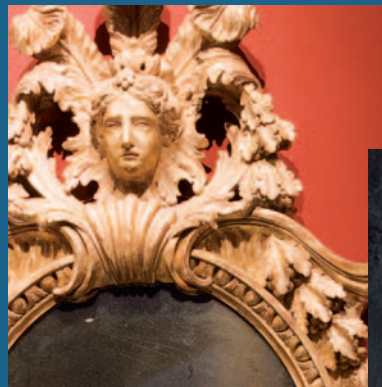


If I had \$1 Million



The New York Winter Antiques Show is America's most prestigious; and is also regarded as one of the important shows internationally. Its seventy-four dealers are the world's elite, and the objects they bring are among the rarest and finest on the market today. A perfect venue for the quest set for our five antiques lovers. The rules were simple: we were each given an imaginary amount of money (up to a million dollars) to spend at the show, and invited to select any four objects. To make it interesting, *Antiques & Fine Art* added a couple of requirements. Two of the pieces had to be objects outside our usual comfort zone, and one had to be priced less than \$15,000.



A Winter
Antiques
Show
Buying
Spree



The results were fascinating, reflecting the immense variety of objects on show. Great objects, regardless of their price, tend to tell a story; we are often too preoccupied to listen. The quest forced us to listen and we found our most interesting objects, such as the Enigma machine and the Regency miniature eye, from outside our areas of specialty, talking to dealers we might otherwise have passed by.

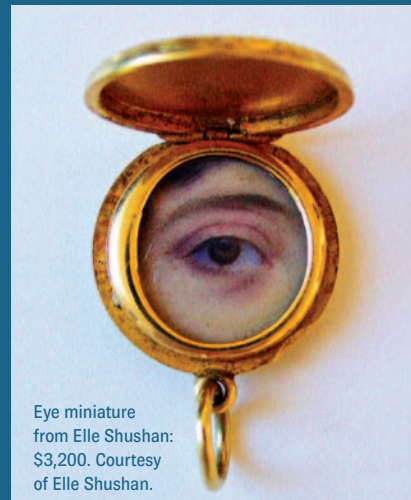
produced by Mark Golodetz



Chest on Chest from Leigh Keno: \$385,000. Photography by Michael L. Hill.



Painting by Laurencin from The Fine Art Society: \$100,000. Courtesy of The Fine Art Society.



Eye miniature from Elle Shushan: \$3,200. Courtesy of Elle Shushan.



Cockerel weathervane from Peter Tillou: \$275,000. Courtesy of Peter Tillou.

As collectors of English Georgian furniture, American furniture is generally not to our taste, but we surprised ourselves by falling in love with Leigh Keno's superb chest on chest (\$385,000). The richly figured mahogany with its warm, almost glowing, patina is something we have rarely seen on an American piece. Its graceful curved front, swan's neck pediment and ogee feet, and its impeccable provenance (it was once owned by the pioneering American furniture collector, Charles Davenport) helped convince our Anglophile eyes to put this exceptional piece on our list.

The extraordinary cockerel weathervane at Peter Tillou's stand could definitely be the centerpiece of our weathervane collection. This large, gutsy piece, priced at \$275,000, had spent centuries on a church steeple

through the bitter Maine winters. It is remarkable not only for its size (4½ feet high by 4 feet wide) but also for its strong lines and lovely patina of weathered copper. The split tail is particularly strong and gives it a tremendous sculptural vitality.

Collecting paintings is one of our greatest passions, and we swooned over a gorgeous Sargent portrait in Adelson Galleries' booth. At \$3.5 million, it was way out of our budget (we did ask if we could spend more and sadly, the answer was no!), so we continued our search, coming across a lovely oil by Marie Laurencin (French, 1885–1956) for \$100,000 offered by The Fine Art Society. We have long admired the distinctive style of Laurencin, and this painting of a woman in contemplative pose is a beautiful example of her work.

But for this assignment, we would certainly

never have discovered one of Regency England's most eccentric fads. As exhibitor Elle Shushan told us, the trend for eye miniatures started in 1786 when the Prince of Wales (later King George IV), not wanting to flaunt his marriage to the twice-widowed, Catholic Mrs. Fitzherbert, refused her request to wear his miniature portrait as was the custom. The wily George instead commissioned the royal miniaturist, Richard Cosway, to paint the Prince's eye and had it set in a locket. Mrs. Fitzherbert was captivated and immediately commissioned a miniature of her eye (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum). Although the man whose eye is reproduced in this tiny treasure, which Elle priced at \$3,200, will always be a mystery to us, we were charmed by its offbeat history and its allure as a conversation piece.



