

ANTIQUQUE

COLLECTING

AUGUST 2024

BIDDING WARS

Why Churchill memorabilia will never be defeated

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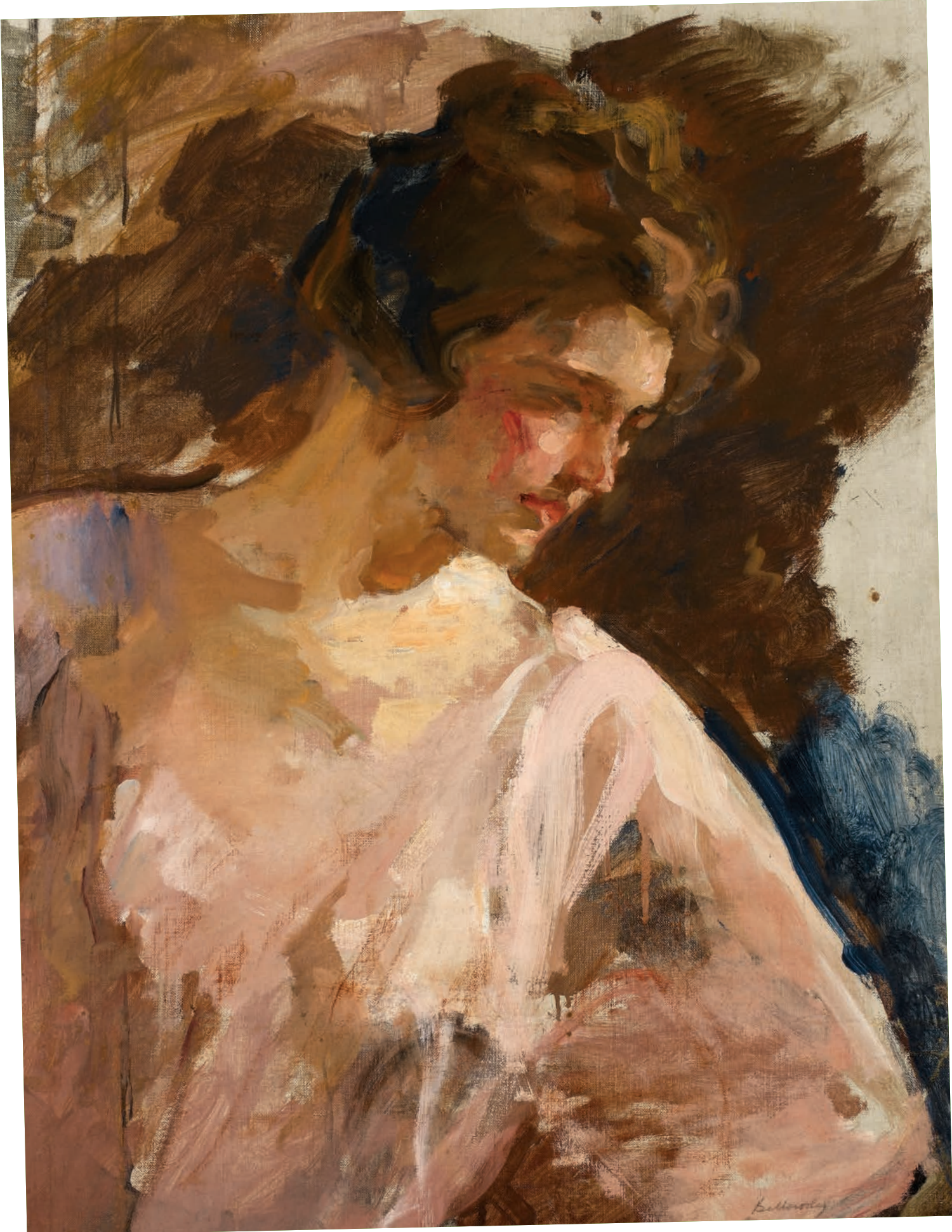
COLLECTING TABLEWARE BY LEADING 20TH-CENTURY ARTISTS

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Princely ALBERT

In his lifetime the little-known, Swansea-born artist Albert de Belleruche rubbed shoulders with Degas, Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec, as well as being a lifelong friend of John Singer Sargent. A ground-breaking exhibition and catalogue raisonné is finally putting the unsung artist on the map. Paul Liss reports



Opposite page Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) *Portrait of Julie Visseaux*, c. 1908, signed, oil on canvas, courtesy of Liss Llewellyn

Above right John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) portrait of Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944)

Left Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) *Les deux petits pots (Les pots jaunes)*, c.1889, signed, oil on canvas, courtesy of Liss Llewellyn

Right Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) portrait of John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), c. 1882, Colorado Springs Fine Art Centre, public domain

Below right Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) *Haarlem*, c.1883, oil on canvas, signed, courtesy of Liss Llewellyn

Next year will mark the centenary of the death of John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) when the reputation of the portraitist will be rightly fêted around the world. Less known, however, is the work of his lifelong friend Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) with whom he shared a studio in London and Paris. While interest in the Belle Epoque has spawned numerous publications and exhibitions, the name Belleruche remains stubbornly unknown. The question is why?

