

## PRESS RELEASE

An exhibition of selected works and new commissions responding to the Old Master prints and drawings collection of Richard Day

# OLD MASTER DIALOGUES

Old Master Dialogues considers the influence of Old Masters both on their 'schools', 'circles' and also on contemporary art practice and the notion of 'follower'. Four contemporary artists, Mark Wright, Chloe Steele, Alyson Helyer and Richard Stone, have been invited to respond to works from the personal collection of the Old Master Drawings dealer Richard Day. Alongside these responses a further group of artists whose work references Old Master genres add additional and important notes to the exhibition.

Traditionally museums aim to strictly observe the hierarchies of history, whereas collectors and artists acquire or visually consume anything and everything that appeals to them personally. A collection, like an installation or a sculpture, a painting or a drawing becomes a composition in itself; edited, discussed, discarded or revered. Day started his career as a partner at Sotheby's in the 1960's, leaving to focus on his independent dealership in Bond Street, London. His collection is not one of household names. The works are small, discreet and dearly loved and represent a very particular and personal taste, honed from fifty years of researching, buying and selling artworks as an Old Master dealer and expert in drawings.

Many contemporary artists source ideas, styles, techniques and subject matter from the Old Masters – sometimes overtly, sometimes conceptually and often through particular colour palettes or composition. This is no great revelation – the art history lineage is a wide, sprawling web of intersecting influences. Day's collection shows, for example, the influence that Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola (called Parmigianino) had on Zanetti, or Samuel Palmer on Alan Reynolds and John Varley. Old Master Dialogues teases out some of these connections: the relationships between Old Master works and contemporary practice and those between peers, then as now.

For Old Master Dialogues Mark Wright has worked from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century landscapes of John Varley and Stephen Frederick Gooden RA. His paintings consider the relationship between nature and artifice and move between classical notions of painting and the burgeoning presence of the digital era. Also working within the landscape genre Chloe Steele makes haunting works imbued with personal narratives. For OMD she has also taken on the portrait, taking stock from

the small but powerful 17<sup>th</sup> century etching of Titus, Rembrandt's son, by Constantin Adrien Renesse.

Richard Day's collection contains an array of portraits from different eras. Aly Helyer's recent paintings respond to the Abraham Bosse prints, *L'Air*, *La Terre*, *L'Eau* and *Le Feu*, from the 17th Century. Their stylised demeanours and symbolic gestures lend themselves perfectly to Helyer's interest in narrative and the painted surface. As if from one end of a decorative spectrum to another the Bosse and Helyer articulations of portraits play on the conventions of the day.

On the platform at Collyer Bristow Richard Stone presents an installation that encompasses the drawn, sculptural and display elements of Day's collection. Using as his starting point the exquisite red chalk drawing of a horse by Guiseppe Cesari (also known as Cavaliere d'Arpino) 1568-1640, Stone dissects the image, including the gold frame in which it sits, drawing out each element through a series of cast horses heads, frames and draped terracotta.

Other artists in the exhibition include Geraldine Swayne whose darkly seductive miniature enamel portraits are the antithesis to the passive, sleeping Victorian women in the Day collection whilst Flora Whitely's dissolving studies are taken from a myriad of printed sources: newspapers, magazines, postcards. Fiona Macdonald returns to Collyer Bristow Gallery with a series of new watercolours: the result of her immersion in the Kent countryside, beloved by Samuel Palmer and echoed in the drawing by Alan Reynolds (b.1926) of *Trees at Shoreham*.

Three works from Gordon Cheung's *Revelations – Apocalypse* series from 2009 are shown alongside Bouke de Vries's sculptural subversions of familiar pastoral artefacts. Similarly Ann-Marie James's powerful new painting, *Ugolino II*, also emphasizes the fact that benign feelings of nostalgia for a pastoral idyll can have their flipside.

Richard Day's collection is not one of household names but represents a very particular and personal taste, honed from fifty years of researching, buying and selling artworks as an Old Master dealer and expert in drawings. The works are all small, discreet and dearly loved. Day started his career as a partner at Sotheby's in the 1960's, leaving to focus on his independent dealership in Bond Street, London. Richard Day's knowledge has been instrumental in the conversations and outcomes of the commissioned contemporary art works.

The exhibition has been timed to coincide with *Frieze* and *Frieze Masters* to contribute to the debate around the art market and the current direction of the Fairs.