

# Frank Auerbach to the fore

The artist was all the rage at Frieze Masters and has taken over from Lucian Freud as the UK's foremost modern painter

**A**S hoped, the mix of old and modern art at Frieze Masters, especially on the 'Standout' dealers' stands, seemed natural and comfortable this year, rather than an arranged marriage as it sometimes has in the past. I may be mistaken, but my impression was that fewer less-than-masterly modern galleries were given space to keep the numbers up (*Art market, October 12*).

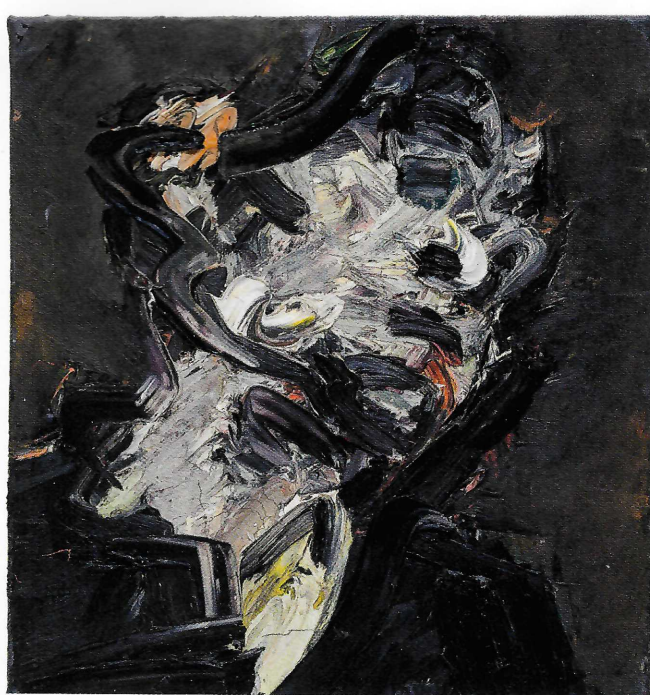
My favourite exhibit turned out to be one of the first things that I saw on entering the fair, a 17½in-high limestone figure of St Catherine (**Fig 1**) on Sam Fogg's stand. It was carved in the Ile de France towards the end of the 15th century. Quite beautiful.

It was striking to find so many galleries showing work by Frank Auerbach (b. 1931), who, since the death of his good friend Lucian

**Fig 1: Limestone figure, carved in the Ile de France, of St Catherine. With Sam Fogg**



Freud, has come to be regarded as Britain's foremost painter. A recent correspondence in *The Times* came to the conclusion that this is true because of his paint-handling, whereas David Hockney is more a master of image-making. This market interest coincides with the exhibition at Piano Nobile, London W11 (until December 16), which claims to be the most comprehensive retrospective of his portraits ever

