

From paint to page

The New English Art Club celebrates 125 years with paintings to savour, and a series of notable publications pay tribute to talented artists and dealers



Fig 1: *Rajastani Man*, mixed-media by Madeline Fenton

THE Critics' Lunch of the New English Art Club (NEAC), which takes place towards the end of November during the annual show at The Mall Galleries, is one of the pleasantest occasions in the calendar. The generous cold buffet is supplied by the members—they do not stint—and the company is excellent. It is, of course, a very happy way to view the 10-day-long show, which is open to public submission, as well as to the 70 or so members.

This year, the club (and it prides itself on being clubbable rather than coldly associative) celebrates its 125th anniversary, and so is not as New as it was. The art on offer accepts that people may wish to enjoy it rather than be 'challenged' as the current cliché has it, and it is a haven for values that are not always observed at the RA or more fashionable areas of the market. One of my favourite paintings this year was a recent work by one of the older members, William Bowyer, patriarch of a talented clan. This 23in by 19in *Path to the Bell Hotel, Walberswick* (Fig 2) was a reminder of happy holidays. Another thing that took my fancy was an 11in by 9in mixed-media

study *Rajastani Man* (Fig 1) by Madeline Fenton. The NEAC



Fig 2: *Path to the Bell Hotel, Walberswick*, by William Bowyer, at the New English Art Club show

runs a valuable drawing school, and www.newenglishartclub.co.uk is well worth visiting, both by potential pupils and by buyers, even after the end of the show, which closed on December 5.

Last week, I mentioned the exhibition of David Russell's woodworking tools at Bernard Shapero in St George Street (to December 11) (Fig 3). Now to the

catalogue *Antique Woodworking Tools: Their Craftsmanship from Earliest Times to the 20th Century*, published by John Adamson at £90. This is a superb achievement, with more than 1,500 tools beautifully photographed by James Austin. Mr Russell was apprenticed to a joiner in Kendal before setting up his own successful building

firm, and his first love was a Norris plane that he was forbidden to touch. Now, he has more than 200 examples, and his interests widened to almost any craftsman's tool displaying quality and fitness to purpose. There are Continental and American as well as British examples, and Mr Adamson, himself knowledgeable on the subject, has contributed a valuable essay. There are paragraphs on tool types, makers and firms, and also the social history that produced particular designs.

Other books that have come my way recently include two memoirs of the antiques trade, with rather different perspectives. Molly Freeman, who traded under the name of Harriet Wynter, was the doyenne of the antique scientific instrument trade, with shops in Brighton and later the King's Road. In her early days,



Fig 3: A selection of plumb-lines from *Antique Woodworking Tools*