An Irish silver table, designed to display silverware or a tea service, has a dished top and raised gallery

An 18th-century Chippendale giltwood pier glass mirror

A 19th-century walnut and brass-inlaid travelling vanity box contains silver-gilt boxes, jars, mirror, brushes and medicine spoon

Adam de Coster, Concert (Three Figures) is a highly atmospheric composition

Two flagship country house sales offer treasures galore

Philip Carton

I am old enough to remember when The Late Late Show featured an antiques restoration competition.

Having recently come into several boxes of monthly publications including The Antique Collector and Antique Dealer & Collectors Guide from the 1970s and '80s, I was struck by the passion, expertise and sheer number of dealer adverts contained within their pages.

It got me thinking about the future of what is rather unfairly described as brown furniture. Taste and fashion have undoubtedly moved on from the days of re-creating Georgian or Victorian interiors, but that does not mean these objects have lost their relevance.

For new and younger collectors, there is much to be gained from looking again at an exceptional Georgian mirror above a contemporary sideboard, a beautifully proportioned campaign chest in an otherwise modern room, or simply a single piece chosen for its craftsmanship, history or provenance.

Antiques also come with outstanding sustainability credentials, having already survived generations. They were made to stand the test of time, and bring an individuality and character that mass-produced furniture simply cannot replicate.

Quality, character and provenance can all be discovered at two major country-house auctions this month, where exceptional antique furniture, paintings, silver and decorative objects are being presented in suitably grand surroundings.

The Durrow-based auctioneers Sheppard's annual Legacy of the Big House series is a three-day affair starting on October 6, with the lots currently on view at Coolattin House in Co Wicklow.

A pair of Italian bronze figures of the Furietti centaurs has Grand Tour appeal

Among the pieces which caught my eye is an 18th-century Chippendale carved giltwood pier glass mirror (€3,000–€5,000).

This striking mirror with its broken swan-neck pediment, centred by a Prince of Wales's-feathers crest and surrounded by scrolling foliage, commands attention.

For those favouring cleaner, more classical lines, an Irish silver table (€2,500–€3,500) could fit the bill. Originally designed to display silverware or a tea service, its dished top and raised gallery helped prevent precious objects from slipping over the edge. Today, with its elegant proportions, scallop-shell carving and claw feet, it can bring both decorative and sculptural qualities to any room.

An Irish George III giltwood mirror

A secretaire, meanwhile, is a handsome example of Irish Georgian craftsmanship dating to around 1740–'50, combining a bookcase with a writing desk. It has an almost architectural quality, with mirrored doors drawing the eye upwards to the carved eagle surveying the scene from on high (€8,000–€12,000).

A 19th-century walnut and brass-inlaid travelling vanity box (€600–€900) has been fitted by Asprey with chased and engraved silver-gilt boxes and jars, a rectangular mirror, ivory-backed brushes, manicure implements, a medicine spoon, penknife, thimble and vinaigrettes.

Adding another layer to its appeal is its provenance, in that it once belonged to Doreen O'Brien of Dromoland Castle.

Adam's of St Stephen's Green, meanwhile, is presenting its flagship Country House Collections auction on October 13, with viewing taking place in the splendid surroundings of Townley Hall outside Drogheda.

Among the items being offered, many with impeccable provenance and rich in history, is an Irish George III giltwood pier mirror in the manner of Matthias Lock (€40,000–€60,000).

Colloquially referred to as 'Chinese Chippendale', according to auctioneer Amy McNamara, the mirror is decorated with a pair of ho-ho birds and a central crest surmounted by a canopy of distinctly eastern design.

This magnificent piece comes from Hamwood House in Co Meath, the family home of the artists Letitia Marion Hamilton and Eva Hamilton, and was illustrated in Irish Furniture, published by the Knight of Glin in 2007.

Grand Tour treasures can be found in the form of a pair of Italian bronze figures of the Furietti centaurs (€3,000–€5,000). Standing on grey marble bases, the 19th-century bronzes come with continental provenance.

The auction also includes a superb selection of paintings, notable among them Concert (Three Figures) (€40,000–€60,000) by the 17th-century Flemish artist Adam de Coster.

The highly atmospheric composition depicts three figures singing by candlelight, the concealed flame casting their faces and sheet music dramatically out of the surrounding darkness. De Coster's particular skill in capturing such nocturnal scenes earned him the title 'Painter of Nights'.

