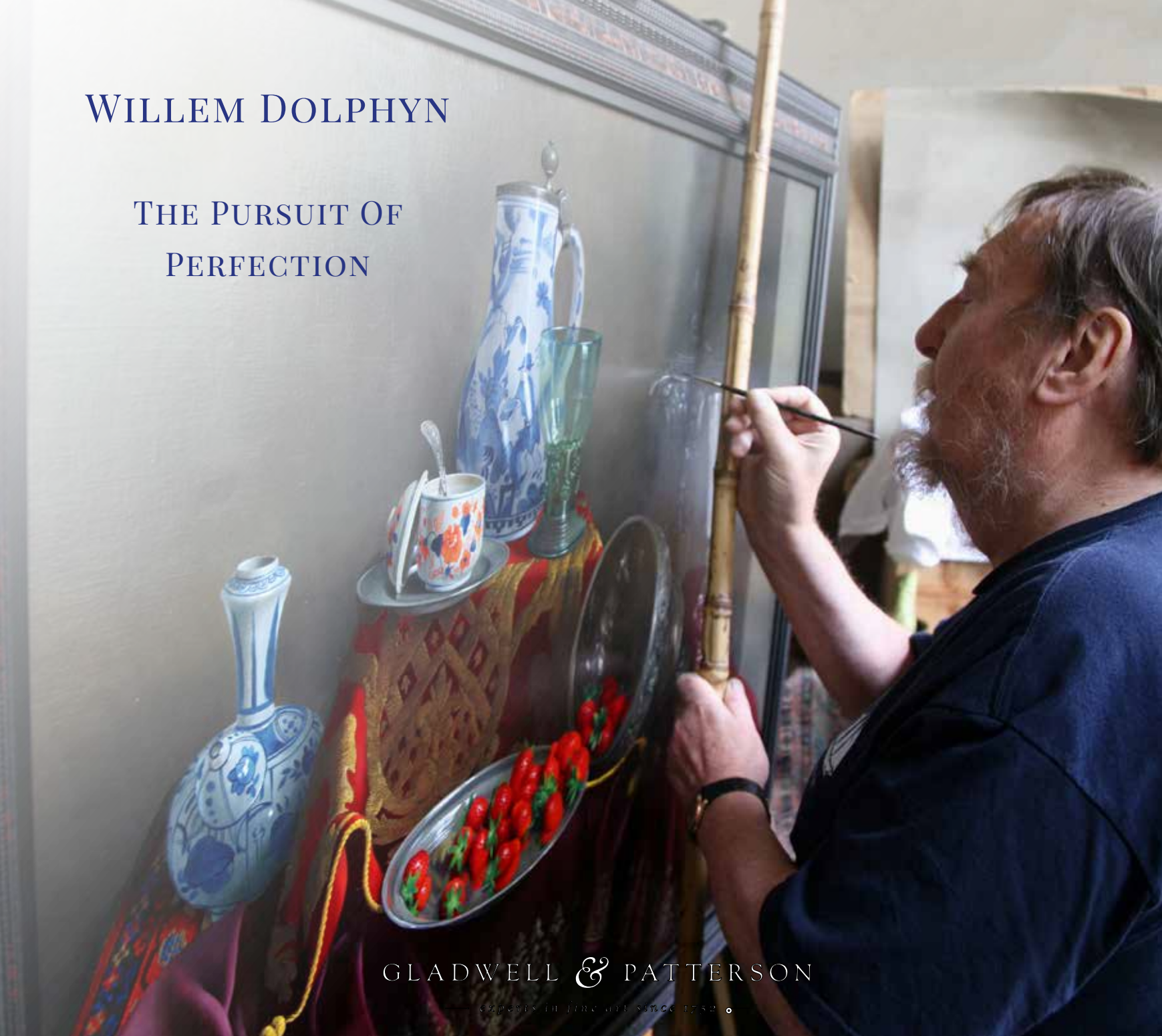



WILLEM DOLPHYN

THE PURSUIT OF
PERFECTION

GLADWELL & PATTERSON

EXPERTS IN THE ART SINCE 1752





*The pursuit of perfection in the representation, not of objects,
but of what moves me in the material of those objects”*

Willem Dolphyn.





THE PURSUIT OF PERFECTION

This catalogue is dedicated to our dear Gentle Giant, Willem Dolphyn, whose twinkling eyes, cheeky sense of humour and kind, kind soul we miss beyond words.

