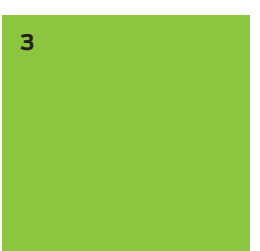


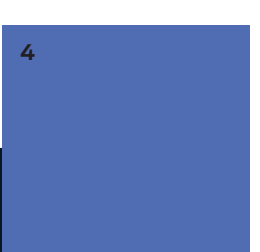


**THE
FRAME
GAME**

**GOLF-THEMED
ART IS HOTTER
THAN EVER.
HERE'S WHAT'S
IN DEMAND—
AND WHY**



**BY MICHAEL
CALLAHAN
ILLUSTRATIONS
BY JAMESON
SIMPSON**





THE GOLFERS BY CHARLES LEES, 1847

W **HEN YOU FIRST LOOK AT IT,** it’s hard to tell what exactly is going on. Properly attired 18th-century gentlemen lunge from different angles toward the cup, perhaps to challenge whose ball is away, perhaps to follow the path of a putt. Around the men are some 50 spectators—some engaged, some seemingly bored, all stylishly dressed—surveying or ignoring the moment to varying degrees. Painted in oil by the Scottish artist Charles Lees in 1847, “The Golfers: A Grand Match Played Over the Links of St. Andrews on the day of the Annual Meeting of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club,” is the most sought-after work ever to depict the game. “It’s probably the most famous painting in golf,” says Dale Concannon, the author of 17 books on golf and an art collector in Stratford-upon-Avon, England.

Lees, one of the greatest golf artists of the 19th century, did a series of detailed sketches of almost every individual pictured in the painting before assembling the final masterwork. Art experts believe the painting is one of the first to prominently feature such thorough renderings of its many spectators.

Since its completion, the work had been in a private collection of the Cheape family of Scotland, which at one time owned the Old Course at St. Andrews (a bunker on the second hole is named for the Cheapes). In 2002, the family decided to sell. Art circles buzzed with anticipation, smelling a record-setting sale. Eventually, “The Golfers” was offered to an American for about \$6 million—destined to become one of the highest-priced transactions in the history of golf art.

However, determined not to let a national treasure slip away, the Heritage Lottery Fund, a government arm that provides grants for the arts, with help from the private National Arts Collection Fund and the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, brokered a deal with the Cheape family for £2.2 million to keep the painting in Scotland; it now hangs in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh.

In the cloistered, rarefied air of the art world, such a kerfuffle—and such direct intervention by a government to snatch a work out of the hands of a collector—usually occurs only when the prize is some high-profile work of international acclaim. Two years ago, an unlikely consortium of Philadelphia blue bloods, politicians and art activists worked together to block the sale of Thomas Eakins’ 1875 “The Gross Clinic,” considered one of the finest depictions of early surgery, to Wal-Mart heiress Alice Walton. The group quickly raised \$30 million, assuring the painting would remain in the city.

But a golf painting? In the past two decades, as the collectibles market for vintage clubs, feathery balls and old tournament ephemera has exploded, the fine-art market has tagged along, breeding a committed, knowledgeable and sometimes surprisingly feisty cabal of collectors who spend hundreds of thousands of dollars for pictures signed by names like Lees, Lemuel Francis Abbott and Sir George Chalmers.

Retired British executive Tim Smartt and Jaime Ortiz-Patino, founder of Valderrama Golf Club in Spain, have two of the finest private collections of golf art in the world, according to many art experts; in the U.S., fervent lovers of the game have assembled impressive collections as well. Most of these include 18th- and 19th-century English and Scottish watercolors and

paintings. Ortiz-Patino, however, also owns invaluable Dutch images that pre-date the game, showing children holding golf-like clubs.

“The general art market has become a status symbol for many people who have accumulated wealth, so they display, they buy, they point proudly to this name or that name,” says real-estate entrepreneur Lowell Schulman, the founder of Atlantic Golf Club in Bridgehampton, N.Y., and a member of the U.S. Golf Association’s museum committee. “Golf art isn’t a status symbol. It’s owned only by passionate golf collectors. So the prices have appreciated, but only as the little world of golf collectors grows.”

‘T

“THERE’S A LOT OF GOLF ART out there,” says Rand Jerris, the director of the USGA Museum in Far Hills, N.J., which is undergoing a huge renovation and will reopen in May, along with the Arnold Palmer Center for Golf History. “There’s also a lot of bad golf art out there.”

