

Bond Street's heist!



THE EARL OF GOWRIE (left) and Thomas Gibson—an Old Etonian art coup that left American dealers seething.

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By Alexander Walker

IN WHAT was definitely not part of the Bicentenary celebrations, a couple of Old Etonians have just pulled off a coup that has left the American art dealer establishment seething with resentful chauvinism.

Under the noses of the New York dealers—noses that are continually sniffing out the rare and highly-priced—the two-man Bond Street outfit of Thomas Gibson and his partner the Earl of Gowrie have transferred one of the last major works of Jackson Pollock from private hands to the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

Trade sources, which are as reliable as they are envious, believe the price paid for Pollock's *Lavender Mist* was a world record one of over two million dollars, or about £1,300,000 at today's exchange rate.

"We are delighted the painting is coming to us," says Charles Parkhurst, the Washington National Gallery's assistant director. "It's a splendid picture." He added: "We were very surprised when, after expressing interest in the picture to its owner, American artist and

collector, Alfonso Ossorio gave us the word to see these two young London dealers.'

Contrast

Thomas Gibson, who opened his Bond Street business a mere five years ago, was the Earl of Gowrie's "fag" at Eton. Lord Gowrie—"Grey" to his friends—is a poet as well as an art dealer and an Opposition spokesman in the Lords. He joined Gibson two years ago.

They make a winning contrast. Gibson is neat, efficient, aggressive in business dealings and what is known as a good "closer" of deals. Lord Gowrie has the more tranquil manner, the more poetic approach—"His lyrical tongue is of great help in such million dollar deals," says his partner with a shade of quiet contentment.

The two visit America about seven times a year. They specialise in being

given requests by foundations and museums for specific works of art needed to enhance collections—and then marrying up the buyer to the seller. It is an exacting process of detection and persuasion.

Their last coup was selling Henry Moore's life-size bronze, *King and Queen*, to the American magnate Norton Simon. The price was undisclosed, but is believed to be around half a million dollars, then a record for such a work.

Smoothly

"I met Mr Ossorio at a friend's supper-party in New York about eight years ago," says Gibson, "and since then I have been helping him disperse some of his collection, which is among the best in private hands in America and includes De Koonings, Dubuffets and Pollocks."

Why did Ossorio take to this essentially English dealer when he was being wooed by some of New York's most avid art-brokers? "I think," says Gibson, modestly but discreetly, "he found that things went very smoothly. The negotiations for the Pollock sale were of Kissinger-like delicacy, but there was no hard bargain-

ing." It is the Washington gallery's first major Pollock.

Gibson agrees that it is a pity such native expertise cannot enhance the galleries of Britain, but at present prices this would hardly be realistic.

"So the next best thing is do the deal for Americans in America and that way at least some of the money comes back to Britain." Transatlantic art dealers, meanwhile, are not likely to relish this modest example of British patriotism in Bicentenary year.

Free range

Richard Cork writes: *Lavender Mist*, which was first exhibited in Pollock's memorable one-man show at the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, in 1950, is one of the most mature examples of his abstract period. Mural-size and covered all over with the frenetic rhythms of Pollock's gestural paint-marks, it represents a definitive demonstration of the style which made him so notorious 26 years ago and so important a modern artist today.

The canvas was treated as an arena, almost a battleground, for Pollock's determination to achieve as close a correspondence as possible between *how* he painted and *what* actually appeared on the picture itself. He used to lay his canvases on the floor and approach them from all sides, pouring paint from the pot and indulging in a whole range of free yet disciplined ways of making marks.

Lavender Mist is, therefore, the sum of the gestures Pollock flung at it in his characteristically abandoned dance around the picture during its execution. Oil, enamel and aluminium paint all coalesce on the surface, creating a variety of densely textured marks which all stress the flatness of the picture, and refuse to emphasise one area at the expense of any others.

Alfonso Ossorio, the painting's original owner, has noted that Pollock even used faint handprints on the raw canvas, but the main stress is