the years was a 26.8in high six-light candelabrum centrepiece by Paul Storr, 1811, which they showed as part of London Art Week in 2020. The palm-like column was flanked by three satyrs with Pan pipes, which were probably modelled by the sculptor William Theed II and inspired by a bronze from the circle of the Renaissance master Andrea Riccio (1470 - 1532). Other outstanding pieces include an Elizabethan silver-gilt cup and cover made by the London smith Affabel Partridge in 1578, which had once been owned by J P Morgan and was acquired by Temple Newsam House, Leeds, and a 1731 silver bowl and cover by Edward Feline that was a christening present from George II to his god-daughter Lady Emilia Lennox, later Duchess of Leinster, which was bought by the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2014.



Silver christening cup and cover, marked Edward Feline, London, 1731.

[Sold by Koopman to the V&A in 2014.](#)

In 2021 Koopman left the Silver Vaults for Dover Street in the West End, and at the same time brought in Lewis' daughter Kimberley to deal in 19th and 20th century jewellery. Previously she had run her own Kimberley Fine Jewels and worked in the department at Sotheby's.

Lewis and Timo recognise the need to encourage young dealers, and as importantly a new generation in allied trades such as restoration. It is vital to the trade that skills and knowledge are passed on, especially as the pool of the very best items available to the market inevitably shrinks. Where for some people this might prompt a move towards the contemporary field, they prefer the history and uniqueness of older pieces. However, they are by no means backward-looking, and they regard the increasing importance of internet trading, especially in the last few years, as very positive for the future. Not only is it vital to research, but it helps to bring down barriers between markets and extend the reach of dealers to all parts of the world.



Timo Koopman and Lewis Smith, directors of Koopman Rare Art.
[Courtesy of Koopman Rare Art](#)