



Looking Back at John Osborne: Pictures and Possessions from his Estate, The Hurst, Shropshire

London, UK: John Osborne (1929-1994) was the original “angry young man” whose play *Look Back in Anger* disrupted the complacency of 1950s England, gave voice to a new generation, and made British theatre important again.

Now, as a new production of that first “kitchen sink drama” is due to open at The Almeida Theatre and Oasis is set to reprise the songs of their angry youth, a collection of John Osborne’s most personal possessions from the house in which he spent his final years is coming to auction. **The Olympia Auctions sale of pictures and possessions from The Hurst will be held online from 10th – 20th October, with all items on view to the public from 13th – 18th October. Estimates range from £50 - £5,000.**

In 1986, John Osborne and his fifth wife, drama critic Helen Dawson, fled the South-East for a quieter life in Shropshire. The Hurst, a large 1812 house on the outskirts of Clun, became their final home. Here he wrote the second volume of his autobiography, *Almost a Gentleman*, a collection of non-fiction writing, *Damn You, England*, and his last play *Déjà Vu* in which *Look Back*’s Jimmy Porter reappears as an older man.

On Osborne's death in 1994, The Hurst was acquired by The Arvon Foundation, one of the UK's leading arts organisations, with the aid of an Arts Council Lottery Grant and has since been cherished as a retreat for Arvon's creative writing courses.

The Hurst will always be redolent with the atmosphere of the Osbornes and some of their furniture remains in use but items which have been packed away since Osborne's death are now being sent for sale.

The Hurst's Director Jo King said: "The paintings, posters, photographs, books, diaries, awards, mementos and desk paraphernalia being sent for sale surrounded Osborne as he wrote and lavishly entertained. Accumulated over a lifetime, there are posters, playbills, programmes and books relating to all his major works: *Look Back in Anger*, *The Entertainer*, *Luther*, *A Patriot for Me*, *Inadmissible Evidence*, *The World of Paul Slickey*, *Hotel in Amsterdam*, *Dejavu* and more.

"It is not just the Osbornes who are present in this collection. Cecil Beaton, Lord Snowdon, John Betjeman, Melvyn Bragg, Laurence Olivier, Alan Bates, Patrick Procktor, Leonard Rosoman, Trevor Howard, Denholm Elliott and former wives Mary Ure and Jill Bennett: so many luminaries of the mid to late 20th century are represented. It's a treasury of theatrical and cultural life centred around one of its most enduring figures.

"Thirty years on, it seems right to let John and Helen's possessions find new homes – and help us, by their proceeds, to carry out essential repairs to the house and grounds."

Photographs show Osborne in hats, scarves, sunglasses, watches and a ring that are also included in the sale. A set of Ibsen's plays, texts on Fielding's Tom Jones and other books speak of the authors who influenced him or whose work he adapted for film and television. There is a teddy bear and a toy squirrel, possibly signifying the relationship Osborne continued to enjoy with his first wife Pamela Lane long after their divorce in which he was "Bears" and she "Squirrel". A collection of walking sticks tells of the pleasure he took in the Shropshire hills. There is even a sporan, part of the country gentleman look he favoured in later life. And for those who would like to emulate John Osborne on a Saturday night, there are cushions from his sofa and a box of VHS recordings to go through.

The John Osborne sale includes:



LORD SNOWDON (1930 - 2017)

1979, three black and white studio portraits of John Osborne, wearing sunglasses and smoking a cigar, framed and glazed; together with a pair of John Osborne's sunglasses.

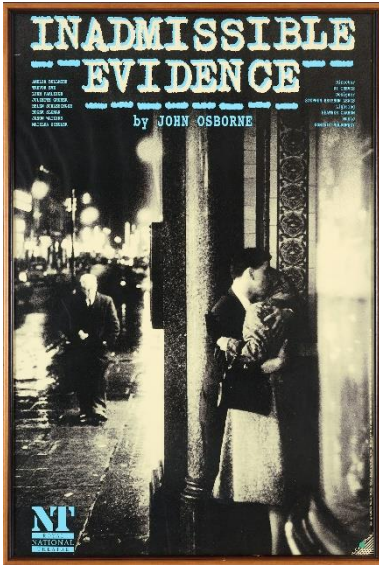


CECIL BEATON (1904 -1980), 8 PELHAM PLACE, KENSINGTON, JULY 1956

two black and white portraits of John Osborne seated by a sunlit window, framed as one, signed Cecil Beaton in pencil; together with another of the playwright in profile, unframed (3) 54 by 28cm