Year on year we would eagerly await the visit to Antwerp to visit Willem in his studio to see the output of his 365 days around the year, for Willem barely missed a day of painting, often working on several works at a time. Entering his studio museum was a little like running the gauntlet with antiques, papers, trinkets, canvases, oils stuffed into every nook and cranny, extremely precariously, ready to tumble at the mere swish of a coat passing. A consummate collector, his paintings catalogue multiple lives worth of treasures, every canvas filled with exquisitely chosen artefacts from around the world.

Having ‘a little drinkie’ in the pub around the corner was obligatory, where hundreds of witches hung on their broomsticks and builders propped up the bar. This is when Willem’s stories would come tumbling out, both from his friends and himself, always involving something that would make us all cry with laughter. As you will see in stories lovingly handed down by his son Walter, this was a man whose life was extremely well lived!!

We have brought together a collection of Willem’s best works to memorialise this great painter. In his pursuit of perfection, Willem showed a desire to explore beneath the surface of his beautifully rendered objects, constantly pushing his craft to new heights and never resting on his mastery.

I can hardly believe it has already been 6 years since Willem’s passing, so vivid are my memories of him. I’m sure any of you who also met him would agree that he left a lasting impression. Although his English was not perfect, the sentiment of what he said was always absolutely spot on, his observations and knowledge of life as detailed and insightful as his paintings. Generous with his time, advice, and rich imagination, Willem leaves a legacy beyond even his outstanding works.

His spirit lives on in his paintings and I know that every time I stop and enjoy the one that I have at home, I smile just thinking of him, reminded of how lucky I was to have met such an extraordinary character.



The Fig Harvest

Oil on Panel
 60 x 75 cm / 23.5" x 30"
 £20,500



A Taste of the Orient

Oil on Canvas
 70 x 50 cm / 28" x 20"
 £20,500

*‘People who depict too many details
put all their strength in that detail
and therefore pass over their atmosphere.’*

Grapes and Mandarins

Oil on Panel
70 x 60 cms / 27.5" x 23.5"
£20,500





Marine Delicacy

Oil on Panel
51 x 61 cms / 20" x 24"
£17,500

A Bountiful Harvest

Oil on Panel
59 x 48 cms / 23" x 19"
£17,500



Middle Eastern Delights

Oil on Canvas
70 x 100 cms / 28" x 40"
£46,000





Fresh on the Branch

Oil on Panel
40 x 50 cms / 16" x 20"
£10,500



Rustic Figs

Oil on Panel
51 x 61 cms / 20" x 24"
£17,500



A Succulent Crop

Oil on Panel
61 x 51 cms /
24 " x 20"
£17,500



Pears and a
White Delft Jug

Oil on Panel
70 x 60 cms /
28 " x 24"
£17,500

A MASTER CRAFTSMAN

A Window to the Past

The artist's studio is a hallowed place, a temple to the arts in which the painter seeks to capture his individual vision of the world. Yet as with most features of Willem Dolphyn's career, his studio attained a larger-than-life, almost legendary character. In his historic studio of Venustraet, Willem would create nearly 2500 paintings over half a century, a monumental achievement for a single artist.

The rooms were crowded with historic furniture, the shelves were loaded with treasures, fabrics, glassware and ceramics which span the centuries, gleaming and glinting in the Northern light, each piece collected with pride and all contributing to his incredible compositions. To call this setting a studio would almost seem to undervalue its importance, which approached that of a museum. After years of travelling the world and collecting its most beautiful objects, his house provides a physical manifestation of a lifetime's work. Surrounded by these treasures, the ideas for his compositions came to Willem during the night. Even in his dreams he worked, seeing Roman glass, Delft tiles, Flemish tapestry, fine fruits and expensive china drawn from across the continent and coming all together in his mind.

"Antwerp has the most beautiful light in the world, together with Venice. I do not know why that is so. It has nothing to do with civic pride, for this fact has been known since the Middle Ages. It is no doubt part of our cultural heritage".

Willem Dolphyn

Yet one does not have to travel to Antwerp to gain access to this wonderful space, for Willem brought his studio into almost every painting that he made. Look closely at any of the artist's works and you will find the reflection of his studio's beautiful bay windows; It might be stretched across a vase, refracted in a glass, or elongated across a fruit bowl. So perfect is Willem's understanding of light and texture that the viewer might not even recognise the skill required to capture this motif, but to my mind it encapsulates what makes this artist so special.

