

Press Release
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John Russell Taylor and Alfred Hitchcock, 1970s

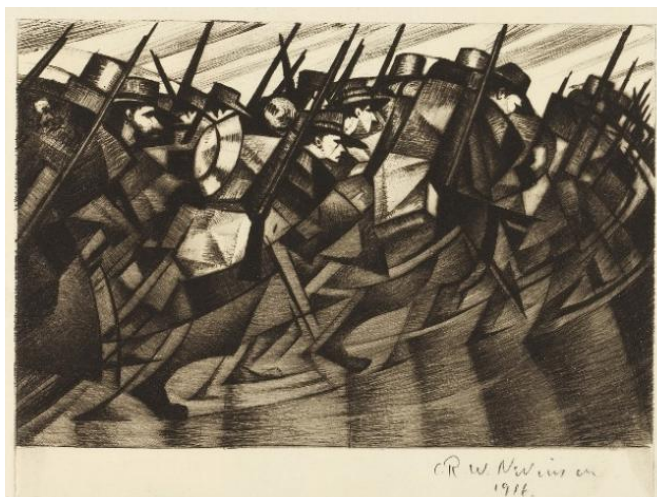
PRIVATE COLLECTION OF HITCHCOCK'S BIOGRAPHER RENOWNED AUTHOR, CRITIC & COLLECTOR JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR HEADS TO AUCTION

JANUARY 2026. Olympia Auctions is honoured to present the private collection of John Russell Taylor (1935–2025), the authorised biographer of Alfred Hitchcock and one of Britain's most influential cultural critics of the post-war era. The auction on **February 11, 2026** will reveal a very personal insight into a writer whose talent spanned film, theatre, literature and the visual arts and whose intellectual curiosity shaped more than six decades of cultural debate.

Taylor is best known internationally for *Hitch: The Life and Times of Alfred Hitchcock* (1978), written with the director's full cooperation and still regarded as the definitive biography of one of the most influential and recognisable filmmakers in the history of cinema. Over the course of Taylor's career he wrote some 50 books, including studies of British drama, Hollywood cinema, Art Nouveau and modern painting, as well as serving as The Times' theatre and film critic during the 1960s before becoming its art critic from 1978 until 2005. Educated at Dover Grammar School, Jesus College Cambridge, where he took a starred first in English and the Courtauld Institute of Art, Taylor combined scholarly rigour with an exceptional visual intelligence and memory.

In the catalogue introduction for the sale, art historian Andrew Lambirth recalls that when he began writing in the 1980s, Taylor was at the peak of the profession, known for his lightly worn erudition, his clear but relaxed prose and the authority he exercised with generosity rather than dogma. Lambirth describes him as more accurately a cultural critic than an art critic, noting that his conversation ranged freely across literature, film, theatre and art and that this same range animates the collection offered here. He writes that this very personal collection is full of delights and surprises.

Taylor acquired his first original painting at the age of twelve, a seventeenth-century Dutch oil affectionately known in his family as “John’s Old Master” and continued collecting for more than seventy years. He famously researched and collected without notebooks or tape recorders, relying instead on what Lambirth describes as a phenomenal memory and an efficient mental filing system. Charing Cross Road bookshops and Portobello Road stalls were favourite haunts, where he located works by artists overlooked by fashion but rich in visual, historical and human interest.



Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson (British 1889 – 1946)
Returning to the Trenches
£20,000 - £30,000



Frances Hodgkins (New Zealand 1869 – 1947)
The Tea Party
£3,000 - £4,000

The collection spans painting, drawing, printmaking, illustrated books and theatre and ballet designs, and reflects Taylor’s huge range of interests and eclectic taste, tempered by a deep interest in artistic experiment. Artists represented include Edward Bawden, Robert Bevan, Frances Hodgkins, Paul Nash, C.R.W. Nevinson and Austin Osman Spare alongside drawings by Edouard Vuillard, Edward Coley Burne-Jones and Graham Sutherland. Highlights include a rare Vorticist abstraction by Frederick Etchells, an unusual Cubist still life by Edward McKnight Kauffer, Neo-Romantic works by John Craxton, Keith Vaughan, Robert Colquhoun and Denton Welch, and theatre and ballet designs by Benois, Osbert Lancaster and Patrick Procktor. The collection also includes books illustrated by Lucian Freud, John Craxton and Keith Vaughan, among many others.

