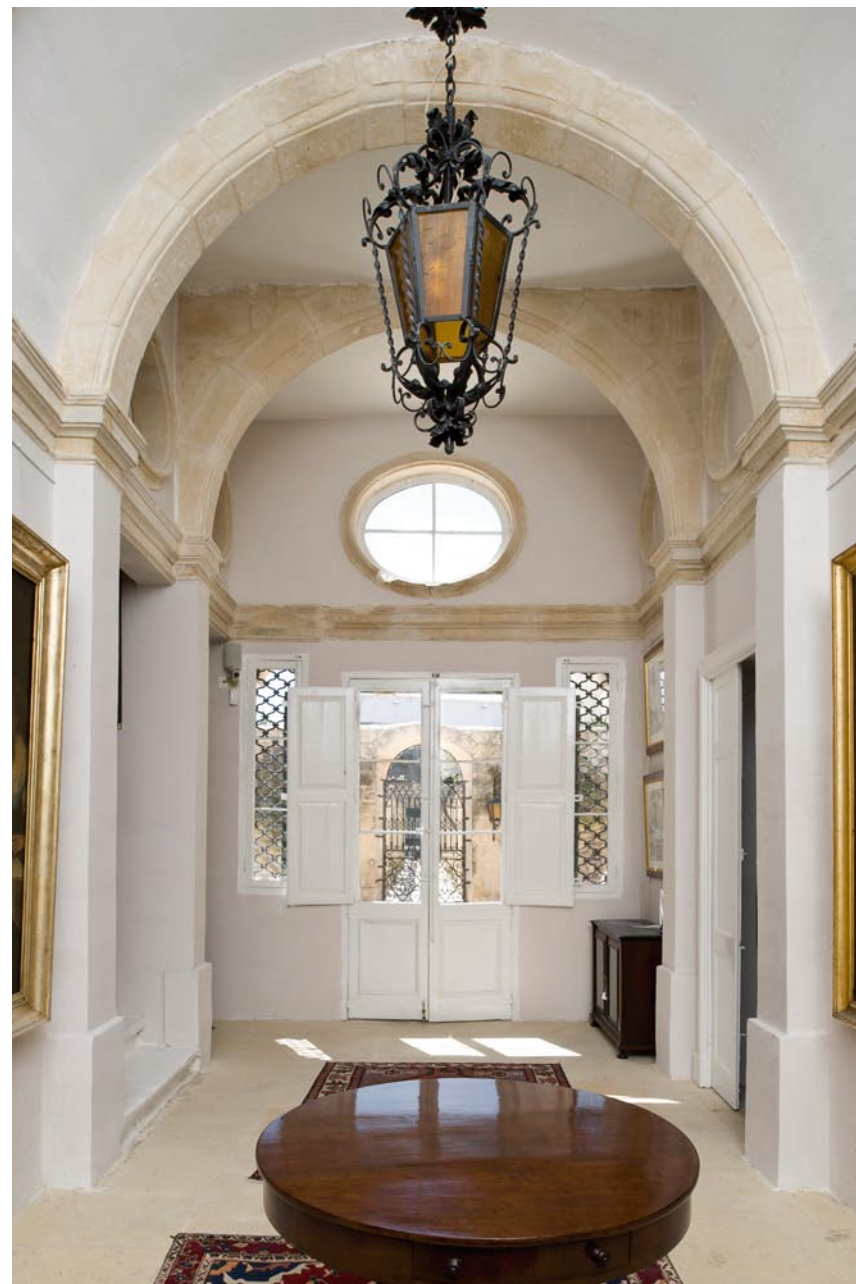


Antiques are a staple in most Maltese homes, whether they are used throughout to decorate each and every room in a town house, or whether they are used uniquely as focal pieces to be included in the ultra-modern set-up of a high-rise apartment. Not everybody can truly claim to understand the world of antiques, the nuances and foibles of the public with regards to preferences of taste, or the spending power of locals and foreigners in this regard. Who better to consult than an auctioneer who looks beyond the local market for inspiration to add that extra touch of interest to each and every auction he embarks on?

