

ART & AUCTIONS

Renewed Interest in the Old

[Collecting]

BY MARGARET STUDER



There's nothing old about Old Masters as a series of sales in London will show next week.

On the catalog cover of Christie's evening sale Tuesday is Francisco Goya's portrait of Don Juan López de Robredo, embroiderer to King Carlos IV of Spain (estimate: £4 million-£6 million). This eternally young picture was commissioned by Robredo in a triumphal moment, when, in 1798, he was allowed by the king to wear an official uniform, a status symbol in the strict hierarchy of the Spanish court. Here, Robredo proudly wears his lavish new uniform richly embroidered in gold for which he long strived. "This amazing and ambiguous portrait shows a man incredibly pleased with himself, as it also raises a question as to if he is over-pleased," says Paul Raison, who heads Christie's Old Masters and British Pictures department in London.

The following day at Bonhams, a previously unknown 17th-century portrait of a dignified gentleman in a black tunic and aristocratic white collar by Diego Velázquez comes up for sale (estimate: £2 million-£3 million). Included in a consignment of works to the auction house in 2010, the portrait, researched by Bonhams Old Master paintings specialists, turned out to be a Velázquez discovery.

English portraiture also plays a major role in next week's sales. At Christie's, a 1778 painting of Philip Stanhope, 5th Earl of Chesterfield, by Thomas Gainsborough, depicts a relaxed moment in the life of an English gentleman. The earl in a striking, fire-red jacket, rests

against a bank during a country walk, while patting an adoring dog (estimate: £2.5 million-£3.5 million). An English equestrian picture from 1826 by John Ferneley shows a dapper Captain Horatio Ross astride Clinker, a magnificent horse on which the sportsman won a celebrated two-rider racing dual for 500 guineas (estimate: £500,000-£700,000).

At Sotheby's evening sale Wednesday, a pair of paintings from 1762 by Johann Zoffany, whose works rarely come to auction, show the British actor David Garrick relaxing with family and friends in the garden of his house on the River Thames (estimate: £6 million-£8 million). "This is the ultimate English view with the Thames and garden; and this famous man enjoying his leisure time, getting away from it all," says Emmeline Hallmark, Sotheby's head of early British paintings.

Turning to sculpture, Sotheby's will hold a European sculpture sale Tuesday, covering 800 years of artworks beginning at the 12th century. A dramatic piece will be a German limewood figure of St. John the Baptist (circa 1515), carrying an estimate of £100,000-£150,000. The sculpture shows the saint in flowing robes carrying a lamb. "The quality of the carving is superlative and the size monumental," says Erik Bijzet, Sotheby's head of European sculpture auctions.

Another major lot in this sale will be a group of four terra-cotta Flemish putti representing the senses of smell, taste, sight and touch from 1733, attributed to Jan Pieter van Bauerscheit II (estimate: £150,000-£250,000). "To find such a complete set of terra-cotta figures is extremely rare," Mr. Bijzet says.

With contemporary buyers joining the mix of traditional collectors, Mr. Bijzet says, "There is a renewed interest in old art."



The Francisco Goya portrait of Don Juan López de Robredo, the embroiderer to King Carlos IV of Spain, is estimated at £4 million-£6 million.

The Art of the Videogame

Gaming Reaches Another Level at the Grand Palais

BY GABRIELE PARUSSINI

"Game Story," one of the most comprehensive art exhibitions dedicated to videogames, is like a walk down memory lane for fans, featuring everything from "Pong" to "Pac-Man" and "Sonic the Hedgehog." But its presentation in Paris's Grand Palais, one of the temples of contemporary art in the French capital, is an effort to show that what many still consider a hobby for geeky teenagers has grown into an art form.

"This isn't videogames taking over the Grand Palais. This is the Grand Palais taking in videogames," says Jean-Baptiste Clais, one of the exhibition's curators.

In an attempt to prove that computer gaming is an art, Mr. Clais has situated 80 videogames spanning four decades in their cultural context. He draws from cinema, literature and Japanese painting to prove the artistic worth of the genre.

Often, videogames are seen only for their entertainment value. Trade fairs abound. Other less-ambitious exhibitions about videogames, such as one last year at Paris's Arts et Métiers museum, omit cultural references.

The exhibition 'Game Story' shows the parallels and influences between different forms of artistic expression and videogame aesthetics.

However, interpreting videogames as art is gaining traction. The Barbican Art Gallery in London put together an exhibition, "Game On," nearly 10 years ago, exploring the history and creation of videogames, that has since traveled to two dozen cities around the world, and is currently showing in Sao Paulo. Berlin's Computerspielemuseum, dedicated to all things gaming since opening in 1997, opened a new permanent exhibition earlier this year. The Smithsonian American Art Museum is set to unveil "The Art of Video Games" next spring.

