

HARRIS LINDSAY
WORKS OF ART
INVITE YOU TO
NOW & THEN
11th-28th October
2011

AN EXHIBITION OF CONTEMPORARY
ART AND HISTORICAL OBJECTS

ORGANISED BY ADRIAN DANNATT

Jay Batlle 2011

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Now & Then Installation

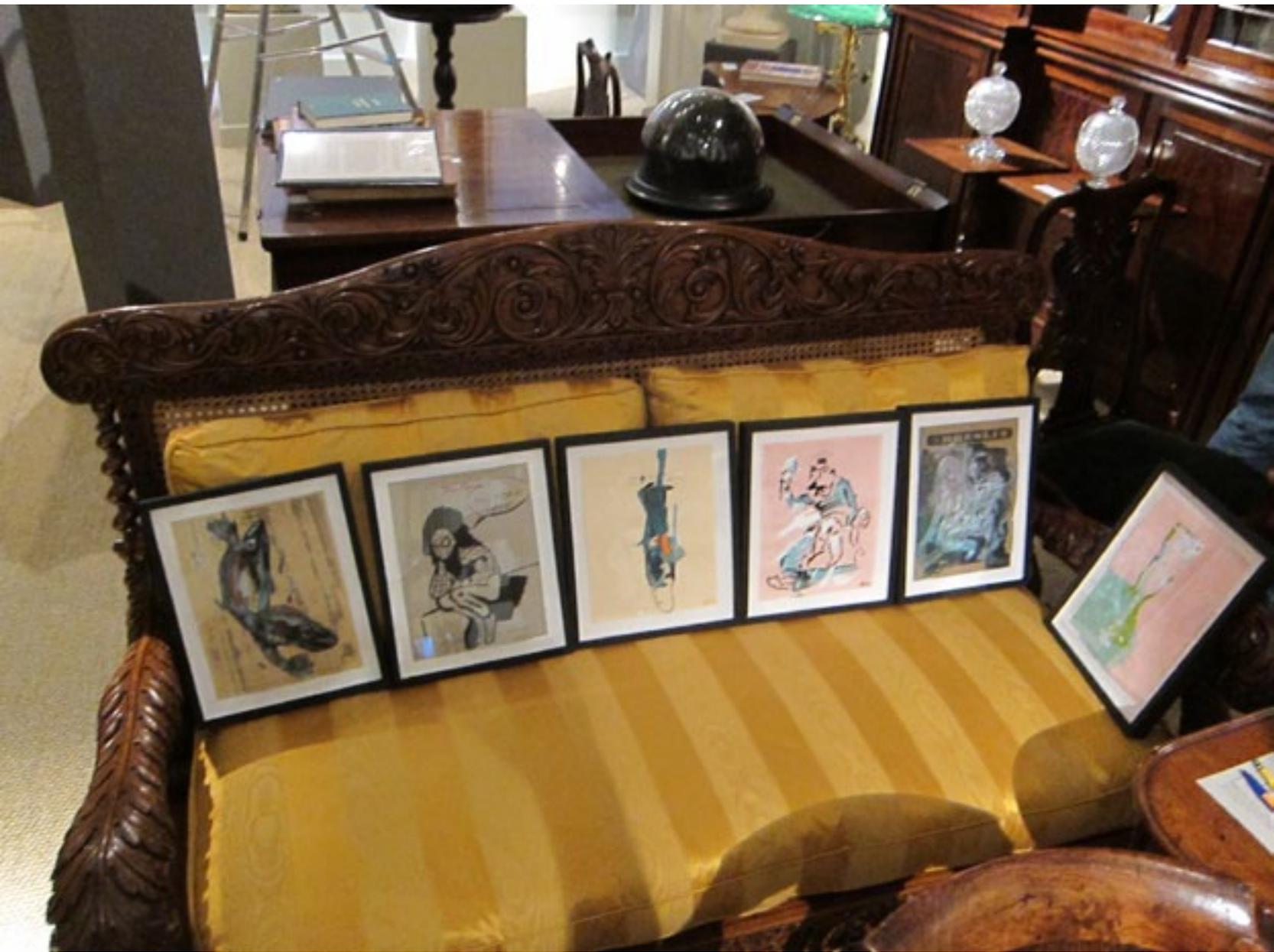
Now & Then Installation



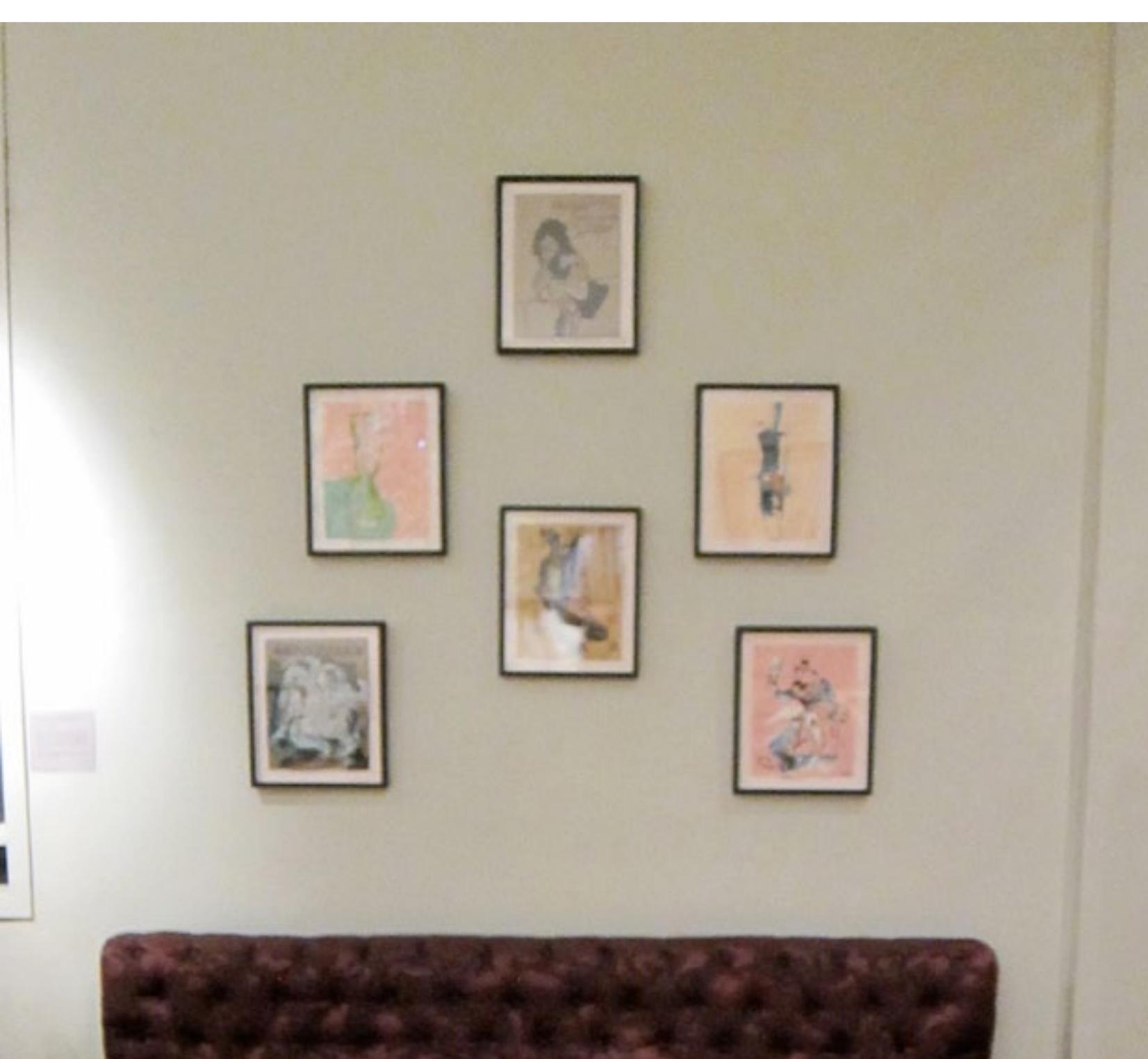
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OF CURIOSITY

by Adrian Dannatt

Suddenly, I became indifferent to not being modern.

Roland Barthes

'I lower my eyes when I walk past an antique shop, like a seminarian passing a night-club', admitted Henry de Montherlant concerning his obsessive collecting, and likewise whenever my children spy any sort of bric-a-brac emporium they push me across the road or blinker my sight like a carthorse, to ensure they will not be thus delayed. For some of us (the disbelief of discovering that it is not all of us) find such places irresistible, time-consuming and potentially ruinous, to the point where we must be eventually weaned off them. The time-worn analogy with addiction, narcotics or alcohol, seems closer to medical fact than mere turn-of-phrase.

