

BOOKS & ARTS

The art of collecting

Passion was in the air in the rooms of the Wallace Collection last week — or at least the word was at the inaugural *Apollo* seminar sponsored by specialist art broker Stackhouse Poland with AXA Art Insurance. ‘How do you collect art and antiques in today’s market?’ was the question and the panel, chaired by *Apollo*’s editor Oscar Humphries, was unanimous that passion played an essential part when starting a collection.

James Stourton, chairman of Sotheby’s, believed that to start a collection one had to be energetic, assiduous, knowledgeable and to be at the right place at the right time because supply was always short. And he advised always to buy the best one can afford. Ah, money.

Yes, Robert Devereux, founder of the African Arts Trust, agreed, money certainly helps but the two most important things were time and, of course, passion. Never buy a work of art solely as an investment, he warned. And if you find you have too much stuff, he had an easy answer: lend — to friends, to pubs, wherever. AXA Art’s Andrew Davies rather surprisingly agreed: insurers did not always insist on laser beams and fancy alarms, though window locks were essential.

There were no surprises what The Museum of Everything’s James Brett recommended collecting: anything. The artist Peter Blake, for example, is almost incapable of passing a bric-à-brac stall without buying something. The Fine Art Society’s Patrick Bourne, however, warned that collecting modern art was risky, and advised building a relationship of trust between dealer and collector.

There are now more people in more countries collecting art, Susan Moore, saleroom columnist, confirmed, and buyers from emerging markets are pushing up prices. Fashion plays a part, she added, with 18th- and 19th-century art being surprisingly affordable. But trying to sell the unfashionable can be difficult: there is no guarantee that you will get your money back. So it’s crucial that you should like what you buy. All that passion...

— Liz Anderson

Radio
Care in the community
Kate Chisholm

‘We all need to rendezvous every week. It keeps us all as a community,’ said Jane Copey on the *In Touch* anniversary programme (produced by Cheryl Gabriel). The Radio 4 magazine for the blind and partially sighted has been around for 50 years dispensing advice and encouragement, hope and cheer. Nowadays it’s been cut to just 20 minutes, but at least it’s still in its Tuesday-evening slot, where it’s been scheduled for decades.

Copey was arguing for the survival of the programme, even though there’s now an online equivalent, called *Ouch!* Podcasts, downloads, internet chatrooms can all replicate radio but not the experience of listening in as a community, the feeling that, as you are hearing about how someone is coping with the onset of macular degeneration or the fear of a cataract operation, so there will be thousands of others also benefiting from this shared knowledge, shared understanding, shared optimism. One of Jane Copey’s first reports for the programme almost 40 years ago was recorded from the back of a tandem cycling through Richmond Park. Peter White, the current presenter who’s been blind since birth, heard it and was inspired to believe that anything is possible, no matter your disability.

It’s hard to define or evaluate this notion of ‘a community of listeners’, worryingly so. As the latest round of cuts to the BBC was announced by the director-general Mark Thompson last week, in response to the global economic crisis and the freezing of the licence fee, Radio 4 looks pretty safe. The cuts are being felt elsewhere (especially on local radio, which is another battle to be told). But minority-interest programmes like *In Touch* are an endangered species, and will always need defending.

Not so many years ago there was a sister programme, *Does He Take Sugar?* (whose title betrays its origins before the gender battles of the 1970s). That programme was cut because it was thought to be too nar-

row, too limited in scope, too paternalistic. In fact, the powers-that-be who have to make these decisions are often too busy to hear such programmes on a regular basis, and so they find it hard to appreciate that anyone and everyone can listen and enjoy them. How valuable it is to be able to hear what it feels like to negotiate the world as a blind person, and to hear this week-on-week, and not just as a one-off documentary. Who knows when you yourself might need to draw on this reservoir of information and insight, built up over years of having listened in each week?

All the presenters and most of the production team of the programme are blind or partially sighted. They rely on Braille, both to type up their scripts and then to read from them. They know just how much harder they have to work than the fully sighted (they might know Braille but it’s another story being able to read from it fluently at 90 words a minute). But they also know how much it is possible to overcome, and are keen to share this conviction, this motivation.

Community may be vulnerable to downsizing, lean thinking and the kind of casual violence we witnessed during the August riots, but it’s often cheerily resilient. Alan Dein began his new series of *Lives in a Landscape* (produced by Sara Jane Hall) on Monday morning by visiting Hackney, London E8, in the days after the looting and burning. He met Siva Kandiah, whose convenience store was ransacked and destroyed. Siva, a Tamil refugee from Sri Lanka, lost everything that he had built up over the previous 11 years; his whole shop destroyed in a single night. He had no contents insurance because, after a few years of paying out and never needing it, he assumed it was an unnecessary overhead. On the day the riots began he shut up shop early at 2.30 p.m. and went home. ‘My shop is safe,’ he thought, ‘because my shop is local. My people know me.’ That evening, live on TV, he saw his shop being attacked and rushed out to try to save it. The police wouldn’t allow him anywhere near the scene; nor were they doing anything to stop the looters.

A week later, though, Clarence Road was shut off to traffic for another reason: an afternoon tea party celebrating the local community and reasserting its values. A website was set up to save Siva’s store — by a former customer who now lives in New York — which raised £11,500 in fewer than 24 hours. Many of his regular customers gave him envelopes stuffed with notes, wanting him to reopen as soon as possible.

Alan Dein’s programmes are like portraits in sound, giving voice to Siva and to his neighbour, who runs a Caribbean restaurant. Her business suffered no physical damage, but she’s now taking only about £30 a day. ‘It’s gone so dead,’ she said. ‘People have gone. People are afraid of the road.’