Walk into any tournament tent or golf shop and you’ll see what he means: pretty schlocky stuff. That’s why much of the fine-art market for golf—which includes photography and sculpture but is mostly paintings—is focused on the hunt for originals from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, almost all done in the British Isles.

Most of this art remains in three places: the august golf clubs of the U.K.; the British Golf Museum, down the street from the R&A, which has art dating to the dawn of the game; and within the holdings of the original purchasing families. But in the 1980s, the golf collectibles market took off as Japanese collectors went on a buying spree that lasted until the turn of the century, loosening up supply. Jerris says Irish post-impressionist John Lavery produced about a dozen golf paintings during the early 20th century. “Twenty or 30 years ago, they were trading at \$25,000,” Jerris says. “Today they command \$250,000 to \$500,000.”

“The taste of collectors in this market is very traditional,” says Graham Budd, a London auctioneer who has managed several golf collectibles and art auctions for Sotheby’s. “They’re not really into the Tiger Woods era. They’re more interested in the real history of the game.”

Collectors save some of their greatest enthusiasm for golf-themed works by famous artists. Norman Rockwell produced a dozen illustrations or so about golf, from the famous “Missed,” which shows a group of skinny boys



WANT A HARTOUGH? GET IN LINE

We all have one spot that sums up what golf means to us: a famous place, like the 18th at St. Andrews, or a favorite fairway at our home course.

Whatever or wherever it is, there’s a chance Linda Hartough has immortalized it on canvas. During the past 20 years, she has become the first lady of golf art, painting landscapes of the most famous venues in the game and building a healthy business taking commissions from clubs around the world. How healthy? Well, she’s booked for the next two years.

If you have the patience—and \$80,000, the average price for one of her original oils—you can call her cozy Hilton Head Island gallery and hire her for a rendering. Hartough will travel to your club, study the terrain, take photos, and immortalize the scenery in oil. Private commissions account for a quarter of her business.

Hartough grew up around the game (her dad was a member at Big Spring in Louisville) and began painting at age 6. She built a nice if undistinguished career turning out portraits of horses and the like before a person with connections to Augusta National wandered into a gallery in 1984. Augusta was looking to commission a painting of Azalea, its famed 13th hole; Hartough got the gig. After the limited-edition prints sold out in days, she asked the club if it would like another. It did.

This spring she’s heading to St. Andrews and Pebble Beach to do homework for two commissions: official course portraits for the 2010 U.S. Open and British Open. “The only actual tournaments I go to anymore are the Masters, the U.S. Open and the British Open,” she says. “I know, I know,” she adds with a laugh. “Life is tough.” —MC

GALLERY OF THE GREATEST A sampling of treasures in the golf art world



JACK NICKLAUS
Andy Warhol, 1979



THE BLACKHEATH GOLFER
Lemuel Francis Abbott, 1790



THE GOLF PLAYER
Rembrandt van Rijn, 1654



KEEP YER EYE ON THE BALL
Clyde Ross Morgan, 1999



LADY ASTOR PLAYING GOLF AT NORTH BERWICK
Sir John Lavery, 1924



MISSED
Norman Rockwell, 1951

attempting to putt, to “The Score Pad,” a rendering of a golfer and his caddie originally commissioned as an advertisement for Beech-Nut gum in 1923. Andy Warhol did a portrait of Jack Nicklaus; sculptor Alexander Calder once created a work in wire of John D. Rockefeller in a golf pose. “These things turn up occasionally on the market, and if it’s a notable artist, they’ll attract considerable attention,” Jerris says.

Depictions of golf in art date back as early as 1350, with a golf-like game engraved into a stained-glass window of England’s Gloucester Cathedral. Even Rembrandt took a swing, as it were, depicting a game in a 1654 engraving. The earliest known painting that still exists is from 1746 and shows several players—and a random milkmaid—on a links in front of Edinburgh Castle. But few works before 1850 have survived, leaving an increasingly competitive scramble for the pedigreed works that do. Six years ago, Budd sold a rendering of Rye Golf Club by Harry Rountree, who illustrated the classic *Golf Courses of the British Isles*. The tiny work fetched a not-so-tiny £20,000—about \$39,000 at today’s exchange rate. “It ticked all the right boxes for the collectors,” Budd says. “It’s an acclaimed artist, it’s a known location, and it’s a very historic course that still exists.”

