

ART REVIEW; Treasures Out of the Past, No Museum Pass Needed

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Correction Appended

Reminding us that it's not only museums that deal with art of the past on the New York scene, three uptown dealers have joined in "Masterworks of Six Centuries," a show that celebrates the centuries before our own, may they rest in peace.

The joint exhibition started out with five galleries participating, but two of them, Hall & Knight USA and the London-based Daniel Katz Ltd., are no longer with it. Katz did its usual annual two-week stint in New York from May 3 to 14 as part of the show, then took its treasures back to London, where they go on view Tuesday. Hall & Knight, whose presentation was to be of 16th-century Florentine art, has been acquired by Christie's, and its two principals, Nicholas Hall and Richard Knight, have joined Christie's as international directors.

But not to worry; there's more than enough left to see. Of the three now exhibiting, the Richard Feigen and the Didier Aaron galleries are having one-artist shows, and at David Tunick, French art of five centuries prevails.

At Feigen, "Joseph Gandy: Visionary Views of England" sets out the admirable work of Gandy (1771-1843), more appreciated as a fine, poetic landscape painter than as the architect he was trained to be. To support himself, he worked for decades giving elaborate pictorial expression to the architectural designs of another, more noted practitioner, Sir John Soane.

The show here consists of a large selection from a newly discovered, unpublished body of nearly 100 of Gandy's smaller works collected by his friend, the sculptor Richard Westmacott (1775-1856). A firm believer in a continuing dialogue between architecture and nature, Gandy wandered over the English countryside along the Thames outside London, through Sussex and to the southeast coast of England, mostly in the 1820's.

He recorded, in watercolor and pencil, not only ancient monuments and ruins, but also distant, panoramic vistas, close-up views of unspoiled countryside, dramatic sweeps of bays and cliffs, and lightning and other weather phenomena. Nor did he neglect the bleak industrial wastelands and developing suburbs that had begun to invade the countryside. So vivid are these mini but fully packed renderings -- enhanced by his own romantic vision -- that it's hard to pick standouts.

Among those of particular appeal, however, are "Stormy Landscape With Lightning" (no date), a peaceful, unspoiled landscape of hills and scrub theatrically menaced by a skyful of boiling gray clouds with a zinger of lightning; "Brighton Beach" (1822), a Winslow Homerish scene of a small boat buried in big waves that approach a rocky shore; and "Architectural Landscape at Night" (no date), a fanciful apparition of three ancient ruins,

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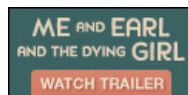
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including a Greek temple, serenely bearing up under the ravages of time. Tune your eyes to small, and this work will grab them.

At David Tunick, "Enduring Elegance: French Drawings, Prints and Photographs" covers drawings, prints and photographs from the Renaissance to Picasso, Matisse and Atget and including, surprise, a work by Madame de Pompadour. One prize from the 18th century: a large etching done in 1778 by Fragonard that shows two young things caught coupling by her parents: he covers his shame as he emerges from the encounter; she weeps before the parents' fury. Besides this, two lively Fragonard chalk drawings for Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso" (1532) look decorous indeed.

A complete set of 24 miniature etchings of posturing commedia dell' arte figures by the innovative French engraver Jacques Callot (1592-1635) is something to savor, as is a campy 1777 color engraving by Jean-François Janinet of Marie Antoinette, done up in a towering wig and a regal gown of astonishing sumptuousness.

The extravagant, elaborate gold mount of the engraving is worthy of note, too. Napoleon is also given his due here, in a heroic color drawing of 1805 by Antoine Charles Horace Vernet. It shows the emperor swanning on his horse as he gets a plan of the Battle of Marengo from his chief of staff, Maréchal Berthier. This one, too, is set within an incredibly elaborate mount.

From more modern times there is "The Bath," a striking black-and-white woodcut from 1894 by Félix Vallotton of a woman in a tub. Its merits lie in the wonderful contrasts between areas of stark black and white, and between the curves and straight lines that animate it. A fine 1913 Cubist drypoint by Jacques Villon of his sister, Yvonne Duchamp, makes a rare appearance, and a photo of an amusement park (1922) by the pioneer French photographer Eugène Atget is a persuasive item from the Museum of Modern Art's collection of Atget vintage duplicates, now offered for sale.

While it seems like a nice idea to paint the extraordinary fountains of Rome as they splash and burble all over the city, the recent pastels of them at Didier Aaron by Victor Edelstein, an English couturier turned painter, are not inspired.

A meticulous painter, Mr. Edelstein goes at these baroque masterpieces from every angle, concentrating on details and focusing on individual parts of the more elaborate ones, like Bernini's "Fountain of the Four Rivers" in the Piazza Navona. The likenesses are good, but they are postcard views. The artist's voice is lacking. It's true there's not much more that a painter can do, anyway, in the face of these enormously imaginative sculptural achievements, than to record them. But what's the point, when a camera can do as well?

The various artists in "Masterworks of Six Centuries" can be seen through July 2 at the following galleries: "Joseph Gandy: Visionary Views of England" at Richard L. Feigen & Co., 34 East 69th Street; "Enduring Elegance: French Art in Drawings, Prints and Photographs" at David Tunick Inc., 46 East 56th Street; "The Fountains of Rome: Recent Pastels by Victor Edelstein" at Didier Aaron Inc., 32 East 67th Street.

Photo: A large detail of "Brighton Beach," an 1822 work by Joseph Gandy. (Photo by Richard L. Feigen & Company)