Not surely for the lack of drama: his life reads like a novel. He was born to a French nobleman in Wales, he

‘Impatient to embark on his own career Belleruche, still in his early 20s, set up a studio in Montmartre, opposite the Moulin Rouge, he took lodgings in the nearby Place de Clichy, close to the art shop M.Hennequin, the favourite paint supplier of Manet and the Impressionists’

Belleruche and Sargent

Having met at the atelier of Carolus Duran, Belleruche and Sargent went on to become lifelong friends providing mutual support for their artistic endeavours.



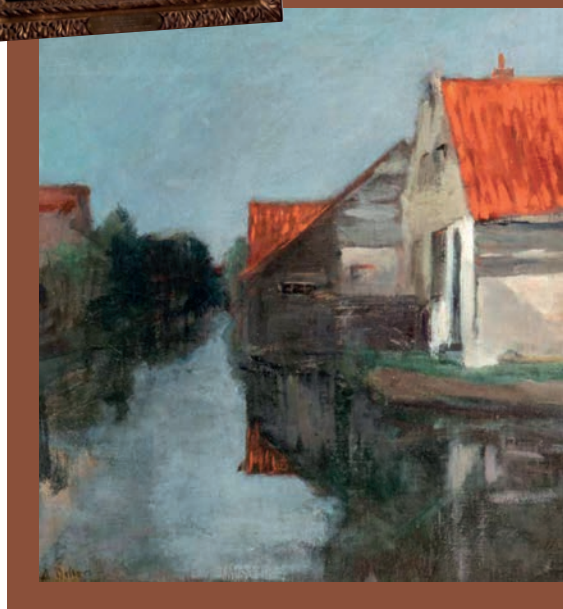
Correspondence shows that Sargent acted as Belleruche’s mentor, offering him advice about his paintings and exhibiting his work. Belleruche was the subject of numerous portraits in both pencil and oil by Sargent.

Eight years his senior, Sargent affectionately referred to Belleruche as ‘baby Milbank’, referring to the name of Belleruche’s stepfather. The closeness of the pair’s friendship has caused speculation as to whether their relationship was purely professional.

Art historian Dorothy Moss, states: “Sargent’s portraits of Belleruche, in their sensuality and intensity of emotion, push the boundaries of what was considered appropriate interaction between men at this period.”

The pair made many painting trips together, including an 1883 trip to Haarlem in the company of their artist friend Paul Helleu (1859-1927).

In 1905, Belleruche declined joining Sargent on another painting trip to the Middle East, later writing “I realized that a journey like this with Sargent might influence me in my art and affect my individual expression.”



COLLECTING GUIDES *Albert de Belleruche*

became a leading light of the artistic milieu of turn-of-the-century Paris. He shared a model with Henri de Toulouse Lautrec, the celebrated Lili Grenier, a woman who went on to become his mistress and muse for 17 years. Belleruche's works, especially his lithographs were widely lauded – even Edgar Degas owned three.

And yet Belleruche ended his days in relative obscurity in Southwell near Nottingham renting a makeshift studio over an electrician's shop.

But finally his light is set to shine with an exhibition at Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum in Bournemouth, featuring more than 60 of his oils and lithographs, many of which have not been on public display. Added to which George Kenney's catalogue raisonné, *Albert de Belleruche, Master of Belle Epoque Lithography*, was published in May – an essential guide for art lovers and collectors alike.

Worth reappraisal?

But fame due to Belleruche's undoubtedly illustrious associations alone would be a poor reason to argue for a reassessment of his work. So was he simply a minor figure – a petit maître – of the Belle Epoque, who justifiably has sunk to relative obscurity, or is his talent worthy of a more detailed examination?

Belleruche was born in Swansea; his father, Edward Charles, Marquis de Belleruche, came from a noble French Huguenot family, and his mother, Alice Sidonie Van den Berg, daughter of Desire Baruch, was Belgian.

The marquis died in 1867, when Albert was three and in 1871, Alice married Harry Vane Milbank, a well-known adventurer, huntsman, gambler and duellist said to have been responsible for the deaths of four men.

