

Barry McGlashan
Mudlarks & Connoisseurs

John Martin Gallery



The Morellian Method, (CAT NO. 8)
oil on panel, 24 x 19¼ inches, 61 x 50 cms



Hogarth and the Damn'd Cup, (CAT NO. 16)
oil on canvas, 30 x 34 inches, 76 x 86.5 cms



John Soane's Basement, (CAT NO. 21)
oil on panel, 17¼ x 11¼ inches, 45 x 30 cms

It seems apt that I've been making paintings about collecting this year, as it marks 20 years since graduating into the wonderful, curious and challenging world of art. Without collectors I wouldn't be here, writing this now. But to say this exhibition is purely about the act of collecting isn't quite right; it's really about why we need to collect and the fascinating ways we go about it.

Recently I found myself sitting in my studio, the desk and floor strewn with sheets of paper as ever - handwritten lists of paintings for an upcoming show. I was in the habit of making repeated lists of work titles as I got towards my deadline. These lists weren't really of any practical use and yet if I made an error in the writing I tended to start again from scratch, to have the 'complete' list. Was this just a way of holding all the information together correctly or was something else going on? I realised I was trying to exert a form of control over the complicated business of making a show. An exhibition needs to be like a well oiled machine - all the parts need to align at the right time so that the machine can run smoothly. The creation of this exhibition itself demonstrated the sort of obsessive behaviour that characterises many forms of collecting: from the gathering of ideas, to the precise layering of marks on the picture surface, to the collation of the final body of work. According to the philosopher Umberto Eco 'we like lists because we don't want to die' and it is this eternal human pursuit of permanence through collecting, recording and collation - and all the adventure which that entails - that lies at the heart of this latest exhibition.

The drive to collect has not only shaped the history of art - something which continues to inform my work - it has also been an influential factor in many major historical events. When those first early explorers returned from the New World, it was the myriad wonders they had collected, catalogued and preserved on their travels which proved inspirational to traders, colonisers, scientists and idealists alike. Of course, at its worst, collecting could inadvertently lead to the frenzied, speculative greed of Tulipmania in seventeenth century Holland, an hysteria that only aided the spread of bubonic plague, nonetheless, such events still form part of the collecting story. Such stories form the starting point for my work*. I love finding those tales which have been largely overlooked, gaps in our visual culture waiting to be filled that not only talk of our past, but also think of our present and look to our future. They allow me to go deeper into the history, imagine the scenes and make the paintings.

I hope that this exhibition talks to all those Mudlarks and Connoisseurs who share the need to pursue, to collect, and who in doing so find their own meaning.

— Barry McGlashan, October 2016.

**Notes on all the paintings can be found at the end of the catalogue.*



The Smokers, (CAT NO. 4)
oil on panel, 30 x 30½ inches, 76 x 77.5 cms



THIS PAGE AND OVERLEAF, WITH DOOR PANELS OPEN:
Die Wunderkammer, (CAT NO. 12)
oil on folding panel, 17¾ x 35½ inches, 45 x 90 cms (panels opened)





The Mudlarks, (CAT NO. 7)
oil on canvas, 38 x 48 inches, 96.5 x 122 cms



Tradescant's Ark, (CAT NO. 18)
oil on panel, 24 x 31½ inches, 61 x 80 cms



The Custodian, (CAT NO.1)
oil on canvas, 45 x 60 inches, 114 x 152.5 cms



Salvation, (CAT NO.19)
oil on canvas, 38 x 48 inches, 96.5 x 122 cms



The Dealer, (CAT NO.13)
oil on panel, 24 x 28 inches, 61 x 71 cms



Our Little Hour, (CAT NO.10)
oil on panel, 24 x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, 61 x 50 cms



The Curio, (CAT NO.11)
oil on panel, 16 x 20 inches, 40 x 51 cms



The Botanist, (CAT NO. 29)
oil on canvas laid on panel, 13 x 11 inches, 33 x 28 cms