Phyfe guéridon from
Carswell Rush Berlin:
\$160,000. Courtesy of
Carswell Rush Berlin.

I'm fascinated by the thin line dividing the sublime and the ridiculous. Or maybe there is just something sublimely ridiculous about the art that catches my imagination.

"There is only one person uglier than myself, and that is my wife," was the proud boast of British colonial painter George Chinnery (1775–1852), who painted several portraits of himself. Owners of the portraits include the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the National Portrait Gallery, London, and the Peabody/Essex Museum, Salem, MA. The wonderful, tiny (only 9 1/4 inches high) Chinnery portrait offered by China Trade specialist Martyn Gregory for \$130,000, the only one not in the collection of an institution, speaks volumes about this notoriously talented and troubled genius—A master portrait painter who, for decades, made his subjects beautiful, but then wallowed in his own grotesqueness. Fantastic!

After admiring the beauty of the Hudson River School painting on the crest of a circa-1820's New York chair, one has to wonder how such absurdly shaped legs could support a person. But the chair was obviously sturdy, having survived in such a marvelous, "undisturbed" (dealers expression) condition for over 180 years, even retaining its original rush seat. Made of maple and other native woods, this "urban American Sheraton style" chair was remarkably well priced at \$6,500 at Courcier and Wilkins.

Since known provenance increases the value of a piece, Michele Beiny's price of \$175,000 for a magnificent Sevres vase seemed a trifle. Presented by Napoleon to the Prince de Talleyrand in 1813, and standing a little over 17 inches high, it's a spectacular example of the outstanding form known as "Vase Etrusque de 1810." The scene, La Tour des Souiris prè Bingen sur le Rhin, was painted by Swebach-Desfontaines, one of the most important landscape



Sevres vase from Michele Beiny: \$175,000.
Photography by E. Shushan.



Hudson River School painted chair from Courcier and
Wilkins: \$6,500. Photography by E. Shushan.



George Chinnery self portrait from Martyn Gregory:
\$130,000. Courtesy of Martyn Gregory.

painters at the Sevres factory during the Empire period. The gilt ornamentation is by Charles Christian Marie Durosey, one of the factory's most talented gilders. This porcelain masterpiece is indisputably worthy of its destiny as a gift from an Emperor to one of the greatest politicians in history.

Conveniently, the name of Phyfe & Sons was in use for only three years, 1837–1840, so my next object, a delightful cast iron and

marble guéridon, for \$160,000, may be dated almost exactly. Believed by dealer Carswell Rush Berlin to be the earliest documented example of indoor formal American cast-iron furniture, this diminutive table (29 inches high, 22 inches in diameter), also retains its original marble top. The marble, set into a conforming rosewood apron, bears an inscription in charcoal, “PHIFE [sic] & SONS,” presumed to have been inscribed by Phyfe's

marble supplier. Additional inscriptions on the brace identify the table as having been made for “Mrs. A Holmes/East Greenwich, R. I.” A native of Rhode Island, Alice Arnold Holmes (1782–1866), daughter of Colonel William Arnold, married shipping baron Captain Silas Holmes in 1807. They kept residences in New York, New Orleans, and Greenwich, Rhode Island, which were obviously furnished in the latest fashion.

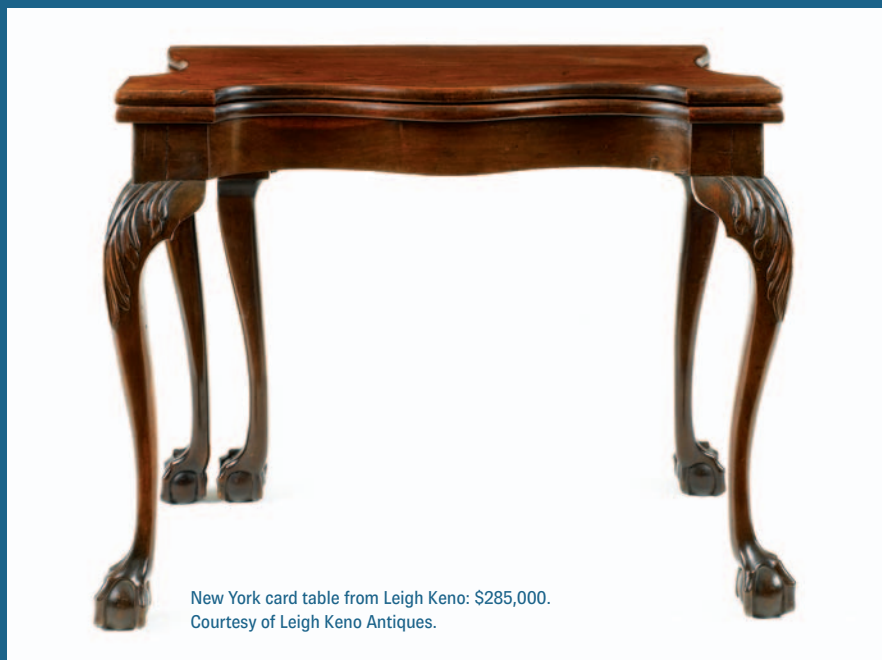
Margi Hofer, curator of decorative arts, New-York Historical Society