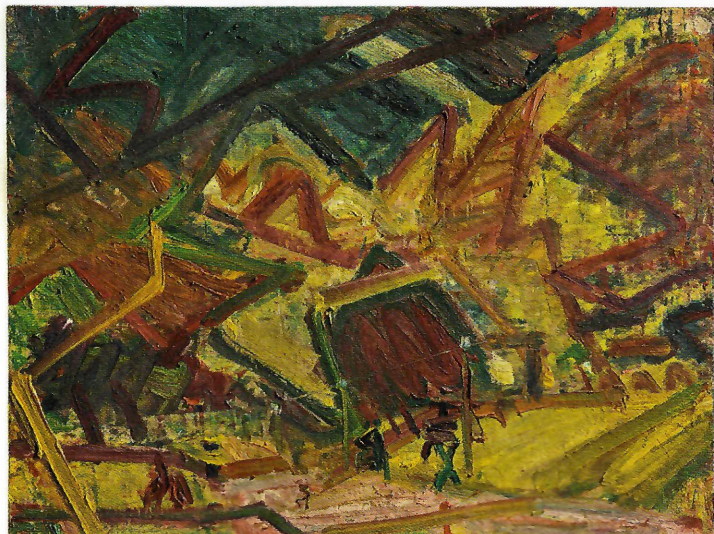


**Fig 2: Head of J.Y.M., 1984–85, by Frank Auerbach. £5,648,800**

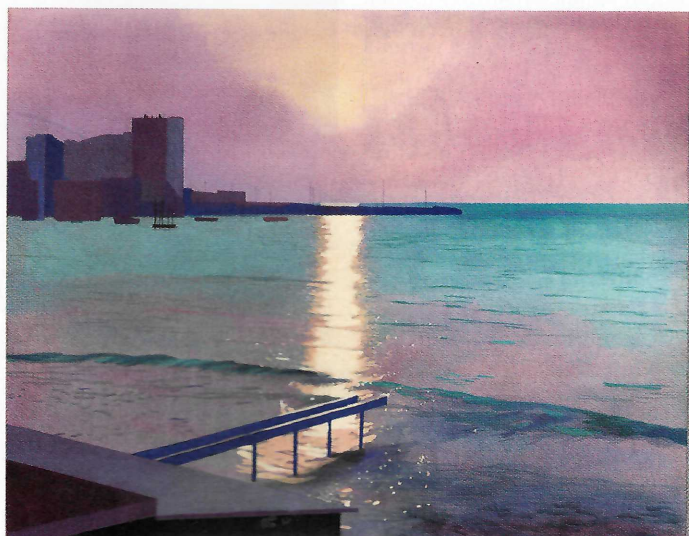
organised. That catalogue will be invaluable, with a full list of sitters, and new books have been published by Rizzoli and the Paul Mellon Centre.

Mr Auerbach also featured prominently in the Frieze Week sales at Sotheby's and Christie's. A favourite model, painted and drawn time after time over 41 years, was Juliet Yardley Mills, or JYM. A 26in by 24in *Head of J.Y.M.* (**Fig 2**), painted in 1984–85 and estimated to £4 million, sold for a record £5,648,800 at Sotheby's, the previous record having been set at £4,149,000 by the same auctioneer in June.

Mr Auerbach's technique is famously exhaustive and exhausting, requiring a great deal of stamina in his models. The paintings take so long because they are scraped down and reformed from session to session until at last a satisfactory image emerges. As he partially explained in 1978 to another favourite, the art historian Catherine Lampert: 'I think all good paintings look as if the painting has escaped from the thicket of prepared positions and has entered some sort of freedom where it exists on its own, and by its own laws, and inexplicably has got free of all... explanations.'



**Fig 3 left: Primrose Hill, by Frank Auerbach. £2,442,000. Fig 4 right: Early Morning Sainte-Maxime by David Hockney. £20,899,500**



The Auerbach at Christie's was not a portrait, but one of his largest landscapes, a 45in by 60in view down the vertiginous flank of Primrose Hill near his Camden Town studio (Fig 3). It was painted in 1978, and, given that size, it is unexpected to find that it is inscribed 'Study' on the reverse. Here, the price, although itself sizeable, was a within-estimate £2,442,000. At Bonham's, incidentally, two 8¼in-square crayon sketches titled *From the Studio* sold for £46,920.

The Christie's contemporary sale was headed by a £20,899,500 Hockney, the 48in by 60in *Early Morning Sainte-Maxime* (Fig 4), which was painted in 1969. The sun was rising through the haze, turning sky and sea into a whole palette of colour. At first sight, the composition looks like

a poster, but, despite the simplified form, there is considerable subtlety in the play of light. The artist said: 'I took a photograph of the scene and I was so impressed with it that I painted it just like that.' It had an added, if inartistic, appeal to me as just behind the artist (and us) are some of my favourite food shops.