World Narrowing, (CAT NO. 28)
oil on canvas, 60 x 48 inches, 153 x 122 cms



THIS PAGE AND OVERLEAF:
Last Night of the Tulip, (CAT NO. 3)
oil on folding panel, 24 x 48 inches, 71 x 122 cms (panels opened)





The Humble Potato, (CAT NO.6)
oil on panel, 31 x 37 inches, 79 x 94 cms



Winter in the Low Countries, (CAT NO.2)
oil on canvas, 26 x 28 inches, 66 x 71 cms



Veil, (CAT NO.14)
oil on panel, 8 x 11 inches, 20 x 28 cms



Bloom, (CAT NO. 15)
oil on on panel, 8 x 11 inches, 20 x 28 cms

Mudlarks And Connoisseurs: Notes on the Paintings

1. The Custodian

I wanted to make a painting that was a kind of monument to those who appreciate and preserve that in our culture which could so often be forgotten – or worse still, destroyed. It has a sense of ending about it – is that a sunrise or sunset? I used some ancient forms of architecture, all overrun by weeds (Doric and Ionic columns, the central archway is from the previously sacked site of Palmyra in Syria) to create some sense of a ‘cradle of civilization’. Paintings by Friedrich, Titian, Poussin, Caravaggio, El Greco and Van Eyck are either coming or going. Apollo, the god of many things cultural, sits atop the bookshelf. I’m a huge admirer of the allegory paintings of Jan Brueghel and Rubens, themselves a form of visual collection or list and I reference them here with the tabletop covered in artefacts and valuable items from different periods, besides which sits a large pot of salt – symbolic of preservation. Musical instruments are scattered around and the whole thing is overlooked by the busts of Plato, Socrates and Aristotle. There amongst it all sits the young custodian, surrounded by a pile of upturned books – perhaps beginning to learn again for a new day?

2. Winter In The Low Countries

I had been looking at a lot of Dutch art after a visit to Amsterdam - it’s full of these frozen lakes and canals. Merchants and poor people trying to scratch out a living in difficult times, hard circumstances. I think hardship is an excellent subject for a painter.

3. Last Night Of The Tulip

I think Tulipmania must be one of the best examples of speculative greed in our history. The market grew to a crescendo in 1637, when a single bulb was selling for ten times the annual wage of a skilled craftsman. To give an idea, in 1636 one bulb sold for 5500 guilders, that same year Rembrandt’s The Night Watch would sell for 1600 guilders – such was their perceived value. Haarlem seems to have been the beginning of the end, when people refused to turn up to an auction (of course the plague also helped to collapse the market) ironic given that the wide spread of the tulip market had in turn been helping to perpetuate the plague. On the outside of the painting I have shown a tulip merchant arriving at the tavern ‘De Tulp’ with a wagon load of bulbs set for auction, but death and misfortune is already stalking the land as two plague doctors are seen approaching from Haarlem. Inside the tavern, chaos reigns as the organ grinder’s monkey, a symbol of human folly, has torn up the merchant’s tulip catalogues, heralding the end of the speculative craze. The merchant lies slumped in the foreground, surrounded by his guilders and bulbs, the frozen wind from the plague doctor’s entrance stage left, extinguishing his candle. I enjoy the puzzle of putting these symbolic plays together.

4. The Smokers

This painting is really an homage to David Teniers, a seventeenth-century painter famous for his allegorical tavern scenes. We see some tobacco connoisseurs slovenly enjoying their pipes in the dingy tavern as the sun shines brightly outside. I hope there’s a sense that they’re hiding away from jobs needing to be done, all talk and no action. Teniers would depict mussel shells as a symbol of the poverty that this behaviour would lead to. I have hammered this home with the pigs!

5. Plato’s Cave

The Allegory Of The Cave was first forwarded by Plato to talk of how education, or the lack of it, can affect our natures. I think it’s been well visited throughout art history: Casper David Friedrich and Joseph Wright of Derby are two which spring to mind instantly. In my version, a man sits



Cabinet (The Devoted), (CAT NO.17)
oil on panel, 26 x 28 inches, 66 x 71 cms

with a collection of shells, listening for the sea, despite the fact that the real sea can be found just outside the cave. It reminded me a little of how we are today with technology – fixed to our little screens, a whole world in our hand, but ignoring the real world around us.