One of my roles as a curator is to expand our collection with objects relating to New York. Therefore, as part of my assignment I searched for pieces with regional associations. I found my first object almost immediately at Leigh Keno's booth. The elegant, sinuous five-



Bonnet from Morning Star Galleries: \$8,500. Courtesy of Morning Star Galleries.

legged New York rococo card table for \$285,000 caught my eye. For years I have been longing for one of these masterpieces of New York Chippendale furniture for the Historical Society's collection. Leigh Keno's example featured a boldly curved serpentine front, shapely cabriole legs terminating in solid, well-executed ball-and-claw feet, acanthus carving on the knees, and the notable absence of a gadrooned border on the skirt, which seemed to give it a weightless quality. Though it had minor condition issues (not unusual for a piece of its age), including a repaired leg and a missing card drawer, and no surviving history of its original owner, I was captivated by its dynamic form and delicate grace.



New York card table from Leigh Keno: \$285,000. Courtesy of Leigh Keno Antiques.

Frankl Skyscraper bookcase from Historical Design: \$250,000. Photography by Brad Shew, New York City. Copyright 2006 Historical Design, Inc., NY, NY.



My second pick, the centerpiece of Historical Design's booth, could not contrast more dramatically with the curvaceous card table—Paul Frankl's towering 8-foot skyscraper bookcase, all straight lines and hard angles, at \$250,000. The Historical Society has focused its recent collecting efforts on the twentieth century, and skyscraper-inspired objects rank high on the decorative arts wish list. Although Frankl's line of skyscraper furniture, introduced in 1927, included a variety of forms, the soaring verticality and jagged outline of the New York skyline is best captured by the bookcases. Historical Design's example was virtually identical to one in the original

Skyscraper Furniture catalogue from circa 1927, listed at \$300. Its bold orange-red interiors and black lacquered exterior had been redone, but in a manner consistent with the original decorative scheme.

Putting aside my curatorial focus for the objects outside my "comfort zone," I was drawn to the jewelry display at James Robinson and examined a stunning 18K bracelet by Paris jeweler Eugène Fontenay, made circa 1865 in the Etruscan Revival style. I inspected the amazingly intricate details of the design and, most importantly, made sure it looked as good on my own wrist as it did on the black velvet mount in the display case. It was an easy sale at \$36,500.

In search of a fourth item, I was drawn to the beaded bonnets at Morning Star Gallery's booth of antique Native American art, where I examined a bright blue bonnet of tanned hide with intricate beaded decoration of birds, flowers, and an exuberant potted plant. Morning Star's Vanessa Hernandez, explained that this Sioux bonnet (\$8,500) of around 1880 represented cross-cultural exchange, as the form was introduced to the tribe by Christian missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century. Native American bonnets are quite rare, and those that do survive were commissioned by missionaries' wives or made for Native American infants baptized as Christians.

Ronald Bricke, interior designer

Spend a million dollars at the Winter Antiques Show—Easy! As a designer, my approach is to look for items that are beautiful, unique, outstanding, or all of the above. I approached the project with zest. Finally! There is enough money to buy anything I want; and at one of the best sources in the world.

As a collector of antiquities, I knew I wanted the first- to second-century AD Roman torso of Apollo at the Safani Gallery priced at \$285,000. The torso is a Roman copy of the original Greek bronze statue known as the "Kassel Apollo," by Pheidias, circa 460–450 BC, and named after the replica in the Kassel museum in Germany. The overall form is elegant and dynamic. The surface of the marble

Library chair from
Dillingham: \$195,000.
Courtesy of Dillingham.