For veterans who mingle in the golf-art market, the hunt for the “score”—finding that elusive

bargain, or snatching that long-thought-lost lithograph—is as much a part of collecting as the appreciation of color, light and technique in the works. John Fischer, a Cincinnati attorney, picked up a passion for collecting from his father, who had amassed one of the finest collections of the watercolorist Arthur Weaver. Fischer’s bounty includes an impressive combination of original oils, watercolors, sculptures and archival-quality photographs, but he remains obsessed with his Holy Grail: locating a Valentine Green mezzotint of “The Blackheath Golfer” by Lemuel Francis Abbott. (Mezzotints are rare black-and-white prints made from engravings of original works.) The etching depicts William Innes, a patrician-looking English gentleman in a red coat with a club swung jauntily over one shoulder. A few steps behind is his faithful caddy, the remaining clubs under his left arm. Less than 15 mezzotints of the image are known to exist, and so far Fischer’s hunt has failed to yield one.

These days, such a search is undertaken on several fronts: from surfing the Web to looking through auction catalogs to networking gallery owners and art brokers. (*See “Getting started in art” on page 111.*) Twenty years ago, Concannon, a veteran of such treasure hunting, was plugged in enough to hear that Harry Vardon’s house in North London was being emptied. “After it was cleaned out, they found—under the floorboards

in the attic—these three images of Vardon in his great championships of the 1900s,” he says. Concannon bought the images, adding to a collection that today totals more than 250,000 photographs, including the original Hy Peskin shot of Ben Hogan hitting his 1-iron on the 18th hole at Merion in the 1950 U.S. Open. The photo hung in Hogan’s office for years.

“It’s maddening when you go down a bunch of alleyways that turn out to be dead ends,” says Fischer. “And then it’s sort of exciting when you find it. You have to learn to be patient. The fun is in the finding it.”

NOT EVERY COLLECTOR is out foraging for mint-condition oils of Old Tom Morris. The art market includes many modern works, and though a lot of it is bad art, some contemporary artists—like Utah sculptor Blair Buswell, who crafts the busts for the Pro Football Hall of Fame and produced a memorable statue of Jack Nicklaus sinking his famous putt at the ’86 Masters—are creating works sought by serious collectors. The problem, Buswell says, is that in his case there’s no real respect for sculpture. “They look at the sports sculptures I’ve done and say, ‘What’s the trophy for?’ ” he says. Such comments drive him slightly

mad. “That’s the stigma that goes along with bronze,” he says. But not always. Tim and Sally Gold, who own Burchfield’s Golf Gallery in Pinehurst, N.C., recently sold a life-size statue of Eddie Lowery (the 10-year-old caddie for Francis Ouimet in the 1913 U.S. Open) by contemporary Arizona sculptor Clyde Ross Morgan, for \$21,000.

This old-versus-new tension is, predictably, omnipresent in painting and photography as well. As with cheese, furniture and wine, there remains a certain whiff of snobbery from some collectors that if it isn’t old, it probably isn’t very good. “The challenge for a museum or a collector is to identify an artist who is working today in the more commercial vein, but who someday will rise to the top as the premier golf artist of their generation,” says Jerris. And how does one do that? He laughs. “It is virtually impossible to predict where tastes will go.”

Today’s artists seem to favor a dreamy, almost ethereal approach. Arthur Weaver, who at 90 is still painting, is known for his lush landscapes and has seen them rise in value. Likewise, Linda Hartough of Hilton Head Island has a cult following in the U.S. (*see “Want a Hartough? Get in line” on page 109*). Collectors include Nicklaus and Ian Baker-Finch. She has been described as “the Rembrandt of the back nine.”

In addition to offering works deeply saturated in bright, eye-popping colors, many modern golf artists eschew literal interpretations of hallowed courses in favor of more impressionistic renditions. Edgar Barnett’s “Norman at Augusta” is a panoramic mélange of emerald greens and sunlight yellows that shows Greg Norman, Larry Mize and Seve Ballesteros on the green of the first playoff hole at the 1987 Masters; Paul Gribble’s watercolor of Nick Faldo and Nicklaus at the ’90 Masters captures a Faldo tee shot wrapped in a soothing palette of pale blues and forest greens. British painter Kenneth Reed has created the official posters for several U.S. Opens and British Opens—his sweeping portrait of spectators, for instance, used as the image for the official poster for the 1995 U.S. Open at Shinnecock, is an assassination of color.