See sheppards.ie and adams.ie

What's on

Eilis O'Connell at the Solomon

- **Until October 7:** Diamond jewellery, watches, gold and silver sale by Victor Mee Auctioneers, victormeeauctions.ie
- **October 14:** Sale of the library of the late Etienne Rynne and from the late AT Lucas, and from other select clients by Purcell Auctioneers, Birr, purcellauctioneers.ie
- **October 18:** Annual design sale by South Dublin Auctions, Dublin, southdublinauction.com
- **Until October19:** The autumn online art auction by Whyte's, Dublin, whytes.ie
- **Until October 20:** Irish and international art online auction by Morgan O'Driscoll, morganodriscoll.com
- **Until October 24:** OPE, There Goes Gravity, an exhibition of recent works by Eilis O'Connell (pictured) at the Solomon Gallery, Dublin, solomonfineart.ie

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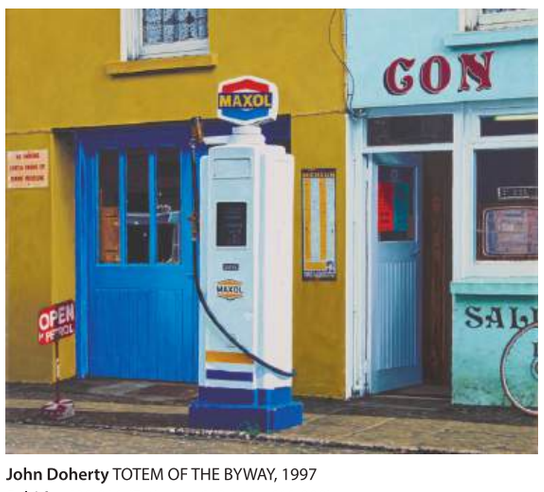

John Doherty TOTEM OF THE BYWAY, 1997
Sold for €29,000 (Estimate €12,000 - €18,000)

We are now accepting entries for our important art auction to be held on 23 November. Following fantastic recent results at Whyte's this will be an ideal opportunity to sell. Contact Peter Whyte at **01 6762888** or **info@whytes.ie**

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Meet the artist: Sheila Naughton

Shells, stones, travel, and the joy of light

A native of Dublin, Sheila Naughton is a visual artist based in Waterford. She studied at NCAD and the École Cantonale des Beaux-Arts et d'Arts Appliqués in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Since 2010 she has exhibited widely throughout Ireland, with a residency at The Custom House Studios in Westport proving pivotal in the development of her interest in contemporary abstract drawing and painting.

Naughton's work explores the nature of human experience through colour, movement and light, with a particular emphasis on the expressive qualities of line.

Working intuitively and without a predetermined plan, she allows spontaneity to shape the work, preserving the energy of its making. The mark of the hand remains central to her practice, reflecting an interest in individuality and human identity.

Her current exhibition, Presence, runs at the Olivier Cornet Gallery in Dublin until November 1. See oliviercornetgallery.com.

Sheila Naughton: Travelling alone as a young person through Europe was 'an intense cultural experience and the strong sense of feeling European was exhilarating'

Sheila Naughton's Aura

How did your artistic journey begin?
As a wild, adventurous child, I was given lots of colouring books by my mother to stop me from disappearing off for hours with other kids. This was my first introduction to a lifelong interest in colour and line.

Where did the title for your current show come from?
An artwork is a living presence. It is a connection to someone and something. I remember seeing a small, very beautiful pencil portrait by John Butler Yeats some years ago. It had such presence.

I was fascinated by the idea that some pencil lines on a flat sheet of paper could conjure up an image of a person that I could recognise in the street.

What do you want your audience to feel when visiting the exhibition and viewing the work?
An abstract work is open to interpretation, and everyone will take what they want from an abstract painting relative to their own life experience. I am happy if it elicits an emotional response.

What's something you wish people asked you about your work but never do?
I just want them to enjoy looking at it and not ask me too many questions about technique. I experiment a lot and sometimes can't remember how I did something!

What's the most valuable investment of time, money, or energy you've made in your career?
Travelling alone through Europe after college in the early eighties. I had never been out of Ireland and was desperate to travel. I went to see places and works in museums that I'd only seen in photographs in books.

It was an intense cultural experience and the strong sense of feeling European was exhilarating. Travelling alone was hard and sometimes lonely, but it forced me to socialise with the people I met. Oh, and I brought my life partner and now husband back from my travels too.

A place that means a lot to you other than your studio?
The west coast of Ireland, as the quality of light is so special. The subtlety and softness of colour is uniquely Irish. Just looking at the landscape would make you a colourist. Walking on a beach full of interesting shells and stones also makes me feel carefree and happy.

How do you see technology reshaping the art world?
The word artificial means something that is not real. AI is a very sophisticated tool created by humans to mimic reality, but it is not reality. The important issue for us as humans is to be able to distinguish between the two.

It has the potential to be used for immense good and immense evil and it will be used for both. How we use it will come down to what we value as a society.

If you could disrupt one thing about the art world, what would it be?
I would like to get rid of incomprehensible writing about art. Good writing should elucidate and communicate.

The best piece of advice I ever received?
My own advice to myself which I try to heed – there is no substitute for experiential learning.