Firstly, we should recognise the skill needed to understand and capture this optical phenomena. Light doesn't stand still, its intensity varies, and its imprint upon objects moves throughout the day. Yet without fail Willem expertly captures his window's reflections in work after work. If we take Decadent Spread as an example we can investigate the complexity of this motif. In the glass at the lower left, the artist has captured the window and the light it casts on the wall, which in turn are then reflected within the curve of the object itself. On the jug behind it, the viewer can make out the window at four separate points, twice on its metal head and twice within its main body. The same can be said of the silver bowl and the wine glass to the right. In each case the artist perfectly captures the immense complexity of light with apparent ease, in single-virtuoso strokes of lead white. **To make such details feel so natural requires unparalleled skill and technique.**

While Willem never painted his studio, only the still lives within it, he nonetheless gives the viewer an impression of the space around his compositions, bringing us into his private space and extending the scope of his works far beyond the picture's borders. That he achieves this without us immediately recognising the feat is simply astounding.



Yet to my mind the importance of this window goes beyond demonstrating Willem's considerable technique, it links the artist one of Europe's greatest pictorial traditions. In works by two of the Low Countries greatest geniuses, Van Eyck and Vermeer, we see the same windows, lighting their subjects and locating the viewer in these private domestic spaces. A defining characteristic of these immensely important artists, Willem's use of the same motif establishes a connection between their works and his continuation of the Northern tradition. Unsurprisingly, Dolphyh held these artists in the highest regard, with Van Eyck being singled out in particular as the most important figure in the History of Art, describing his influence as follows: "Jan Van Eyck is the alpha and Omega of the art of painting".

In extending and reviving the Netherlandish tradition in the present day, Willem opens a dialogue with his country's artistic past that few others have managed to create. His efforts were widely recognised by his contemporaries, with a planned documentary about Dolphyh even giving him the title of 'De Laatste Bourgondiër' (the last Burgundian), an explicit acknowledgement of his place within this great painting tradition.





Cherry Reflections

Oil on Panel
51 x 61 cms / 20" x 24"
£17,500



Silver Reflections

Oil on Panel
51 x 61 cms / 20" x 24"
£17,500

Arabic Treasures

Oil on Canvas
70 x 100 cms / 27½" x 39½"
£46,000

'The background is the most difficult. It generally covers the largest part of the painting and serves as the binding element for the objects. If the background works well, half of the painting is finished'





Blue and Red

Oil on Panel
40 x 50 cms / 16" x 20"
£10,500



Blueberry Pickings

Oil on Panel
20 x 30 cms /
8" x 12"
£5,250



The Artist's Collection

Oil on Panel
40 x 50 cms / 16" x 20"
£10,500

Strawberry Harvest

Oil on Panel
61 x 51 cms / 24" x 20"
£17,500

'I never want to achieve a photographic representation of an object. When I paint a strawberry, it is not the fruit 'lying' there, but the fruit I 'perceive'. There is an on-going creative process between composing a still life and painting it. I am interested in representing the subject matter, and not the more or less accidental object. That has always been my striving and only now do I really start to succeed in doing so'