Painting “makes you part of a golf course,” says artist Joshua C.F. Smith, who counts among his collectors Tom Lehman, Tom Doak and Charles Schwab. Smith’s originals cost \$1,000 to \$5,000. “You get to honor and respect some of the best courses in the world just through trying to do them justice. I think that’s what I love about it—trying to capture what the architect had and what Mother Nature had and then putting both on canvas. It’s a unique challenge.”

More and more artists are booking com-

missions from enthusiasts. Artists such as Hartough, Smith and Dallas landscape painter Tom Fort have built thriving businesses fulfilling commissions from individuals and clubs eager to see their home course—or special hole, or bunker, or clubhouse—immortalized. “Someone might get a hole-in-one at a course and think, *Boy, I want something more than a scorecard and a golf ball. I want something that sings,*” says Fort, whose works range from \$2,000 to \$12,000.

“Golf is a sport that’s different from every other sport, because Joe Blow can go and play at a course where Tiger Woods has played,” says Smith. “So it gives us all courses we’d like to remember. There are certain settings that are burned into people’s brains. Having a piece of artwork allows them to be reminded of them.”

LIKE FISCHER, most collectors have that one piece—that one painting, sculpture or photo they will never stop searching for, never stop wanting. One of the most sought is Lavery’s “Lady Astor Playing Golf at North Berwick,” a 1924 portrait of the socialite valued at more than \$1.5 million and owned by a private collector in New York. It isn’t for sale and isn’t likely to be anytime soon.

If you gaze at the image of Lady Astor today, you don’t think about its monetary value. Instead, you see a woman in the finish position on a glorious, sun-splashed day along the Scottish coast, a tiny figure amid a sweeping links under fluffy white clouds against a gorgeous, cornflower-blue sky. The power of the painting comes not from its subject but by its transformational quality—its ability to make you wish you were there.

Benjamin Franklin wrote in *Poor Richard’s Almanac* in 1741, “Beauty, like supreme dominion, is but supported by opinion.” And so it goes with the world of golf art. One man’s Thomas Hodge or F.P. Hopkins is another man’s Linda Hartough. “To me, a golf course isn’t green,” Fischer says. “There are a whole bunch of shades of green, lots of browns, other colors in it, depending on the light. Hartough’s look is too green—every tree is green, the grass is green, everything’s green except the water, which is blue. It’s very idyllic, as opposed to what a golf course truly looks like.”

So he’ll stick with his old masters, and other collectors will become giddy owning more vivid renditions. And that, Jerris says, is how it should be. “My advice? Don’t buy art as an investment,” he says. “Buy it because you like to look at it.” 🏌️

GETTING STARTED IN ART

Jumping into the world of fine art can be intimidating. Follow these three steps to cut your chances of making a mistake.

SURF
The Internet offers tremendous resources for fledgling collectors. Both thesaleroom.com and invaluable.com list legendary and contemporary artists, sales, auctions and pricing. At artnet.com, you can track the price history of almost any golf artist, and Golf Links to the Past (golfspast.com) offers an overview of the collectibles market in general, with links for painting and sculpture. Finally, the three major art-auction houses—Christie’s (christies.com), Sotheby’s (sothebys.com) and Phillips (phillipsdeputy.com)—have regular sales of golf collectibles.

STUDY
Two excellent titles with extensive chapters on fine golf art are out of print but can usually be found through used-book sales or the Internet: *The Encyclopedia of Golf Collectibles* by John M. Olman and Morton W. Olman, and *The World of Golf Collectibles* by Sarah Fabian Baddiel. The big auction houses publish lush catalogs listing items with their estimated values. Finally, the Golf Collectors Society (golfcollectors.com) publishes a quarterly newsletter called “The Bulletin,” which updates what is coming onto the market, who’s collecting it, and what it’s worth.

SOCIALIZE
As in business, mentoring can help get you started. Join the Golf Collectors Society (\$50 annually), whose knowledgeable members can steer you through the often daunting art market. Its directory makes it easy to connect with a local collector. If you find yourself in the U.K, look up the man considered by many to be the premier broker of golf art today: Manfred Schotten, who has both a name and a lovely little shop straight out of Dickens (see schotten.com for details) and who publishes an authoritative catalog of works for sale. Auctions by the major houses in the U.S. and U.K. offer invaluable opportunities in procuring golf art—but, advises London auctioneer Graham Budd, don’t bid the first time you attend. Instead, watch and learn. “Auctions are dangerous for amateurs,” he says. “You have to know the market value, and you have to have the discipline to set a price in your mind and not go over that price.” —MC