In the same year the family (the young Albert took his stepfather's name until he was 30) moved to Paris with the new Madame Milbank, described as possessing 'almost legendary beauty', lavishly entertaining at their home in the Avenue Montaigne.



Above Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) *Place de Clichy*, c.1890, oil on canvas, courtesy of Liss Llewellyn

Above right Albert Belleruche (1864-1944) *Maissa: Danseuse du ventre - Moulin Rouge*, Sold for £4,080 at Bonhams in 2018

Left Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) lithograph of the artist's mother Mrs Harry Vane Milbank, c.1900, image public domain

Promising talent

In 1882, Milbank commissioned Carolus Duran, a noted portraitist, to paint his wife. While the work was in progress, Alice gave a dinner party for Edward VII, then the Prince of Wales. At the gathering Duran saw sketches by the young Belleruche and suggested he should study at his studio.

However, Belleruche wasn't happy with the formal teaching provided by Duran, and only stayed a short time. Although he didn't remain a student of Duran's for long, he did adopt his master's technique of painting with a fully loaded brush. Belleruche was also inspired by the Dutch Old Masters, whose works he studied in museums, appreciating the power of light and dark chiaroscuro that would later drive his innovations in lithography. It was at Carolus's atelier Belleruche met the rising star of the studio, the American John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), whose early salon successes were the talk of Paris.



Montmartre demi world

Impatient to embark on his own career, Belleruche – still in his early 20s – set up a studio in Montmartre, opposite the Moulin Rouge. He took lodgings in the nearby Place de Clichy, close to the art shop M.Hennequin, the favourite paint supplier of Manet and the Impressionists.

He soon became a habitué of the next-door Café Guerbois, and Café de la Rochefoucauld where many of the renowned artists of Montmartre gathered. Among his entourage were the celebrated literary figures of the day, including Oscar Wilde, Emile Zola (whose funeral cortège he painted in 1902) and George Moore.

Famous models of the period posed for Belleruche, among them Victorine Meurent, notorious as the model of Eduard Manet's *Olympia*. Belleruche also portrayed many of the performers of Montmartre, including Maissa from the Moulin Rouge, famous for her *Danse du Ventre*.

He also painted other personalities of the quartier including the dancer Cha-U-Kao and the femme fatale and spy Mata Hari (of whom he produced at least four lithographs and several pencil studies).

Lili Grenier

It was in Toulouse-Lautrec's studio which neighboured



his own that, in 1888, Bellerocche met Lili Grenier, the wife of Toulouse-Lautrec's close friend and fellow artist Albert (René) Grenier. Lili, known for her striking red hair and milky complexion, lived a bohemian lifestyle, with Toulouse-Lautrec even living with the couple for a time at their home at 19, bis Rue de Fontaine.

Born Amélie Sans on October 9, 1863, Lili was a favourite model of the young artists under Fernand Cormon at his atelier school in Rue Coustante.

While she became famous as a model for Toulouse-Lautrec, Grenier soon began to pose almost exclusively for Bellerocche after he spent two years trying to entice her away from the Frenchman to model only for him. Grenier went on to become Bellerocche's mistress and muse for 17 years and the subject of many oils and drawings, as well as 67 lithographs between 1900 and 1908.

Impressionist landscapes

In his choice of subject matter and technique, Bellerocche's landscapes, seascapes and cityscapes reveal the strong influence of the Impressionists. He enjoyed painting en plein air, and employed a wet-on-wet painting technique favoured by contemporaries such as Sargent, Monet and Renoir.

The daring compositional devices, as well as the striking economy and sparseness of his views, may betray a debt to advances in contemporary photography, in addition to a knowledge of Ukiyo-e printmaking, which was enjoying widespread popularity and distribution throughout Paris, due to the endeavours of Tadamas Hayashi.

Among Bellerocche's favourite sketching grounds were Châteaudun, 130 km from Paris, where he rented La Vieille Chapelle as a studio spacious enough to house his huge Imprimerie Le Mercier printing press, and Villiers-sur-Morin, where his frequent model and mistress Lili Grenier had a farmhouse. Other scenes include ports, such as Dover and Boulogne, and railway stations, among them Charing Cross, and other staging posts that were essential to his frequent crossing of the Channel.

'So why is Bellerocche little-known today? Several reasons can be suggested. He was financially independent, and so had no need to sell or exhibit his works. Commissioned portraits never appealed to Bellerocche'

Women subjects

Women in different states of reverie or melancholy, bearing titles such as *Indolence*, *Réflexions* and *Résistance* are central to Bellerocche's art. Art critic Roger Marx, writes: "His works may be benevolent, dignified, gentle, gracious, and even humorous or portly. But always they are full of charm and contrast." In addition to female subjects, artists were also the subject of Bellerocche's art, including lithographic portraits of Léandre (1803-1881) and Frank Brangwyn (1867-1956); as well as pencil portraits of the American artist and printmaker Mary Cassatt (1844-1926).