6. The Humble Potato

History is full of half truths - but the point of the story is often the thing. Everyone has heard of Sir Walter Raleigh bringing the potato back from one of his far flung voyages but I think it's now generally accepted that this probably didn't happen. I recently read that they were most likely washed up on the coast of Ireland from the hold of a sunken Spanish Galleon. But! Never let the truth get in the way of a good story. I loved the idea of an anxious hand offering a lumpy tuber aloft to the highest power in the land. This humble, earthy vegetable which has become such a national dietary symbol of hearty ballast! It's a painting made up of a few elements – the main composition recalls a quite naive but beautiful painting by a Flemish female court painter by the name of Levina Teerlinc who was a miniaturist in the court of Elizabeth I. The bird and flower wallpaper is from a back room I saw in the Oudekirk in Amsterdam, the image of Elizabeth standing dominantly over the globe from a Gheeraerts painting in the National Portrait Gallery and the whole thing flavoured by a visit to Hampton Court last year. I also hope for a feeling of Machiavellian court politics just below the surface...but in the centre, the potato!

7. The Mudlarks

I wanted to make a painting which could perhaps show the social range in the exhibition – from Mudlarks to Connoisseurs. I had been looking at the Victorian painter, John Atkinson Grimshaw and I loved the otherworldly nature of his landscapes which I think was an influence here. It was a choice between the Mudlarks working in the shadow of St Pauls or the Houses of Parliament (so either church or state) with all their wealth, whilst a Dickensian cast of characters, the mudlarks, dig in the dirt for what little they can find.

8. The Morellian Method

Giovanni Morelli was an art historian and pioneer of art connoisseurship. He found that artists could be identified by studying the individual styling of how they painted details such as ears and hands. Botticelli for example, would unconsciously describe the folds in the ear in an identical manner each time. It was vital to him to study the painting as an object – not simply to read theory in books and as a painter, I really appreciate that approach as it seems to give some importance back to the object. His methods inspired Arthur Conan Doyle when writing Sherlock Holmes (in fact he is mentioned by the great detective) and even the analytical methods of Sigmund Freud.

9. The Great Fire

As it's the 350th anniversary of The Great Fire Of London, it seemed fitting to mark this event given the historical theme of the show. Pepys famously buried his parmesan cheese, a very valuable item in those days, in a hastily dug pit in his garden to preserve it from the inferno. The notion of preservation is seen again in his brooch, the stone of which was fashioned from a large bladder stone which he had removed and wore as a souvenir of his own indefatigability! He would throw anniversary dinner parties which he called his 'stone feasts' to celebrate his unlikely survival. What a character. I had been looking at round 'tondo' paintings – mainly of the Virgin Mary with Baby Jesus – and I liked the balance of them so decided I could use that configuration to create a sense of overblown, operatic drama. It's theatrical, which I hope Mr Pepys would appreciate.

10. Our Little Hour

The title comes from a first world war poem 'But a short time to live' by Leslie Coulson. 'Our little hour, how swift it flies...' I think as a painter you can become very aware of the passage of time,



The Great Fire, (CAT NO.30)
oil on canvas, 48 inches, 122 cms diameter

each painting can be like a marker in your year. I wanted to try to show that passage of time in a painting – here this old artist is trying to capture the youth of the flower before it passes, the studio floor littered with those already gone. I'm wondering if it's me as an old man?

11. The Curio (Homage to Bosch)

This painting refers to a Bosch painting called The Conjurer – but another kind of trickery is taking place here. You often see these oddities turning up in natural history collections – false finds cobbled together out of spare parts to fool a willing audience. I think even the dog smells something isn't right.