It has taken Pierre Grech Pillow just a few years to establish Obelisk Auctions as Malta's leading auction house. Speaking to him about antiques is a learning experience, whether he's explaining the features of antique Maltese furniture or whether he's teaching how to observe good art. What really sells at auction is not always clear-cut as each and every auction is different, but are there any sure-fire sellers?

"Nothing is a sure-fire seller in an auction. Sales are a constant in my auctions, so that is no problem. But sales are unpredictable, although I believe that adds to the fun of it. What sells in one auction might not sell in the next and that's because you generally get different kinds of potential buyers every time."



Why Antiques?

words **Marika Azzopardi**

Mr Grech Pillow should know. His sales portfolio at Obelisk is wide and varied and whilst it includes ships, vehicles, books, firearms, carpets and anything in between, his auctions habitually achieve record prices. Over the past months he has achieved record prices for the sale of Maltese furniture purchased locally by Maltese clients or foreigners aiming to include Maltese elements within their home. *"Maltese furniture is always on top of the 'most wanted' lists of furniture. The most favoured period stretches from the early 17th century through to the end of the Victorian era. There is no one specifically preferred furniture item – I cannot say that a 'gradenza' will sell quicker than a table, but they all sell and sell well, as long as they are in good condition."*

Record auction sale prices have also been achieved on paintings, the latest to be sold privately being two important works by Mattia Preti, whose paintings will incidentally soon also be published in a book. This will add to their ultimate value as published works are thoroughly researched by experts with regards to provenance and history. Old master paintings have also recently fetched record prices at auction, with modern and contemporary Maltese art being other strong favourites. In a recent Obelisk auction Pierre Grech Pillow hammered away some paintings by a handful of big names from the Maltese art world – Willie Apap, Gianni Vella, Emvin Cremona, Victor Pasmore, all of which fetched some impressive prices. Then again, Mr Grech Pillow likes to include the occasional odd, quirky



and curious element in his auctions, because this adds that extra special touch of interest for connoisseurs.

“Many clients who attend auctions whether Maltese or foreigners, generally enjoy big budgets and know what they want. I have clients who furnish their homes with determined pieces, searching high and low for that one elusive item they feel must be included to complete their collection. Their home becomes truly a haven for an exquisite collection of period works. On the other hand, I get clients who seek advice on that one special item they want to embellish their modern apartment. What I recommend depends on a number of key factors – the extent of the ‘modernism’ within their general décor, the type of architecture, the owner’s personality and lifestyle. And then there are always complementary decorative items such as porcelain and majolica which are much appreciated.”

All this talk about the success of the Obelisk auctions goes against current rumours that the antiques market sales are slowing down. I ask Mr Grech Pillow for his personal opinion on this. *“It is absolutely not true that antiques sales are slowing down. I feel it is the same people in this industry who are slowing it down or downright killing it. You see, you have to educate people and organise events such as seminars and specialised talks, in order to help raise awareness on key issues linked to the topic of antiques. One would expect the Antique Dealers Association (ADA) to do this itself and help support our trade. This is something which similar foreign associations do on a regular basis. The ADA does nothing of the sort. On a personal level, I enjoy supporting the trade because it is a fruitful exercise – I promote, I educate, I sell – it is a proven formula.”*

In line with his dynamic style of auctioneering, Mr Grech Pillow has also created innovations around his auction house. Obelisk Auctions recently opened its very own auction gallery in Attard and the luxury of having viewing rooms has provided that added acumen to his business. Obelisk Auctions is going one step further by introducing a new department – the Obelisk Jewellery Department, which will be collecting antique and rare jewellery items for specialised auctions which are in the pipeline in the very near future.



“I feel this is a very good untapped market here in Malta. Although we do not have the kind of market which foreign auctioneers enjoy, we have a substantial number of followers and this raises my confidence in moving on and beyond the antique furniture field.”