The key to it all seems to me 'curiosity' and the attendant curious lack of it in some people, the other people; curiosity as a principle motor of daily conduct, aesthetic discovery and everyday ethics, the wanting to know about other people and their lives, historic or actual, and their objects. Ye Olde Curiositie Shoppe or plain Curiosity Shop strikes me as an excellent name - however ghastly the reality of any store that would use such a term today - because that is the central fact about those who own and frequent such places - an unquenchable curiosity about the world, its inhabitants and their varied creations. These are shops for those of us with a genuine curiosity, who will speak to strangers to discover their life-stories, or at least eavesdrop their restaurant conversation, look at what is hanging on the walls of the same restaurant, and discreetly eye the furniture, furnishings and decoration of any house where they should be welcomed.

All such might seem self-evident, but it is surprising how specific and rare is the actual character-trait of real curiosity. Not the generalised, vague term 'curiosity' which everyone in the world automatically assumes they share, but the real thing in its active, if not incursive, application. W. H. Auden said 'a true friend is someone who reads your mail when you are in the other room' and in that same ambiguous, sometimes annoying manner the genuinely curious, the curiosity-hunters, are 'true friends' to the world and all its effects. It is this same curiosity which unites both the specialist antique dealer or collector with the contemporary art connoisseur, irrespective of how different the objects involved might appear. Of course all art was contemporary once upon a time, at the time of its making, and the very special and tangible excitement of such art is due to its newness, its freshness and often its unexpected demands. Seeing something new and having to deal with its seeming banality or originality, adjusting it to the canon of art history, or indeed rejecting it, just the act of 'processing' its claims and forms, is highly enjoyable - No, it's rubbish, yes, it's interesting, well, it's both, not art, yes art, too ugly, too easy, too odd, and yet and yet... The pleasure is that the decision is up to you, right there, faced with something made last month and trying to stake its place in the long future to come. Whereas, most works in the museums, the old-master galleries, have already had the decisions made about them, have already been ticked, approved and passed on into the future. It is this same curiosity which unites both the specialist antique dealer or collector with the contemporary art connoisseur, irrespective of how different the objects involved might appear. Of course all art was contemporary once upon a time, at the time of its making, and the very special and tangible excitement of such art is due to its newness, its freshness and often its unexpected demands.

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Also, there are the actual aesthetic characteristics of the object, its appearance, shape, colour, size and specific signs. Who made it and when it was made, is equally important to both contemporary and antiquarian collector but above all else remains the question of whether this thing appeals, intrigues, touches one, somehow grants a pleasure, intellectual or instinctive.

In that wonderful phrase of the late French artist Robert Filio, 'art is what makes life more interesting than art.' It is art that can make one look at the world in a new manner, with a more precise or critical edge. And ever since Duchamp's 'Readymade' when we see art which looks like things we do not consider 'art', we have to think longer and harder about what makes something 'art', about the specific properties of all such objects, their 'thingness'.

We are just obliged to be a bit sharper, smarter, to see so.

Any really good antiquarian gallery, like any really good contemporary gallery, will serve as a sort of laboratory for the active testing of your sense-of-response, for your awareness. Thus if you are a curious person there can be nothing more enjoyable than to put yourself through such a battery of tests - Why look at that, what could that have been used for, how beautiful, how improbable, how was that made, why was that made, how impossibly grand. The principle motivation of every antiquarian dealer should be the same boundless curiosity - What will I find next, how many of these exist, why was this made, that drives the contemporary art world.

Curiosity is certainly the ruling principle at Harris Lindsay Works of Art, which as its full title suggests welcomes a wider definition of 'art' than just painting, drawing or sculpture, precisely as contemporary practice also insists upon a far more ambitious scope to the term. A work of art should in itself help expand the boundaries of its own definition. At Harris Lindsay there is emphasis on 'workmanship' and on aesthetic intent, the art being both in the skill of the maker as well as in their imagination. The relevant criteria here are the quality of design; the quality of execution; the historical context.

Hence, the rightful insistence on the correct word; that this is an 'antiquarian' dealership, meaning dealers in rare and unusual objects of interest to collectors and academics, rather than simply dealers in decorative antiques.

Harris Lindsay welcomes the widest range of human creation from any time and any place, from the Neolithic to the neo-neo. Whether in a seminal exhibition on Danish design covering the modern period from 1920 until 1970, or the present display of heraldic 'beestes' once belonging to Henry VIII, the intention of Harris Lindsay is to open one's eyes, to share their own passionate curiosity, to try to understand just why this particular object is as it is. So, in their 2003 Danish Modern exhibition catalogue, the question is posed right at the start - Why exactly was this furniture made in Denmark and at this time? And thus a recent exhibition such as the Hawkins Zoomorphic Collection, in which a truly extra-ordinary range of objects created from animals was displayed in an ideal setting,