Themes running through the collection closely reflect Taylor's own writing and intellectual concerns, including the First World War, Art Nouveau and the fin de siècle, Symbolism, women artists, Jewish and émigré artists, inter-war British Romanticism, overlooked figures in modern British art, and gay artists of the post-war period. Many of the works relate directly to subjects on which Taylor published monographs, making the collection a visual counterpart to his books.



The hallway, John Russell Taylor's flat, 2025



Sitting room, John Russell Taylor's flat, 2025

Adrian Biddell, Art Specialist at Olympia Auctions, notes that what defines the collection is its extraordinary diversity, which mirrors Taylor's encyclopaedic mind. He observes that Taylor was less interested in monetary value and far more driven by the visual impact of a work, the artist's back story, and their significance within a particular medium. Biddell adds that Taylor's frames of reference were exceptionally wide and that virtually every work in the collection opens onto a broader cultural narrative, reflecting his interest in artists of diverse backgrounds and identities.

John Russell Taylor died in August 2025 at the age of ninety. This auction offers not simply the dispersal of a private collection, but a rare insight into the visual imagination of a critic who shaped Britain's cultural conversation for more than half a century. It presents art chosen not for fashion or prestige, but for meaning, conviction and the pleasure of looking, and offers collectors and scholars alike the opportunity to encounter the world through the eyes of one of its most perceptive observers.

**For thumbnail images of photographs of JRT, flat interior & highlights, see following pages, 4-9.
All images available in high res [HERE](#)**

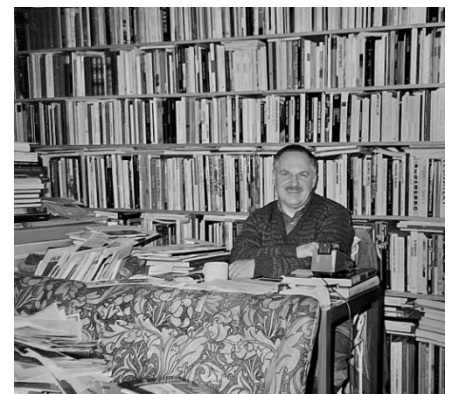
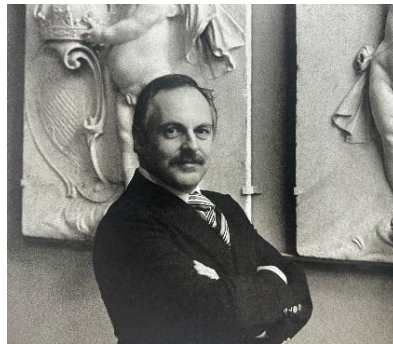
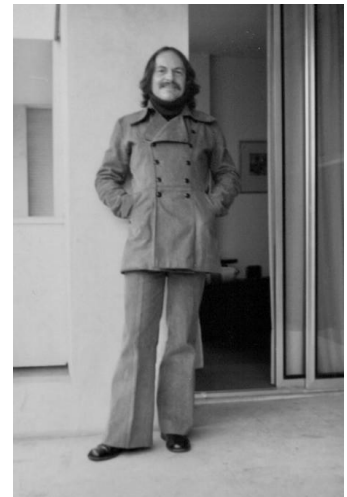
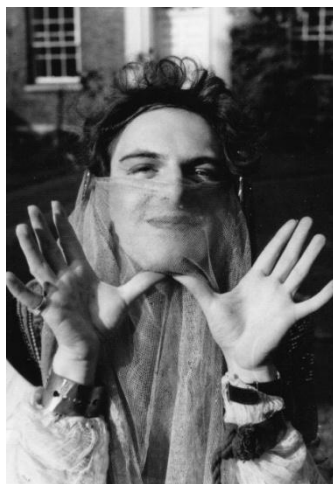
For more information on Olympia Auctions please go to: <https://www.olympiaauctions.com/>

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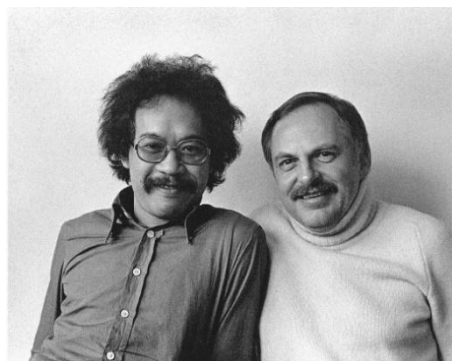
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PHOTOGRAPHS OF JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

Top row: JRT as a boy, a student, at his desk in a tartan waistcoat. Second row, with Alfred Hitchcock, in drag, as a young man. Third row, with Maximilian Schell, with arms crossed in front of classical reliefs, and sitting in front of bookshelves in his flat. Bottom row: JRT with his partner Ying Yeung Li. Copyright © John Russell Taylor Family Archive



20th CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
NOVEMBER 9-23, 1984
Director Maximilian Schell discusses his film
"MARLENE" with John Russell Taylor of the
London Times.



JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR'S FLAT, BROOK GREEN, WEST LONDON. 2025. Copyright © Olympia Auctions



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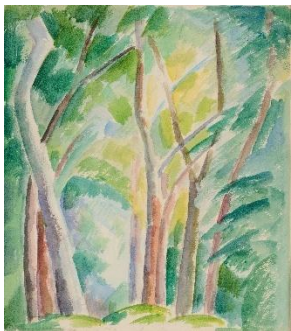
4
Denton Welch (British 1915-1948)
Still Life of Flowers in a Vase
£2,000 - £3,000



9
Richard Eurich RA (British 1903-1992)
Cornish Landscape
£3,000 - £5,000



14
John Craxton RA (British 1922-2009)
Landscape with figure
£1,000 - £1,500



17
Edward McKnight Kauffer
(American/British 1891-1954)
Trees
£800 - £1,200



18
Ithell Colquhoun (British 1906 - 1988)
Study of Tulips in a Vase
£700 - £900



19
Frances Hodgkins (New Zealand 1869 - 1947)
The Tea Party
£3,000 - £4,000



20
Robert Colquhoun (British 1914-1962)
Lobsters
£4,000 - £6,000



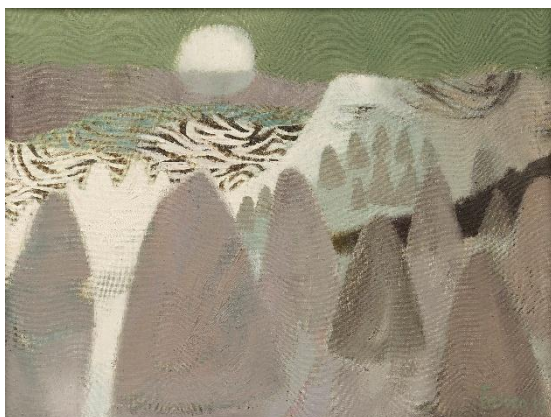
23
John Craxton RA (British 1922-2009)
Sleeping Boy
£6,000 - £8,000



27
Edmund Dulac (French-British 1882 – 1953)
Design for a Rug
£400 - £600



28
John Craxton RA (British 1922 – 2009)
Goat reaching for thorn fruit
£3,000 – £4,000



34
Mary Fedden RA (British 1915-2012)
Cappadocia
£4,000 - £6,000



40
Edward Bawden RA (British 1903-1989)
Horns and Antlers
£3,000 - £4,000



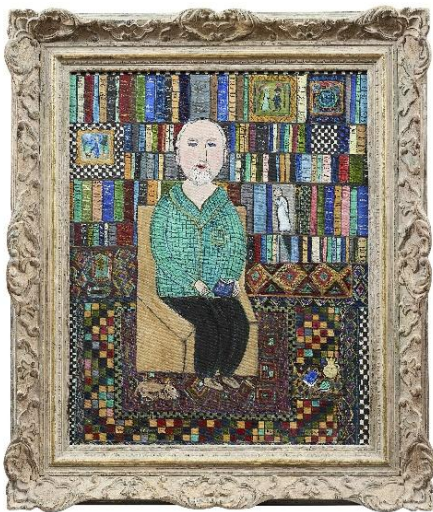
Left:
45
Robert Anning Bell RA
(British 1863-1933)
Mother and Child
£800 - £1,200