JOHN OSBORNE, JONATHAN STEDALL AND SIR JOHN BETJEMAN, 1983
Two black and white photographs of John Osborne seated with Jonathan Stedall and John Betjeman in the latter's study, framed as one; together with a black and white photograph of John Osborne reclining in a chair, circa 1970s, framed and glazed 14 by 10cm; 17 by 20cm



INADMISSIBLE EVIDENCE, JOHN OSBORNE
poster, Patrick Procktor image, signed lower right, Royal Court Theatre; together with another for the Royal Court Theatre; a Royal National Theatre poster, framed and glazed; and a novelty 'Inadmissible Evidence' stone paperweight



EVENING STANDARD DRAMA AWARD, 1965
An Evening Standard Drama Award, 1965, signed Frank Dobson, inscribed "Awarded to John Osborne for A Patriot for Me".



A CHALCEDONY SEAL, MID 19TH CENTURY engraved with a coat of arms of a hand holding a sword impaling a crown, in later gold ring mount; together with three promotional black and white gelatin silver prints of Laurence Olivier, John Osborne and Melvin Bragg for The Southbank Show's documentary, "Laurence Olivier - a Life " (1982)



NIGHT SCENE - MAXIMILLIAN SCHELL AS REDL BY LEONARD ROSOMAN (BRITISH, 1915-2012)

This vast oil on canvas is 184 x 184cm; 72 1/2 x 72 1/2in (framed) depicts Redl, the central character of Osborne's play *A Patriot for Me* first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 1965. It was Osborne's most ambitious staging, requiring a remarkably large cast of some 30-plus actors. The play is based on the story of Redl, an elite officer in the Austro-Hungarian army in the 1890s, who was blackmailed by the Russians for being homosexual. It is notorious for the drag ball that starts the second act, a scene that forced the Royal Court to operate as a private members club to circumvent the censors. The role of Redl was played by the Swiss actor Schell, and the role of Baron von Epp by George Devine who suffered a heart

attack at the end of the play's run and died early the following year. Rosoman was fascinated by *A Patriot for Me* and painted a series of large canvases of scenes from the play of which Night Scene is one. Rosoman's series was shown in New York before being shown at Rolland Browse & Delbanco in London. (£4,000 - £6,000)

ALTERCATION IN THE CEMETERY AMIDST TOMBS BY JOCELYN HERBERT (1917-2003)



Gouache, wash and collage on paper. Herbert was a highly sought after set and costume designer for the Royal Court and theatres across the West End. She was the daughter of the humourist, novelist, playwright and MP AP Herbert, and the longterm partner of George Devine (1910-1966) who founded the English Stage Company in 1956, produced *Look Back in Anger* the same year and was Osborne's greatest supporter. Osborne was chippy with Herbert, finding her airs and graces distinctly upper-class, but they became close friends and associates, Herbert designing the sets and costumes for a number of Osborne's plays. (£50 - £80)

A SELECTION OF PERSONAL ITEMS



Some of the above items pictured and others mentioned in the press release appear in the following descriptions of John Osborne's house from the biography 'John Osborne A Patriot for Us', by John Heilpern, first published in 2006. The author visited Osborne's wife, Helen Dawson, who was still living at The Hurst three years after his death, in 1997.

"Once inside this well-lit place, however, it was clear that.....only a man of the theatre had once lived there. The hallway was crowded with framed posters of several of the plays. Leonard Rosoman's paintings of the 1965 production 'A Patriot for Me' ascended the staircase. Surprisingly corny cushions spelt out embroidered messages from a bench: "You ARE leaving on Sunday, aren't you?" "It is difficult to soar like an eagle when you're surrounded by turkeys." "Eat Drink and Remarry!" p. 6

"His possessions – walking sticks in the hall, dandyish clothes in the wardrobe, spectacles and pens on his desk – were still in place at the house." p. 13

"It would be a rush to judgement to claim the teddies as Osborne's "Rosebud". True, he had a teddy bear as a child. It was his only personal possession, he claimed, in a joyless childhood. But there were too many of them around the house, like fey talisman warding off evil, to be the secret to anything except his surprising whimsy. In the guest room where I slept, for example, a teddy in a velvet clip-on bow tie was perched on a sofa facing the bed. I didn't notice him at first. He was *discreet*." p.13

High res images and full captions available on request

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Editor's Notes

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