

SHOW ME THE MONET

Inventing Impressionism presents not Renoir and Degas, but the entrepreneurial genius responsible for their success



Nick Foulkes

Standing in front of the wall of Monet poplar paintings at Inventing Impressionism in the British National Gallery, I found it hard to keep out of my mind an observation by Philip Hook. In his book about Impressionist painting, the Sotheby's expert says that as he stood in front of one of these canvases depicting an enfilade of trees fading into the distance, he saw the trees re-form themselves into the "shimmering but unmistakable impression of a dollar sign". And in a way it is what this show is about.

Five of the 15 poplar paintings that Monet exhibited in 1892 have been reunited at the National to give an idea of what it was like to attend that exhibition in Belle Epoque Paris, except that we view these pictures through the distorting glass of more than a century's hysteria about Impressionism.

It is hard to respond to these paintings without addressing their financial value and their historical significance. The phenomenon of Impressionist painting is as intriguing as the work itself and, focusing on the role of Parisian art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, this show explains how the hunger for Impressionist painting was created as much by skillful business techniques as by the art itself.

In many ways Durand-Ruel was the forerunner of modern dealers like Charles Saatchi and brought the methods of the Bourse to the art world. A



Paul Durand-Ruel's friends and family, including his daughter-in-law and son, with Claude Monet, right, at the water lily pond in Giverny, 1900

typical coup was to try and corner the market in a certain artist and then promote the hell out of them. Believing in advertising and PR, he made use of solo artist shows to boost the star quality of his acts rather than just presenting them as participants in a movement. He also sought financial backing from wealthy collectors and attracted extra capital by offering shares in his gallery for public sale. This financial acumen made him tireless in his expansion into export markets, with branches opened in cities including Brussels, Vienna and London. Born in 1831 in the age

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Durand-Ruel's life is the model that ushered in the era of the mega-dealer

of Delacroix and Ingres, Durand-Ruel died in 1922, when the rivalry between Picasso and Matisse was beginning to shape the course of 20th-century art. During his lifetime he bought colossal quantities of Impressionist paintings: an estimated 1,500 Renoirs, 1,000 Monets, 800 Pissarros and 400 works by Degas.

Given the number of works to pass through his hands, this exhibition is a sort of a compilation album with enough familiar hits to carry the audience along: Degas at the races and the ballet; Monet flower and snow paintings; Renoir's famous *Dance In The Country* and *Dance In The City*.

We are invited to consider the last two works as they first hung on the walls of Durand-Ruel's apartment. They have long since become standard bearers for Impressionism and Durand-Ruel used them as such in his lifetime,

but here their domesticity is emphasised by their proximity to one of the doors from this room, with panels painted with still lives by Claude Monet.

Alongside the portraits of the dealer's sons by Renoir, the sense of Impressionist painting as domestic art begins to emerge. Once collectors got over the shock of the novelty of Impressionist art, they appreciated that unlike the vast history paintings of a generation earlier, these were works of a scale and subject matter that lent themselves to display in the apartment buildings of Baron Haussmann's redeveloped Paris.

Durand-Ruel's life can be studied as a model for aspiring dealers and ushered in the era of the mega-dealer such as Joseph Duveen, who was so good he sold paintings to a blind man. As Hamburg Gallery's Alfred Lichtwark observed: "The role that was once played in the life of the artist by the priest, the prince and the patrician as protector, employer and intellectual guide is nowadays played by the art dealers."

Over a century later the art market is once again changing. With the modern Durand-Ruels getting ever bigger and the growing importance of auction houses, even well-established medium size galleries are finding it hard to compete.

In a market dominated by big dealers, contemporary art increasingly makes its impact with fairs franchised around the world. Perhaps one day the National Gallery will mount a show on the role of Frieze and ArtBasel in shaping the tastes in art in the 21st century.

At the National Gallery until 31 May. Go to nationalgallery.org.uk/inventing-impressionism

TIME TO TEE OFF

Golfers can revel in the bezels of timepiece that tracks your round through all 18 holes

Graham Boynton

With the Masters in full flow in Augusta, it seems appropriate to take a look at the Etiquis Sport Pro, which has the great game written all over its face. That face is a 3D dimpled recreation of a golf ball, the second hand is the greens flag and the hour markings are represented by tee batons.

Most modern sports watches have bezels that relate to the particular sport favoured by the wearer. Thus divers have the Rolex Submariner, yachties the Omega Seamaster and flyers the Breitling Aviator.

The Etiquis boasts the Butler Bezel, which allows its golfing owners to pace themselves over 18 holes. It's really quite simple - you rotate the bezel so

the start marker coincides with your tee-off time and the number sequence on the bezel tells you approximately in what time you should have played each hole, allowing you to track yourself and complete the course in under four hours, as per the Royal & Ancient guidelines. It also has a 100-metre water resistance rating for golfers who find themselves fishing their balls out of water hazards.

These themed design flourishes aside, the Etiquis is a modern, Swiss-made quartz watch that is reasonably priced (£269) and not unattractive on the wrist. By modern I mean it is a great lump of a watch, a weighty piece of arm furniture that is the current fashion.

It keeps perfect time - at



The Etiquis Sport Pro's face is a 3D dimpled recreation of a golf ball, the second hand is the greens flag and the hours are represented by tee batons

least it did for the time I tested it - and according to its designer Gary Butler it will, most importantly, identify you in your local pub or wine bar as a dedicated golfer. He says it creates an emotional attachment between serious golfers, although there is no suggestion that the wearing of said watch will turn you into Rory McIlroy.

At the moment there are four watches in the range, including a less chunky version of the Sport Pro for lady golfers, and the prices range from £179 to £329, making Etiquis watches very good value for money.

A piece of chrono-frippery or essential kit? Probably somewhere in between, which makes the Etiquis perfect material for this column.

Soundmagic E10 or E20S

Walk into any hi-fi, electrical appliance outlet or all-purpose gadget store and you will see row after row of in-ear headphones, most produced by familiar hi-fi companies (Bose, Philips, Sennheiser, B&O etc), some by an innovative generation of rappers (Dr Dre, Ludacris) and many by companies we've never heard of.

But the entry-level earphones that have been receiving unanimous praise over the past year are SoundMAGIC E10s and the more recent ES20s, both of which are a dramatic improvement on the horrible cheap earbuds that come with iPods and other MP3 players, and actually a lot better than many earphones that are twice the price. They have rich,

vibrant bass tones and distinct clarity in treble and mid-range.

They retail at between £30 and £35 and deserve all the praise that they have been garnering from within the music industry.



Angelbird SSD2go Pocket (£219.99)

SSD or HDD, that is the question. Well, maybe not *the* question, but if you're moving around the world and carrying important computer data with you, it is at least a reasonably important question.

Hard Disc Drive uses a mechanical arm with a read/write head to put information on a storage platter whereas a Solid State Drive stores its information on microchips and is ultimately a large memory stick.

Thus SSDs tend to be faster and less prone to damage. The new Angelbird Pocket is an ultraportable USB SSD that is just 3.5in x 2.75in x 0.41in, and is stylish, fast and robust.

It comes in three memory sizes - 128GB, 256GB and 512GB - and is loaded with

additional software that can be accessed once the personal support portal has been set up.

That includes both TRIM and SMART for Mac users, the only external SSD to do this. It costs between £164 and £220 depending on the amount of memory.



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