

FINE ARTS & ANTIQUES

with Gabrielle Williams

Sussex sale from Sevres to superb surrealism

● CHRISTIE'S of London are to hold a country house sale in June when on the instructions of the trustees of the Edward James Foundation, the contents of West Dean, Chichester, West Sussex, are to be sold on June 2nd-5th.

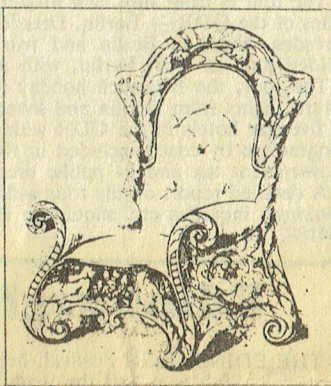
The collector Edward James died in 1984 after a lifetime as a patron of the arts, and in particular a supporter of surrealists and artists of the 1920s. As the heir to a large American fortune, made from railways in the 19th century, James was able to satisfy his artistic interests.

This sale of international interest has its base in 18th-century English, French, Italian and German furniture, which includes fine examples of Regency, Empire and Biedermeier pieces. But there are sumptuous furnishings from the grand Edwardian way of life. West Dean was a popular place to stay with the Marlborough House set, including the then-Prince of Wales.

Outstanding examples of furniture are a Louis XV black lacquer commode by Bernard van Risenburgh, valued at between £40,000-£60,000; a Louis XVI commode by A. L. Gilbert, inlaid with architectural designs and estimated at between £20,000-£30,000; a Transitional small commode by Claude Topino estimated at £10,000-£15,000; and a Louis XV floral marquetry commode by Pierre Flechy with an estimate of £15,000-£20,000.

There is splendour in a Louis XIV gilded and painted sedan chair, possibly with Royal origins, in a pair of Louis XVI giltwood chairs from the Tuileries Palace, and in a group of three very large Italian commodes made for Edward James's father William James from Neapolitan coach panels. Venetian "blackamoor" torchères and painted and gilded grotto furniture are among a strong Italian section which includes furniture in the style of the Maggiolini.

The collection of English furniture shows the serious and conventional taste of the 18th century, and the frivolous decorative styles of the Regency and later. Edward James tended to buy furniture which he felt fitted into the Surrealist movement. His house, Monkton, which sits in 60 acres near West Dean and is also up for sale, is entirely furnished in a surrealist way and is appar-



ently the only example of a house carried out in this style left intact in England. Even the stair carpets are woven with dog prints, devised to cover up the woven footprints of Edward James's wife Tilly Louche, a singer from whom he divorced in a notorious case.

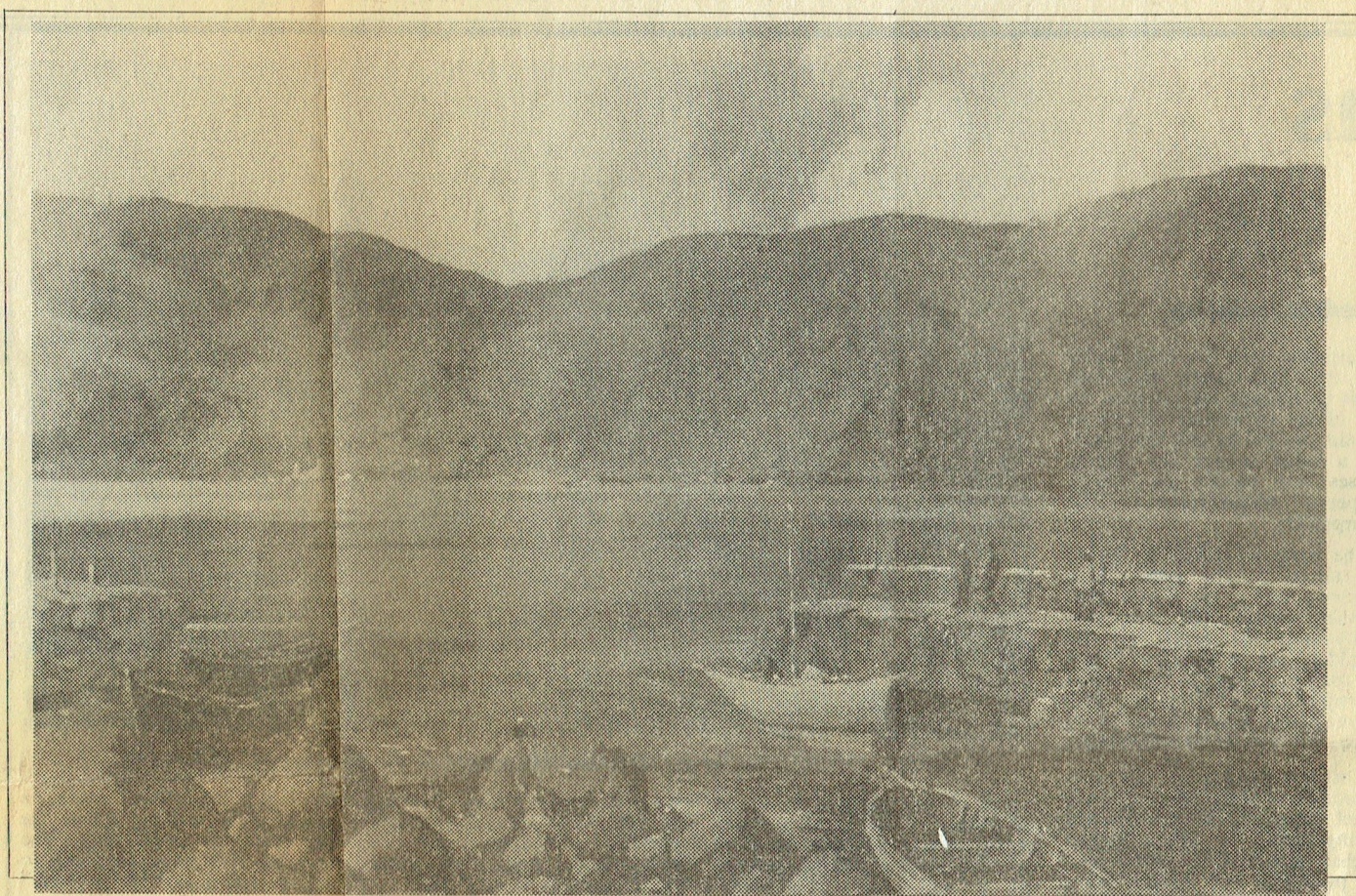
James's possessions are so many and so varied as to be almost overpowering. Good English furniture includes a suite of mid-Georgian seat furniture covered in brightly coloured tapestry, estimated at between £60,000-£90,000; a pair of early George III mahogany card tables; a pair of Regency bamboo-framed side cabinets, possibly from the Brighton Pavilion, and some fine George III satinwood commodes and Pembroke tables.