Above right Albert de Bellerocche (1864-1944) *Portrait of Mary Cassatt*, 1880s, pencil, courtesy of Liss Llewellyn

Above far left Francois Gauzi (1862-1933) photograph of Lili Grenier

Above left Albert de Bellerocche in his studio next to a painting of Lili Grenier, Musée d'Orsay, public domain

Above Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901), *Madame Lili Grenier*, 1888, oil on canvas. Private Collection. The Japanese kimono she is wearing was, in fact, one of Bellerocche's studio props, public domain

Below right Albert de Bellerocche (1864-1944) *The Artist's Garden with stone flowerpot*, Hampstead, 1900, courtesy of Liss Llewellyn

Return to England

In 1910, Bellerocche, then aged 45, married Julie Emilie Visseaux at All Saints Church, St John's Wood. She was 28 and the daughter of his friend, the sculptor Jules Edouard Visseaux. In 1912, the couple moved to a 13th-century house at Rustington in Sussex where they raised three children. His son William (1913-1969) became active in the art world as a painter and a writer.

Bellerocche continued to make lithographs, although after WWI he worked only intermittently and in seclusion. At the outbreak of WWII and the bombing of the coast, Bellerocche moved his family north to Southwell in Nottingham where he lived a simple life in retirement. In a small rented room over an electrician's shop, he kept a makeshift studio where he stored the work of his Montmartre days. Bellerocche died in 1944 at the age of 80 after a long illness.





Lifetime success

Despite his lack of recognition today, during his lifetime Belleruche's achievements did not go unnoticed. He exhibited at the Salon from 1887, with the Société des Artistes Français from 1891; in England at the Royal Academy and, from 1894, the more progressive New English Art Club.

In 1903, alongside Henri Matisse, André Derain and Georges Roualt, he became a founding member of the Société du Salon d'Automne, and had a room dedicated to his work in 1904. This honour was only ever accorded to five other artists: Cézanne, Puvis de Chavannes, Redon, Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec. On the occasion of this solo exhibition, the French state acquired his oil *Printemps* – painted in his studio opposite the Moulin Rouge – which entered the Luxembourg Museum and afterwards hung in the British Section of the Musée du Jeu de Paume (now in Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Orange).

In the 1930s, Belleruche presented large collections of his lithographs to the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; the Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels; and the British Museum in London. A smaller collection was given to the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.

Unsung hero

So why is Belleruche little-known today? Several reasons can be suggested. He was financially independent, and so had no need to sell or exhibit his works. Commissioned portraits never appealed to Belleruche. Given his social position and his special talent in portraiture, he could have enjoyed the fame of Helleu and Sargent, whose commissions were growing in demand.

However, Belleruche believed that when an artist accepted a portrait on commission he risked becoming a slave to the sitter. And because money was not an issue for him, Belleruche could choose his subjects, selecting only personalities who appealed to him.

On leaving Paris in 1910 he was increasingly out of the public eye, and he never sought the limelight. In 1924, at the age of 60, Belleruche appears to have largely retired from producing lithographs. Only 12 lithographs are known to have been produced after 1924, most of them of his daughter Alice.

Above Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) *Landscape Study*, oil on canvas, courtesy of Liss Llewellyn

Right Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) *A Woman Standing in a Doorway*, signed and dated '90' estimated at £1,500-£2,000, it sold for £30,000 in March 2018, image courtesy of Sworders



Belleruche at auction

While his lithographs frequently appear at auction, less common are his paintings and drawings, attracting great interest from collectors when they do so. In 2018, his oil on canvas, *A Woman Standing in a Doorway*, estimated at £1,500-£2,000, sold for £30,000 at the Essex auction house Sworders.

In the same year a striking oil painting of a black male sitter, dating from his time in Montmartre piqued the interest of several bidders when it went under the hammer in East Sussex.