Roman torso from
Safani Gallery:
\$285,000.
Photography by
Michael L. Hill

Dresser teapot from The Fine Art Society: \$250,000. Photography by Michael L. Hill



Rosewood tea caddy from Hyde Park Antiques: \$12,000. Photography by Michael L. Hill.

has a soft glow with light traces of organic growth indicating its burial in the ground. The scale is impressive at approximately 32 inches high, and so beautifully made you hardly notice the missing legs and head.

My second choice was an important English George II walnut arm chair, circa 1730 at the Dillingham & Company booth. I was attracted to the extraordinary armrests with facing eagle heads. Acanthus carving at the knees and pad feet, and the very slender framing outlining the back made in burl walnut veneer complete the piece. Comfort added to the mix pushed me to the decision to buy at \$195,000.

I saw a beautiful half-spherical silver plated teapot by Christopher Dresser at The Fine Art Society—a registered design by James Dixon & Sons in 1879. Although small at 13½ inches, the teapot was pure form and a pioneering industrial design.

There are only seven known examples of this unique design, which probably accounted for the price—\$250,000. The ebony handle held by a semicircular support hovering over the body convinced me to make it my third choice.

My final selection was priced at \$12,000, to be well spent at Hyde Park Antiques. Here was the complement to my almost-modern Dresser teapot. A Regency rosewood tea caddy with its original glass containers. Strong in form, classical in design, large in scale, with exceptional graining in the wood, it would create an exciting tension with my teapot.

Reflecting on my purchases, I discovered that form and scale were for me the most important elements. I now have a chair to sit in while looking at a remarkable sculpture using my regency tea caddy to support my very individual teapot.

Mark Golodetz, writer and collector

My quest didn't start well; both Rosalind and I had fallen for the same cockerel weathervane in Peter Tillou's stand, but she beat me to it. However, within a couple of minutes, I was happily marking off the magnificent oval Italianate Kent mirror on Clinton Howell's stand for \$185,000. William Kent (1686–1748), at his best, juxtaposes a monumental formalism in his carved faces with an almost playful, sensual carving. Here were perfectly carved feathers, shells, vines, and oak leaves bursting with life; an exuberant backdrop to the cool beauty of the goddess Diana perched on the top.

Given that I frequently write about wine, I try to avoid antiques that have anything to do with the subject. But the English cellaret on Malcolm Franklin's booth was special. Cellarets like this are common; what made this one remarkable was the color, a lus-



Kent mirror from Clinton Howell: \$185,000. Photography by Michael L. Hill.



Cellaret from Malcolm Franklin: \$11,500. Courtesy of Malcolm Franklin.

Corinthian helmet
from Rupert Wace:
\$85,000. Courtesy
of Rupert Wace.



Tang horse from
Roger Keverne:
\$280,000. Courtesy
of Roger Keverne.



trous faded mahogany that spoke volumes about its history. It had not only survived several centuries but been enhanced by them. Price \$11,500.

I have always wanted a Tang horse because of their naturalistic modeling and bright colors. Roger Keverne had a glorious example, larger than usual, and seeming to have a real presence and character, the careful modeling sweetened by the lovely jewel-like earth tones of the paint. Definitely worth its \$280,000 price tag.



Enigma cipher machine from Kenneth Rendell: \$85,000.
Photography by Michael L. Hill.

At Kenneth Rendell's booth. I almost literally ran into an Enigma cipher machine. Looking like a glorified typewriter put together by a mad DIY fanatic, this was used by the Germans to send coded messages to their U boats in the North Atlantic during World War II. Deciphering the code was one of the most important breakthroughs for the Allies. After the war, the British government put a large bounty on Enigma machines to prevent them from falling into Soviet hands, so few have survived. Less than a spear throw away, at Rupert Wace's booth, lay another weapon; a simply constructed Corinthian helmet made from bronze in the seventh century. Reflecting a time when battles were hand-to-hand affairs, often between neighboring villages, today it can be seen as just beautiful, savage, and slightly alien in appearance. The pale turquoise of its slightly corroded bronze, and its relatively small size (it was probably worn by a youth) made this a stunning object at \$85,000. The two pieces reflecting warfare from their respective eras made sense as a single exhibit, so I cheated and counted it as one. Even so, like the others, I spent far less than a million dollars. We are a frugal lot! 🍷

Mark Golodetz is a contributing editor to The Wine Enthusiast and also consults for corporate and private cellars. He can be reached at MarkGolodetz@aol.com. He is a regular contributor to Antiques & Fine Art.