12. Die Wunderkammer

I wanted to make a painting about the beautiful 'curiosity cabinets' which were made by German craftsmen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and I thought to make a painting which itself could provide 'a reveal' would be fitting. Originally I had painted more figures on the exterior but I removed them to heighten the realisation that the lone craftsman on the front is in fact in front of a large crowd of people – presenting the cabinet or 'Kunstschränk' to the court of a King or Nobleman. I repeated the arched form of the paintings on the cabinet doors, in the arched windows overlooking the mountains to hopefully give a feeling of a 'world within a world', much like these cabinets of wonders must have seemed.

13. The Dealer

After visiting the Paul Durand-Ruel exhibition at the National Gallery last year I thought the spectacle of his Paris salon, filled with Monet, Renoir and Degas would make a fine subject for a painting on the theme of collection and connoisseurship. Two clients are being woo-ed by the latest Monet and there in the back room... the man himself lurks, trying to hear what is being said by his finest patron.

14/15. Veil & Bloom

The starting point for these paintings were a couple of details I noticed in a painting in The Courtauld. Like Morelli said, looking closely at a painting can reveal a lot and I wanted to make a couple of paintings, quite minimal in content that were just dealing with two or three elements and how that could work. A little experiment in 'less is more'.

16. Hogarth And The Damn'd Cup

The gin craze of the eighteenth century was a great subject for Hogarth – here I have him drawing in a gin den, perhaps preparing a new print to sell to his growing list of collectors, whilst surrounded by the connoisseurs of 'The Damn'd Cup'. I like the irony around Hogarth's work – he made so many moral comments on the ills of society but it's clear from his work that he enjoyed the grotesques!

17. Cabinet (The Devoted)

Holbein's portraits are so lovingly made that I often find it difficult to imagine him not having a sense of feeling for the sitter. I thought about how a portrait can almost be like that idea of the 'cabinet' – a collection on a theme – and so I brought these together in this painting within a painting about devotion.

18. Tradescant's Ark

John Tradescant, the great traveller, collector, naturalist and Royal gardener - a thoroughly busy man whose collection now resides in The Ashmolean Museum. His 'Musaeum Tradescantianum'



Plato's Cave, (CAT NO.5)
oil on panel, 30 x 30½ inches, 76 x 77.5 cms

otherwise known as 'Tradescant's Ark' was one of the first examples of Cabinet collection and the first museum open to the public in England. It was in Lambeth and I like to think that he could see the ships coming and going, ships that he would charge with the task of returning examples of natural wonders from around the world.

19. Salvation

The notion of self preservation certainly comes into play here – a travelling apothecary of the Old West rides his wagon of 'snake oil cure-alls' out of the burning furnace of the desert, racing towards the safety of town before sunset. These pioneer towns were quite at the mercy of unscrupulous salesmen: a captive audience wanting to believe they had bought the next new thing.

20. The Extraordinary Mary Anning

The story of Mary Anning is a long and quite tragic one. She was born in 1799 and began life by surviving a lightning strike as a baby – not a good start. She became a self-taught fossil collector and palaeontologist of international reputation, making many finds of importance around her home on the Dorset coast and contributed hugely to the wide world of science. Her family were poor and also religious dissenters so she was unable to attend university and, as a woman, she did not fit into the male dominated scientific community of the time so sadly lived her whole life struggling financially, scratching out a living selling fossils to tourists (she is in fact the subject of the 'she sells seashells' tongue-twister). It must have been very hard for her, repeatedly exploited by an unscrupulous scientific community who respected her abilities greatly, benefited from them greatly and yet would not credit her finds. She wrote in a letter "the world has used me so unkindly, I fear it has made me suspicious of everyone". And it was very dangerous work, finding fossils in the loose cliffs which were often revealed by bad weather – she narrowly escaped being crushed by a land-slide which killed her beloved dog, Trey. After her death, in a book edited by Charles Darwin, an uncredited author wrote of her, 'the carpenter's daughter has won a name for herself, and has deserved to win it.'

21. John Soane's Basement

I was fascinated by John Soane's house in London when I visited: the chalky, dusty, cathedral-like feel of the place with its central well of light. He collected these architectural fragments from all over the world and turned the house itself into one huge display case. I don't think he was fussy about them having value, perhaps more interested in volume and effect – there seemed an element of showmanship about it all. And of course, he has a hidden wall containing Hogarth's entire series of Rake's Progress paintings as an added bonus.