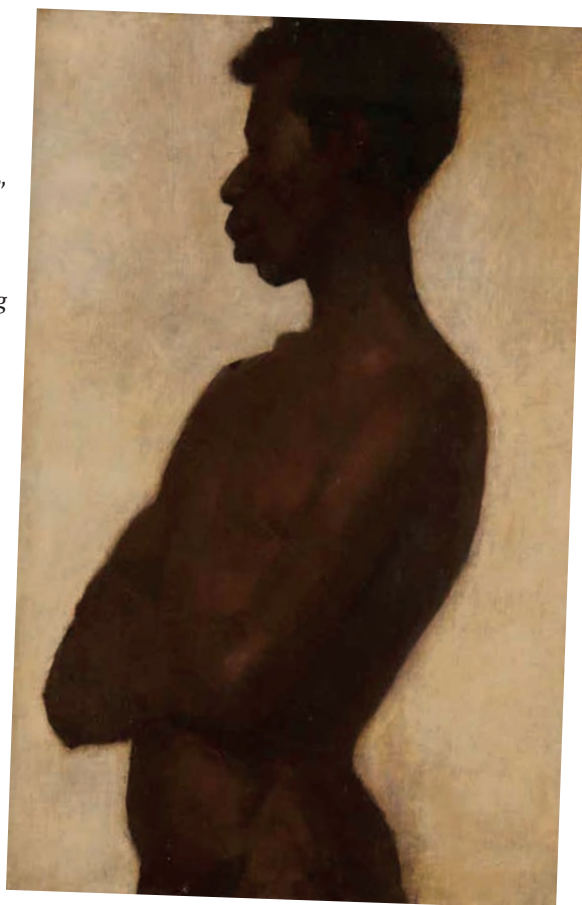
Catalogued simply as a 'half-length portrait of a nude black man', the 2ft 6in x 20in (76 x 51cm) oil of the silhouetted figure sailed above the £400-£600 guide to £7,000 at Gorrings in Lewes.

While the sitter is unknown, Gorrings's auctioneer Clifford Lansbury said he was identified after the sale by one bidder as a dancer from the moulin rouge – possibly Feral Benga, a Senegalese entertainer of the era.

The picture came to the auction house with a collection of mostly unstretched canvases formerly owned by the painter's son, William de Belleruche (1913-1969), and consigned from the estate of his lover, the late Gordon 'Andy' Anderson. Once part of a much larger collection of art from the Belleruche family, the 40-lot group sold for a total of just under £35,000.

Paul Liss is the founder of Liss Llewellyn, Fine Art Dealers which partners the exhibition A Painter in Paris: Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) continuing at Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum in Bournemouth until September 22. On August 19 George Kenney will host an online talk on Belleruche as a master of lithography. His book Albert de Belleruche - Master of Belle Epoque Lithography, A Catalogue Raisonné is published by Liss Llewellyn priced £150.

'Arm yourself with a copy of George Kenney's catalogue raisonné, to acquaint yourself with his work. The catalogue is organised by subject and year and we learn the rarity of each edition'



Above right Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) *Gildys, Grand portrait*, 1906, lithograph on laid paper, courtesy of Liss Llewellyn

Above Catalogued as a 'half-length portrait of a nude black man', the painting by Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) sold for £7,000

Below right Albert de Belleruche (1864-1944) *La Femme Arabe*, 1905, courtesy of Liss Llewellyn

Collecting Belleruche's lithographs

From collectors' points of view Belleruche's work seems easy enough to acquire. Between 1900 and the mid 1920s he produced nearly a thousand lithographs, examples of which regularly appear on the secondary market or on ebay for just a few hundred pounds. Arm yourself with a copy of George Kenney's catalogue raisonné, to acquaint yourself with his work.

The catalogue is organised by subject and year and we also learn the rarity of each edition. Belleruche typically produced each lithograph in an edition of between 10 and 20 signed but unnumbered impressions. Variations in paper and ink add to the uniqueness or rarity of each print.

Look out for

Rare and highly desirable lithographs include *Gildys, Grand portrait*, of the Gildys Leiffer for which Belleruche won a gold medal in the Amieus exhibition and was produced in an addition of 15. Equally rare, *La Femme Arabe*, dating from 1905, was one of three Belleruche lithographs Degas is known to have owned. In his studio logbook Belleruche noted Degas insisted the print showed the model's pubic hair, which Belleruche agreed to.

Stumbling across a copy of *La Femme Arabe* would be a coup for any collector as it was produced in an addition of only 10 impressions. Conversely, and this is where knowledge makes all the difference, some Belleruche lithographs are very common indeed. Between 1903 and 1908, 35,000 impressions were printed from Belleruche's original lithographic stones, for use in magazines. A good example is *Mélancholie*, 1907, of which 700 copies were published in *The Neolith*.

It is also worth noting that in commercially-printed impressions the signature is in the plate, rather than in the margins where Belleruche signed in pencil the lithographs he printed himself. Kenney's catalogue also notes Belleruche's three most frequently portrayed models are Lili Grenier (the subject of 67 lithographs), his wife (the subject of 60 lithographs), and his mother of whom he produced a dozen lithographs.