Right:
41
Samuel Rabin (British 1903-1991)
A Work Out
£400 - £600



75
Helen Brightwell (British 1876 – 1967)
Ariel. Prospero and Miranda; the
Tempest; Ferdinand
£300 - £400



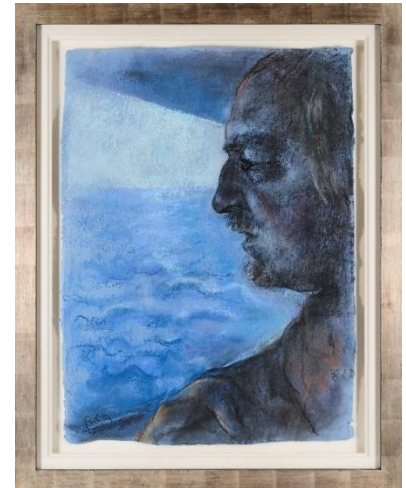
102
Dora Holzhandler (British-French 1928-2015)
JRT at Home with his Books
£800 - £1,200



107
Bernard Meninsky RA (British 1891 – 1950)
Landscape with Figures
£800 - £1,200



Left:
119
Frederick Etchells (British 1886 – 1973)
Vorticist Composition
£20,000 - £30,000



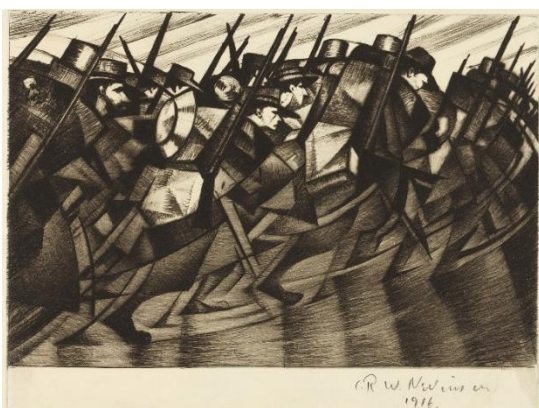
Right:
129
Zsuzsi Roboz (Hungarian 1929-
2012)
Portrait of John Russell Taylor
£300 - £400



171
Keith Vaughan (British 1912 – 1977)
Erotic Fantasy
£500 - £700



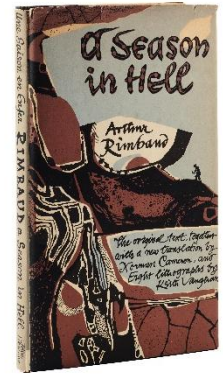
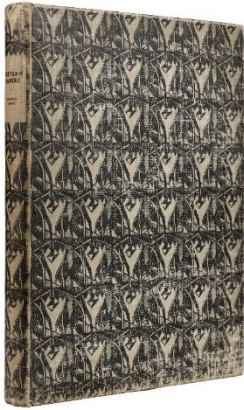
220
Sir Osbert Lancaster (British 1908-1986)
Set design for the dungeon in the Rake's Progress
£800 - £1,200



265
Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson
(British 1889-1946)
Returning to the Trenches
£20,000 - £30,000



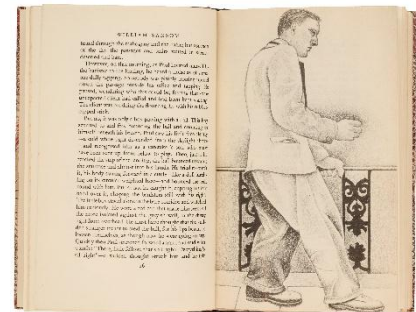
289
Joyce Kilmer
Trees
£40 - £60



277
Curwen Press, 1928
A specimen book of pattern papers
designed for and in use at the Curwen Press
with an introduction by Paul Nash, Curwen
Press, London, First Edition
£500 - £700

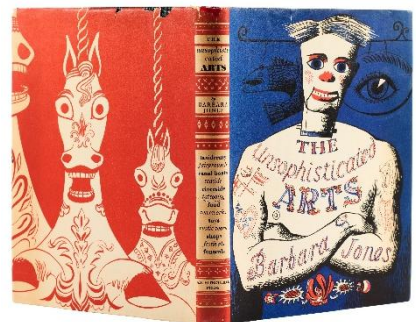
283
Edward Ardizzone
Baggage to the Enemy published by John
Murray, First Edition, 1941, Hardcover
£40 - £60

292
Arthur Rimbaud
A Season in Hell
£300 - £400



293
A complete 78-volume set of new excursions
into English poetry (1944-1947)
£400 - £600

304
William Samsom
The Equilibrad
£800 - £1,200



312
John Betjeman
First and Fast Loves
Published by John Murray, First Edition,
1952, Hardcover
£50 - £70

318
Barbara Jones
The Unsophisticated Arts
published by The Architectural Press, First Edition,
1951, Hardcover
£80 - £120

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