Sweet Temptation

Oil on Panel
61 x 51 cms /
24 " x 20"
£17,500



Delft Treasures

Oil on Panel
61 x 51 cms /
24 " x 20"
£17,500



Pink Lady Apples
and
a Dutch Roemer Glass

Oil on Panel
50 x 40 cms /
20 " x 16"
£10,500

Black Forest Cherries

Oil on Panel
30 x 40 cms /
12 " x 16"
£7,250



Rustic Pleasure

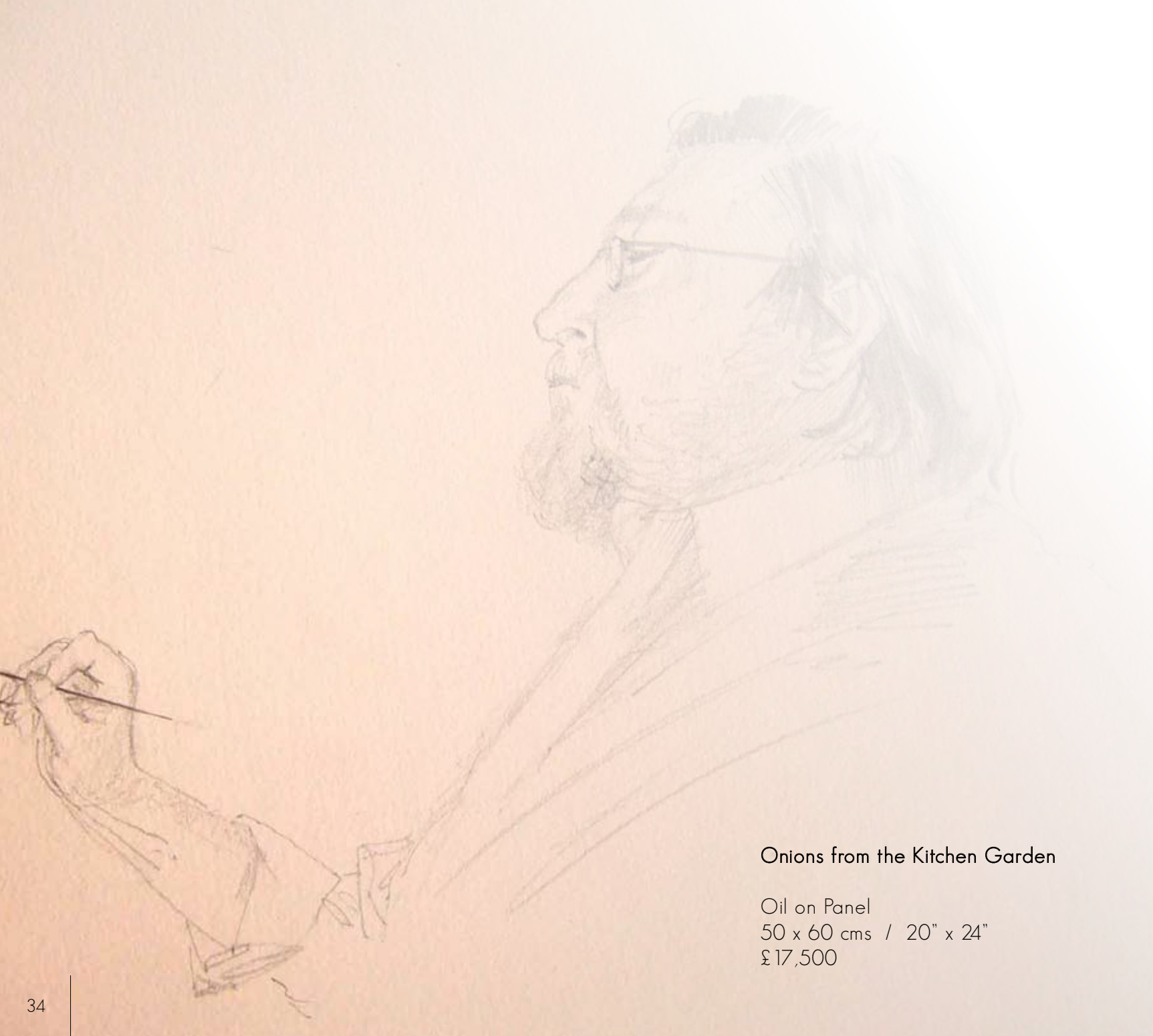
Oil on Panel
30 x 40 cms /
12 " x 16"
£7,250





The Decadent Spread

Oil on Canvas
80 x 100 cms / 32" x 39.5"
£39,000



Onions from the Kitchen Garden

Oil on Panel
50 x 60 cms / 20" x 24"
£17,500





Dessert Plums

Oil on Panel
50 x 40 cms /
20" x 16"
£10,500

Subtle Shades of Green

Oil on Panel
50 x 40 cms /
20" x 16"
£10,500





An Autumn Harvest

Oil on Panel
50 x 60 cms / 20" x 24"
£17,500





The Fruits of Summer

Oil on Canvas
80 x 100 cms / 32" x 40"
£39,000





Blue Designs

Oil on Canvas
40 x 50 cms / 16" x 20"
£10,500



Kir Plums

Oil on Panel
30 x 40 cms /
12" x 16"
£7,250



Summer Plums

Oil on Panel
30 x 40 cms /
12" x 16"
£7,250



Peacock Perfection

Oil on Canvas
80 x 100 cms / 32" x 239.5"
£39,000

'For Belgians a still life has to be Burgundian and preferably very colourful. The Dutch appreciate austerity and a dark background, and also a small format. The English want it to be very luminous and luxurious'





