

# JOHN O'CONNOR CAPTURES THE ESSENCE OF PORTUGAL

**ENTERTAINMENT**

## SYMPHONIES, SONATAS AND PRELUDES AT THE GULBENKIAN

THE EXHIBITION of John O'Connor's drawings, water-colours and oil paintings, held from October 23 to 30 at Lisbon's Grémio Literário, was nothing short of a triumph. Several hundred guests packed into the salon for opening night to wish this young British artist well – and their obvious delight with his work was deserving praise for a man whose talent, energy and industry came across loud and clear from every one of the 50 pieces shown.

His command of the medium, no matter what medium, was strong and sure. Some of the drawings, for instance, were in pencil alone; others in pencil with a wash over; others were highlighted with white, or sepia. All were exquisite renderings – and all of them studies of typical scenes

in the Sintra, Cascais or Mafra areas.

Indeed, almost all of the works in the show were of Portuguese themes – only a couple of still lifes being done in London, where Mr. O'Connor lives and works as a teacher at the Chelsea College of Art and Goldsmith College.

Mr. O'Connor has been coming to Portugal for a few months every year since 1973, and has a house and studio in Sintra. So it should be of little surprise that a man of his many talents should have developed an eye for what is essentially Portuguese, and in turn be able to transpose the flavour of this country on to canvas or paper.

"But he has failed to capture the special light that is Portugal!" exclaimed one critic at the opening.

This reviewer begs to differ. The lady in question made this remark, so I thought,

perhaps before she had seen all of the works – so I took the opportunity of leading her across to two water-colours which only seconds before I had been admiring precisely because I thought they had captured exactly a certain light that falls on the Serra de Sintra like a pink veil.

The two works – "View of the Castelo de Mouros from the Pena", and "Serra de Sintra from the North" – had obviously been noticed by others, and no doubt for that special quality of light. Both had been sold!

My favourite painting of all was a small water colour entitled "Marquis de Pombal's House". The detail, the colours – a little gem. Someone else had noticed it, too, for it also had been sold before the close of the evening.

Of the oil paintings – all of them masterfully accomplished, my favourite was "The Jewel Box". A large canvas, showing two children rummaging through a wooden chest, the girl fondling a string of pearls she has pulled out, the boy seated next to her with an expression of aloof curiosity; the whole appears like a scene viewed through a keyhole – an illicit glimpse back at a moment of childhood's discoveries.

Born in 1945, John O'Connor studied at the Chelsea School of Art, twice gaining top honours for his drawing. Later he studied at the famous Slade School of Fine Art. His work has included commissions for the Royal Observatory at Kew; the Stratford Motor Museum; Court House, King's Sutton in Oxford, and the Clothworkers' Company in the City of London.

His works have also been collected by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Arts Council of Great Britain, and Somerville College, Oxford.

**J.J.H.B.**


"The Jewel Box".

Four concerts are scheduled to be performed at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon over the next week. Tonight (November 6) at 9.30 pm and tomorrow at 6.30 pm in the Main Auditorium, the Gulbenkian Orchestra, conducted by Silva Pereira with violin soloist Elmar Oliveira will play Beethoven's "Namensfeier" Overture, Prokofiev's Concerto No. 2 for violin and orchestra and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 7 (compiled by Bogáteyryev).

November 10 (Main Auditorium) at 6.30 pm: the baritone John Shirley-Quick accompanied by pianist Ian Burnside perform Purcell's "Lord What is Man?", an evening hymn, Williams's "Songs of Travel"; Pfitzer's "Five Songs"; Liszt's "Three Petrarch Sonnets" and Ravel's "Histoires Naturelles".

November 11 (Main Auditorium) at 6.30 pm: Pianist Peter Donohoe plays Rachmaninov's Preludes, Beethoven's Sonata in A Major and Stravinsky's Petrushka.

November 13 (Main Auditorium) at 6.30 pm: violinist Max Rabinovitsj and pianist Elizabeth Allen perform Mozart's Sonata in B Flat Major, Schumann's Sonata in A Minor and Prokofiev's Second Sonata in D Major.

The Gulbenkian Foundation is situated at Avenida de Berna 45, the box office telephone number is 77 41 67.

## MALUDA IN COLLECTIVE

The Galeria de São Bento is celebrating its second anniversary with an exhibition of paintings by Portuguese artists Carga-leiro, Charters d'Almeida, Maluda and Noronha da Costa. The show will close on November 25.

Galeria de S. Bento is located at Rua do Machadinho 1, Lisbon and is open from 11.0 am to 1.0 pm and from 3.0 to 8.0 pm daily except Sunday and Monday mornings.