A striking painting at Sotheby's had a very different appeal. Anselm Kiefer has long been preoccupied by the effects of tyranny and dictatorship and the need to confront them in memory as well as the present—it will be interesting to see his reaction to current events. The 74¾in by 110¼in *Laßt tausend Blumen blühen* (*Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom*) (Fig 5) is a commentary on Chairman Mao's cynical promise of intellectual freedom; those

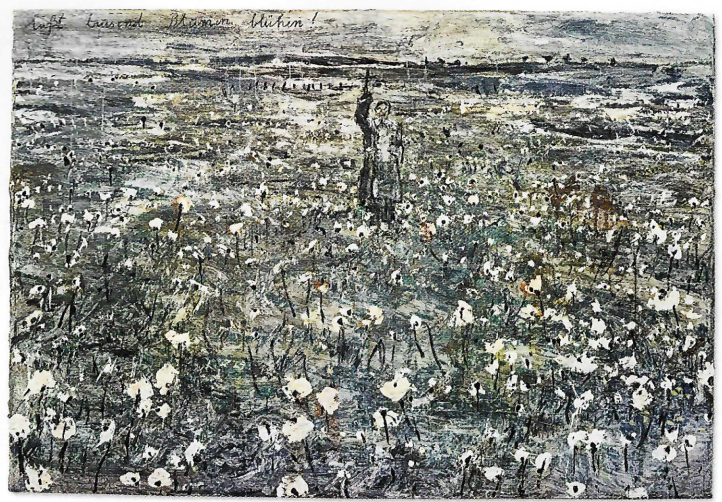


Fig 5: *Laßt tausend Blumen blühen* by Anselm Kiefer. £1,184,500

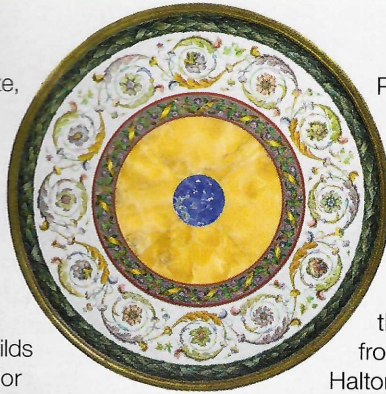
blooming flowers are blighted as if by nuclear fallout, and one feels that, together with the Little Red Book, the artist had somewhere in mind Marlene's *Sag mir wo die Blumen sind?*. It could be

that Mr Kiefer is one of our most valuable artists in more than monetary terms. Here, the mundane price was £1,184,500.

**Next week** Twin collectors

## Pick of the week

After events such as Frieze, the press receives lists of celebrities who have attended, rather like those Regency lists of distinguished weekly arrivals at the new sea-side resorts. In the 19th century, the press would have noted many Rothschilds at art exhibitions and major auctions. The family had to fill the great houses they built or re-created (together with at least 15 great gardens) in Britain and across the Continent, making them the age's greatest collectors until the advent of the American 'robber barons'. There was a similar taste for high quality and high gloss across the branches of the clan, with an emphasis on the French 18th century, giving rise to the short-hand term 'le Goût Rothschild'. Exbury House on the River Beaulieu in Hampshire, the latest



Rothschild house to see a partial dispersal of its contents, is best known for the gardens created by Lionel and Edmund de Rothschild, but, as well as their collections, it housed fine things that had come to them from Alfred de Rothschild's Halton House in Buckinghamshire. Exbury and the gardens are now run by a family trust and the contents, if hardly a mini Mentmore, made a good early-October sale at Woolley & Wallis of Salisbury in Wiltshire.

The star lot was a micromosaic, circular centre table on a Siena marble base (above) attributed to Giacomo Raffaelli (1753–1836), who revived the Roman and Renaissance techniques with workshops in Rome and Milan. In 1918, it had been valued at the equivalent of £3,500; now



estimated to £60,000, it sold for £208,000. Other eye-catchers included, at £67,600, a pair of Louis XVI-style ormolu-mounted rosewood *tables de milieu* (below) attributed to Beurdeley in the 1850s and, at £39,000, a pair of late-18th-century French rock-crystal and ormolu candlesticks (above). At the other end of the scale, a lot of 19th- and early-20th-century 'bedroom ceramics' (below left) was surely a bargain at £390.



Treasures from the Exbury House Rothschild sale