There will be widespread curiosity over the paintings. Edward James's patronage extended to Surrealists, such as Dali and Magritte and to Neo-Romantics such as Pavel Tchelitchew and Eugene Berman, both of whose works are included in this sale.

James bought contemporary art in the 1930s when many of these artists were in need of money and some became close friends. His friendship with Dali lasted from 1933 to 1937/8, and Magritte was a frequent visitor at West Dean and also in James's London house in Wimpole Street.

Later in the 1940s, James's artist friends were both women: Leonora Carrington and Leonor Fini. Their paintings represented in this sale were done between 1940 and 1950.

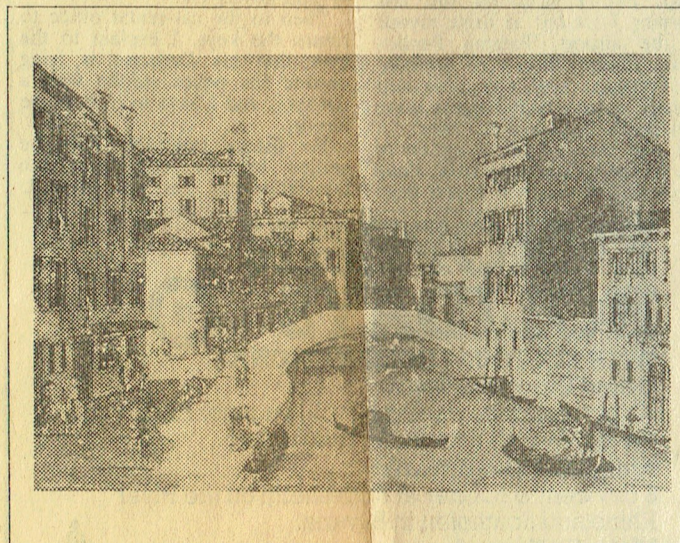
All the artists mentioned here are represented by large groups of top quality works, despite the fact



● Above: the James Gallery in Dalkey will be holding an exhibition of works by George Gillespie, the Belfast landscape painter from April 9th.

● From a sale of Old Master Drawings to take place at Christie's on April 8th, a signed and inscribed work by Giacomo Guardi of figures near the Campo dei Mori, Venice, which has an estimate of £1,000-£1,200, suggesting that drawings are still a good area for the collector of small means.

● Below: West Dean at Chichester, West Sussex, where the Edward James auction will be held by Christie's on June 2nd-5th. West Dean house was listed in the Norman Domesday Book survey of Britain.



that in 1981 a large proportion of James's art collection was sold by Christie's.

Porcelain plays a significant part in this sale. There are extensive collections of Bloor Derby and Chelsea Figures, a quantity of Chinese blue and white, and some fine Japanese lacquer. There is 18th century Sevres, circa 1780, and a rare Augustus Rex beaker vase estimated at £6,000-£8,000.

West Dean is listed in the Domesday Book in 1066 and during the centuries it has been enlarged and aggrandised, especially so in the last hundred years.

In 1964 the West Dean estate and house were formed into a trust and foundation bearing Edward James's name. The foundation holds residential courses in clock and furniture restoration into ceramic, tapestry and musical instrument-making and 6,000 pupils pass through the various courses every year.

As this is a unique sale covering some periods not often handled so comprehensively it should be of wide interest. Viewing is from May 26th-31st and the five separate catalogues amounting in total to £45, but which can be bought separately are now available.

