

## Antiques

# Painters who let the sun shine in...



By Vivienne Milburn FRICS Independent Antiques Auctioneer & Valuer

**Vivienne Milburn, looks at the work of the nation's "sunshine artist" – and at some of the top prices paid for pictures that capture the English summer**



The Daisy Chain by Frank Gascoigne Heath:  
Vivienne's client was amazed when it made £14,900 at auction.

THE GORGEOUS PICTURE by Frank Gascoigne Heath (1873-1936) was not considered to be of any great value by one of my Derbyshire clients. It was, therefore, a great surprise when The Daisy Chain, as it is called, made £14,900 in a recent auction. The artist was closely associated with the Newlyn School of artists. The 'school' was a colony of artists based in Newlyn, a fishing village in Cornwall, from the 1880s until the early 20th century. The Newlyn School was influenced by the Barbizon School in France, where artists moved to paint in settings that emphasised natural light. Such schools, which also included the Staithe School on the north Yorkshire coast, are known as *en plein air*; meaning 'in the open air.'

The fantastic light, the cheap cost of living, and the availability of inexpensive models in Newlyn meant that the area was sure to attract

artists. The artists were fascinated by the fishermen's working life at sea and the everyday life in the harbour and nearby villages. Some paintings showed the hazards and tragedies endured by the community. Lamorna Birch was the main force behind the colony of artists while, later, it was Stanhope Forbes and his wife Elizabeth who were the main influences on the school with their figure painting.

The work of Frank Gascoigne Heath shows the clear influence of Stanhope Forbes, with whom he became good friends. Heath's work in the 1920s was bursting with colour and light. The Cornishman newspaper at this time referred to him as "the sunshine artist." He had pictures exhibited at the Royal Academy, and also at the Paris Salon between 1927 and 1930. Heath painted a wide range of subjects, as well as figure paintings of children and adults. He also tackled landscapes, marine scenes, interiors, flowers in the garden, animals - and he was equally assured in all. In his obituary in 1935, The Times said: "He was essentially an open-air artist, direct in his methods with a good sense of values and a fine taste in colour."

During his time in Newlyn, he became friends with Alfred Munnings, also part of the school and perhaps most famous for his paintings of horses. Sir Alfred James Munnings (1878-1959) is known as one of the country's finest painters and an outspoken opponent of Modernism.

Alfred Munnings was born in Suffolk and at 14, he was apprenticed to a Norwich printer where, for six years, he did designs and drawings for advertising posters. When his apprenticeship ended, he became a full-time painter. The loss of sight in his right eye in an accident in 1898 did not deflect his determination to paint and, in 1899 he had two pictures shown at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. He painted rural scenes, frequently of subjects such as gypsies and horses.

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Although he volunteered to join the Army at the outbreak of the Great War, he was assessed as unfit to fight. Munnings' talent was employed as a war artist to the Canadian Cavalry. During the war, he worked on some canvasses just a few thousand yards from the German front lines and when General Seely's unit was forced into a hasty withdrawal, the artist discovered what it was like to come under shellfire.

Munnings was president of the Royal Academy from 1944 until 1949. His presidency is most famous for the departing speech he gave attacking Modernism. He claimed that the work of artists such as Cezanne, Picasso and Matisse had "corrupted" art. He recalled what Winston Churchill had once said to him: "Alfred, if you met Picasso coming down the street, would you join with me in kicking his... something something?" to which Munnings said he replied "Yes, sir, I would". He was awarded a knighthood in 1944.

His works never fail to attract interest when they come on the open market, as with the picture of his garden at his London house, which is expected to make £20,000-30,000 in a specialist sale.

Another garden picture, by a lesser-known artist, has just made £2,050 at auction. The Sun Umbrella by Ethelbert White (1891-1972) is probably a study of the artist's wife, Betty, at their country retreat in Amberley. He studied at St. John's Wood Art School under Leonard Walker and, in 1911, married Elizabeth Crofton Dodwell, known as Betty. The couple shared a liking for an unconventional way of life, full of fun, friendship, music and travel. They lived in an 18th Century cottage in Camden, and travelled around the countryside in a gypsy caravan. Ethelbert would produce paintings of village life and Betty played the lute. White was a regular exhibitor at the RA and RWS and, in 1979, a memorial exhibition of his work was held by the Fine Art Society in London.

If you would like a valuation and advice on your pictures and antiques please contact Vivienne Milburn FRICS on 01629 640210 or 07870 238788, or email [vivienne@vivienmilburn.co.uk](mailto:vivienne@vivienmilburn.co.uk) or go to [www.vivienmilburn.co.uk](http://www.vivienmilburn.co.uk)



The Sun Umbrella by Ethelbert White - which is signed and inscribed on the reverse - made £2,050 at auction.



Sir Alfred Munnings' painting, In the Garden of my London Flat, is expected to make up to £30,000 at auction.