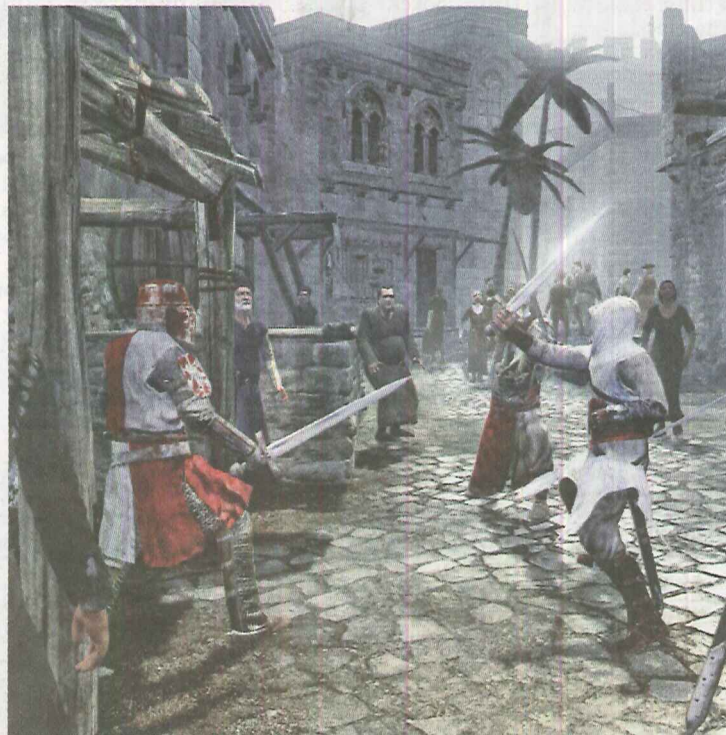
"Despite being an important part of contemporary culture, videogames hadn't yet found their place in museums," says Mr. Clais, an ethnologist and curator of the China section at the Musée Guimet, France's national museum for Asian arts, who wrote his doctoral thesis on videogames and computers. In an adjacent gallery only a few meters away from "Game Story," paintings by Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso are on show.

Yet videogames are also proving to be an influence on older art forms. Many videogames have been adapted to the big screen. Director Nicolas Winding Refn's recent hit film "Drive" tips its hat to two iconic videogames, "Gran Turismo" and "Grand Theft Auto." Contemporary artists such as Japan's Takashi Murakami and China's Cao Fei have taken inspiration from videogame heroes and images in their works.

"Game Story," which runs until Jan. 9, shows the parallels and influences between different forms of artistic expression and videogame aesthetics. For example, the developers of "Zaxxon," a 1982 Sega game, adopted isometric perspective to give



Above, views of the exhibition; below, a still from the 'Assassin's Creed' game.



From top, art by Ubisoft

the player a feeling of distance from the action. The technique was first used by Japanese masters in the 16th and 17th centuries to produce the illusion of depth in two dimensions, and examples of this art are shown alongside the videogame in the exhibition.

Much of the imagery in "Doom," a 1993 game where a combatant from the future must kill hordes of monsters that have stormed a space station on Phobos, Mars's largest satellite, is inspired by the novels of American fiction writer H.P. Lovecraft.

But gaming is most closely intertwined with cinema as an art form, Mr. Clais says. "They re-elaborate all cultural references, from theater to painting, from music to literature," says Mr. Clais. "Contamination keeps culture alive."

"Seven Chances," a 1925 Buster Keaton movie, inspired the developers of Mario, the plumber Sega created 60 years later, and which has since become one of the best-known characters in the industry. The key scene of the silent movie, in which the main character has just a few hours to get married and inherit \$7 million, is an inventive chase sequence. Keaton's character runs away from a mob of women chasing him and—like Mario—climbs on a crane, runs downhill to escape a landslide and dives into a lake. The camera moves sideways

from left to right, in the same way that Mario moves from the start to the end of a level.

The videogames Mr. Clais chose for the exhibition mirror the neck-breaking speed at which computing developed. The remote past—the 1970s—is populated by the first consoles, with one button and an electronic beep.

Approaching the 1972 trail-blazing "Pong"—a single bouncing bit and two white lines, which replicate a table-tennis match—the visitor may be seized by a feeling of disbelief: Surely people couldn't spend hours playing with that?

The exhibition gradually travels back to the present and the latest games: Joysticks have disappeared, and the player's movement is recorded by sensors and translated directly onto the screen.

The gaming boom sparked a proliferation of rival consoles, with the emergence of iconic games such as "Mario" and "Sonic the Hedgehog." Visitors can try out some of the featured games, and it's obvious that few can pass up the experience of playing one of the 1980s hits, from "Pac-Man" to "Space Invaders," that helped computer gaming make its way into millions of homes.

Mr. Clais says different generations have visited—and played—the exhibition. "Passing culture on to the next generation is what museums are about," he said.