22. The Connoisseurs

Connoisseurs come in many forms and here, two collectors are enjoying some Rembrandt prints in an Amsterdam canal house. The room is based on one I saw in the Museum Van Loon which I recently visited in Amsterdam – a beautiful place, the entire house like a collection, wonderfully preserved. That room with its painted walls, affording a view to a wider world, seemed an apt setting for the dealings of the two enthusiasts.

23. Heads

This sculptor's collection of evolving heads feels to me like an ongoing dialogue - I'm reminded of Darwin's 'endless forms' quote: 'from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.'

24. The Victorians



The Connoisseurs, (CAT NO.22)
oil on panel, 24 x 28 inches, 61 x 71 cms



The Extraordinary Mary Anning, (CAT NO.20)
oil on panel, 24 x 20 inches, 61 x 50 cms

The Victorian craze for fern collecting or 'Pteridomania' is an interesting one, creating a common interest for those from different social classes. It's still very evident today when you visit those huge, cathedral-like glasshouses in sprawling public gardens. They had some funny ideas about the fern – it was said that they alleviated the effects of madness and even gave a boost to the libido. So I thought I would show them here in their heavy black formal wear, on a hot evening.

25/26. Wood Gatherer (i & ii)

These paintings are purely about collection for need and survival, gathering wood to keep the fire going through the night.

27. Tone Poem

A list can be a kind of collection, a way to order and categorise a number of subjects. It's how exhibitions sometimes come together for me. This painting is really a physical representation of the collation of ideas for an upcoming show. I have these torn pieces of paper floating around my studio all the time with short written notes, quotes, phrases, maybe just a single word or even pieces of song lyrics. Occasionally I will collect them into a sketchbook but just as likely, this will be all I have before I begin a painting. They are like a shorthand version of a visual idea, so one of these words or phrases represents a complete painting in my mind.

28. World Narrowing

One of the earliest paintings for the show, when I was still forming the idea of pursuit and collection. I had been reading about the great arctic explorer Sir John Franklin whose two-ship expedition vanished without a trace in 1845 whilst seeking the Northwest Passage. It's a fascinating tale with too many twists and turns to go into here but the idea of The Northwest Passage keeps coming back to my work. I love that idea of there being some wild, romantic, undiscovered place. Their disappearance was an international sensation at the time, the crew's bodies weren't found until 1981 – properly buried and preserved by the ice, like they had been frozen in time. Franklin's ship, The Erebus, was only found in 2014. Apparently they had got stuck in the ice for a year and a half and were eating food from cans with faulty lead soldering which had also caused poisoning. Franklin had campaigned to go on this expedition but the Admiralty felt that at 59, he was too old. One of his supporters and fellow explorers had told the Admiralty, "He is a fitter man than any I know, and if you don't let him go, the man will die of disappointment."

29. The Botanist

Just as I spoke about the world of art history, with Giovanni Morelli and his artist's ears and hands, so much knowledge can be gained by looking at the detail of things, something very important to the botanist.

30. Room Of An Italian Painter

This is the studio of the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi, who painted beautiful, tonally exquisite arrangements of bottles and other vessels. I like the idea of him working in there, surrounded by line upon line of his simple subjects.



The Victorians, (CAT NO. 24)
oil on on panel, 13 x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, 33 x 45 cms



Heads, (CAT NO. 23)
oil on on panel, 16 x 20 inches, 40 x 51 cms



Room of an Italian Painter, (CAT NO. 30)
oil on on panel, 12 x 18 inches, 30 x 45 cms

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and Saturdays, 10am to 1:30pm
For all enquiries call Tara Whelan
020 7499 1314 tara@jmlondon.com
All paintings can be seen at www.jmlondon.com
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John Martin Gallery

38 Albemarle Street | info@jmlondon.com | T +44 (0)20 7499 1314
London, W1S 4JG | www.jmlondon.com | Mon-Fri 10-6, Sat 10-1:30