Golden Figs

Oil on Panel
61 x 51 cms /
24 " x 20"
£17,500



Silver Grapes

Oil on Panel
50 x 40 cms /
20 " x 16"
£10,500



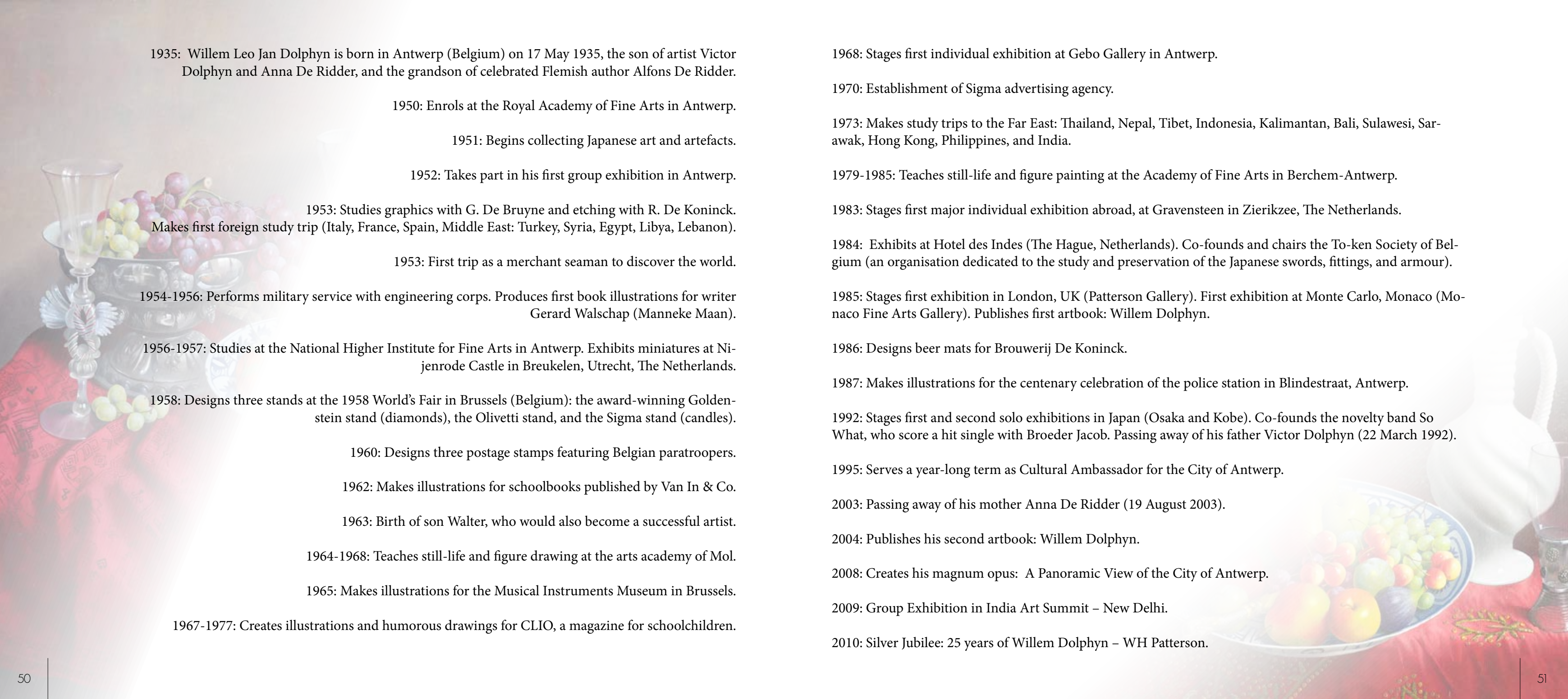
Ripe and Ready

Oil on Panel
61 x 51 cms /
24 " x 20"
£17,500



Pear Delight

Oil on Panel
61 x 51 cms /
24 " x 20"
£17,500



1935: Willem Leo Jan Dolphyn is born in Antwerp (Belgium) on 17 May 1935, the son of artist Victor Dolphyn and Anna De Ridder, and the grandson of celebrated Flemish author Alfons De Ridder.

