



Visions of war

Exhibitions at the British Art Fair offer the opportunity to enjoy works by some lesser-known artists

SINCE David and Judith Cohen retired in 2016 after more than three decades as the specialist dealers in the art of the World Wars, their place has been taken by Andrew Sim, a comparatively young art dealer with a nose for discoveries. In this, he is like his father, Michael Sim of Chislehurst, and finds by both have featured here in the past. Andrew puts on occasional exhibitions or special displays at fairs and will be at the revamped British Art Fair at the Saatchi Gallery on the King's Road, Chelsea, from tomorrow to Sunday (www.britishartfair.co.uk).

Until last year, this was the 20/21 British Art Fair, which took place at the Royal College of Art before a less satisfactory move to the Mall Galleries. The

founders and organisers Gay Hutson and Bunny Wynn were already contemplating retirement when they were approached by Robert and Johnny Sandelson (whose late father Victor had been an early exhibitor) with an offer to buy them out. This was just before Bunny's greatly regretted death. With an injection of funds and the new, larger venue, the fair has attracted 50 galleries and has every prospect of success.

For his ninth exhibition, under the banner 'Holding the Line', Mr Sim has found works by 23 artists, the majority of whom range from little known to very obscure and all of whom are well worth discovering. The name of John Spencer-Churchill (1909–92) is known because he was Sir Winston's nephew, but as a painter, he is remembered, if at all, prin-



Fig 1 top: *Dunkirk from the Bray Dunes* by John Spencer-Churchill. With Andrew Sim. Fig 2 above: *A British Fascist addressing a crowd*, by William Hellicar. Also with Mr Sim

cipally as a muralist. His most important painting has been in a private collection since 1970, latterly at least in Scotland, where Mr Sim acquired it last year. Bowden and Freedman made on-the-spot drawings, but Churchill's 40in by 64in *Dunkirk from the Bray Dunes*, May 29, 1940 is the only full painting of the 'Lifting of the Armies' by an artist who was there (Fig 1).

Richard Eurich and Charles Cundall's officially commissioned paintings were built from eye-witness accounts and are powerful and moving, but they lack Churchill's immediacy and detail. Eurich and Cundall give us, in effect, a Messerschmitt pilot's-eye view of the beach.

Churchill, as he noted, was sketching in the dunes, only slightly elevated above his fel-



Fig 3: An untitled acrylic by John Golding. With Piano Nobile

lows. To the left is the bandstand from which, that morning, Gen Alexander had tried to address the troops. In the middle distance, the paddleship-turned-minesweeper *Crested Eagle* burns. Her bones still show today at low tide. French North African *spahi* cavalry trot along the shore—who else recorded them?

The calm, indeed relaxed, stance of the waiting soldiery accords with verbal accounts of their behaviour after the first days: 'If ever I have to be bombed again, give me a sandy beach, for the bomb sinks in and it hurts very few when it bursts.' Only the half-crouched soldier firing vainly at Stukas doesn't quite convince; he was lifted from a famous photograph—a forgivable later

borrowing, as Churchill took 10 years to complete the painting.

He returned to England that evening, ordered by Alexander to ask his uncle for more little ships. He did so and much later gave Winston the painting.

Two others among Mr Sim's discoveries particularly impress me. Albert Victor Bramble (1884–1963) was an actor, pioneering film director, air-raid warden and an amateur, but very accomplished, artist.

Virtually nothing is known of William Hellicar, other than that he was born in 1910, lived as a postman messenger in Wembley and, in about 1944, produced a remarkable 11½in by 37in painting of what appears to be a British Fascist addressing a small crowd



Fig 4: Ivon Hitchens's *House by Lake*, with Jonathan Clark of Crescent Grove, Clapham

Pick of the week

Mention of art-market writers brings me to my old friend and colleague William Packer, also formerly of the *Financial Times*. William is not just a commentator, but a critic who does. He is a painter of landscapes and still-lives, so, when invited to judge a competition or curate a show, he brings practical experience.

His selection for 'Off the Radar' at Browse & Darby, 19, Cork Street, W1 (www.browseanddarby.co.uk), until October 5, is full of good things. He focuses on the second half of the 20th century and artists who, whether or not successful at the time, have been neglected since their deaths, including Norman Blamey and Jean Cooke.

Cooke had the misfortune to marry John Bratby and I suspect that she was a far better painter than he was. Here *Up the Road and Pigeon Die* is a record of her Blackheath home and the pigeons with whom she was probably more friendly than with Bratby.

Norman Blamey's *Time Like an Ever-rolling Stream* (above) is similarly biographical, a memorial to his late wife Margaret and their life together.

I'm looking forward to seeing Maxwell Doig's strong acrylic paintings of old Yorkshire buildings, which, even with—but especially without—figures, are evocative of past ways of life. His show will be at Messums, 28, Cork Street from October 10 to November 2 (www.messums.com).



at the Lincoln's Inn Fields version of Speaker's Corner (Fig 2). It's easy to forget that Fascist activity continued through and after the war. There appears to be at least one heckler, along with British, American and perhaps French servicemen. It is far more than a competent piece of

work; did Hellicar really paint nothing more?

Since Ivon Hitchens died in 1979, Jonathan Clark of Crescent Grove, Clapham, has been gently dispersing his estate. At the fair, he is presenting a special Hitchens exhibition dedicated to the memory of Victor Sandelson, who, as art-market correspondent for the *Financial Times*, wrote about the artist in the 1950s and became a keen collector. Among the 25 works on show will be the 20in by 30in *House by Lake* (Fig 4).

The other special presentations are of paintings by Bridget Riley selected from exhibitors, celebrating her support for the charity Paintings in Hospitals, and 'Caro/Golding: in Conversation' offered by Piano Nobile of Notting Hill to illuminate the work of the life-long friends Anthony Caro (1924–2013) and John Golding (1929–2012) as they progressed towards Abstractionism. Golding's untitled acrylic of 1974/5 (Fig 3) shows him well on the way.

Next week Change afoot