1950: Enrols at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp.

1951: Begins collecting Japanese art and artefacts.

1952: Takes part in his first group exhibition in Antwerp.

1953: Studies graphics with G. De Bruyne and etching with R. De Koninck.
Makes first foreign study trip (Italy, France, Spain, Middle East: Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Lebanon).

1953: First trip as a merchant seaman to discover the world.

1954-1956: Performs military service with engineering corps. Produces first book illustrations for writer Gerard Walschap (Manneke Maan).

1956-1957: Studies at the National Higher Institute for Fine Arts in Antwerp. Exhibits miniatures at Nijenrode Castle in Breukelen, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

1958: Designs three stands at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels (Belgium): the award-winning Goldenstein stand (diamonds), the Olivetti stand, and the Sigma stand (candles).

1960: Designs three postage stamps featuring Belgian paratroopers.

1962: Makes illustrations for schoolbooks published by Van In & Co.

1963: Birth of son Walter, who would also become a successful artist.

1964-1968: Teaches still-life and figure drawing at the arts academy of Mol.

1965: Makes illustrations for the Musical Instruments Museum in Brussels.

1967-1977: Creates illustrations and humorous drawings for CLIO, a magazine for schoolchildren.

1968: Stages first individual exhibition at Gebo Gallery in Antwerp.

1970: Establishment of Sigma advertising agency.

1973: Makes study trips to the Far East: Thailand, Nepal, Tibet, Indonesia, Kalimantan, Bali, Sulawesi, Sarawak, Hong Kong, Philippines, and India.

1979-1985: Teaches still-life and figure painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Berchem-Antwerp.

1983: Stages first major individual exhibition abroad, at Gravensteen in Zierikzee, The Netherlands.

1984: Exhibits at Hotel des Indes (The Hague, Netherlands). Co-founds and chairs the To-ken Society of Belgium (an organisation dedicated to the study and preservation of the Japanese swords, fittings, and armour).

1985: Stages first exhibition in London, UK (Patterson Gallery). First exhibition at Monte Carlo, Monaco (Monaco Fine Arts Gallery). Publishes first artbook: Willem Dolphyn.

1986: Designs beer mats for Brouwerij De Koninck.

1987: Makes illustrations for the centenary celebration of the police station in Blindestraat, Antwerp.

1992: Stages first and second solo exhibitions in Japan (Osaka and Kobe). Co-founds the novelty band So What, who score a hit single with Broeder Jacob. Passing away of his father Victor Dolphyn (22 March 1992).

1995: Serves a year-long term as Cultural Ambassador for the City of Antwerp.

2003: Passing away of his mother Anna De Ridder (19 August 2003).

2004: Publishes his second artbook: Willem Dolphyn.

2008: Creates his magnum opus: A Panoramic View of the City of Antwerp.

2009: Group Exhibition in India Art Summit – New Delhi.

2010: Silver Jubilee: 25 years of Willem Dolphyn – WH Patterson.



The Line Up

Oil on Panel
25 x 61 cms /
10 " x 24"
£8,500



The First Pick

Oil on Canvas
40 x 50 cms / 16" x 20"
£10,500



Apples in an Oriental Bowl

Oil on Panel
44.5 x 51 cms / 17.5" x 20"
£16,000



Strawberries and the Delft Bowl

Oil on Panel
44.5 x 49.5 cms / 17.5" x 19.5"
£18,500



Silver Strawberries

Oil on Panel
50 x 40 cms /
20 " x 16"
£10,500

Summer's Bounty

Oil on Panel
70 x 60 cms / 28" x 24"
£20,500





The Artist's Collection
Painted in 1983

Oil on Panel
29 x 44.5 cms / 11.5" x 18"
£10,500.

That Willem's life was full of jokes, wits and funny anecdotes is generally known. At parties and in discussions Willem often had the last word and had listeners glued to his lips which sometimes lead to unusual situations.

But it's good to shine our light on another aspect of Willem's life. The artistic oeuvre of this master garnered a lot of respect from his colleagues. Formost this was probably due to the fact that he never manifested himself from up in an ivory tower. From the beginning of his career he always had a good relation with his fellow artists.

Through the years a lot of pupils passed through his studio, many of them had, besides learning the tricks of the trade, a lot of fun doing so. In the very rare occasion that there was any rivalry, Willem always handled it from behind his easel.

Eric de Vree



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