

MICHEL'S PRIVATE COLLECTION

Michel's newly purchased collection of art is now proudly on display at Le Gavroche; **FIONA FORMAN** speaks to the artist, William Balthazar Rose, who explains the inspiration and meanings behind the works.





Modern Economics (2011)



Nowhere to Go (2011)



Pile Up (2011)



Punch (2011)

A lover of art, Le Gavroche is testament to Michel's passion for the subject. The walls of his signature restaurant are adorned with works from some of the greatest artists of the 19th and 20th centuries. An interesting array of pieces – many of which are signed by the artists themselves – the collection speaks for itself. Among them is a piece by French artist Germain Theodore Ribot, a still-life painter who was fascinated by chefs and the tools they used; a painting by South African realist painter John Meyer; a piece by Irish contemporary artist Pauline Bewick; pieces by Russian abstract artist, Marc Chagall; and a piece by Spanish-Catalan surrealist painter, Salvador Dali. Surely though, the most prized in the collection are surrealist masterpieces by Joan Miro and two pieces – *La Petite Corrida* and *Les Saltimbanques* – by the co-founder of the Cubist movement and one of the most renowned artists in the world, Pablo Picasso.

Michel has recently invested in a new collection of paintings titled *Cooks* by artist William Balthazar Rose. Purchased from the Brian Sinfield Gallery, they have joined the other great works of art already residing in Le Gavroche. A painter, sculptor, poet, prize-winning architect and teacher, Rose is clearly a man of many talents. Born in Cambridge to a family of artists, it was quickly apparent that Rose would follow in their footsteps. From an early age he was immersed in art and as a child studied everything from jewellery design to bronze casting and painting. After being educated in America and gaining degrees in architecture and painting, he taught at Princeton and the University of California and worked in top architecture firms while exhibiting his paintings in California. He has also exhibited in Italy and the UK and now divides his time between his homes in Tuscany and Bath. His work, influenced by a combination of classicism, Renaissance art and Cubism, is often dark and melancholy yet there are many comical elements to his paintings too.

These traits are clearly seen in the *Cooks* collection and Rose admits the paintings are both “humorous and terrifying”. Explaining his inspiration for the collection, Rose says: “I began these paintings several years ago and was initially inspired by several things – I have always loved the costume of the cook – it seems magical, theatrical, and suggests, at times, the robes of a priest. I am intrigued by what the cook does as a creative individual and am aware of how often the cook creates more vastly than any other figure in the arts.”

The five oil paintings purchased by Michel from the collection are *Modern Economics*, *The Red Shoe*, *Pile Up*, *Nowhere To Go* and *Punch*. All of the paintings have an elusive stillness to them and the cooks appear in an undefined space – simply a blank background without furniture or windows – which Rose sees as “the context of humanity in which we are unknowing”. A recurrent theme throughout the pieces is judgement, represented by a sitting – or standing in the case of *Punch* – figure. In *Pile Up*, several judging figures watch ▶

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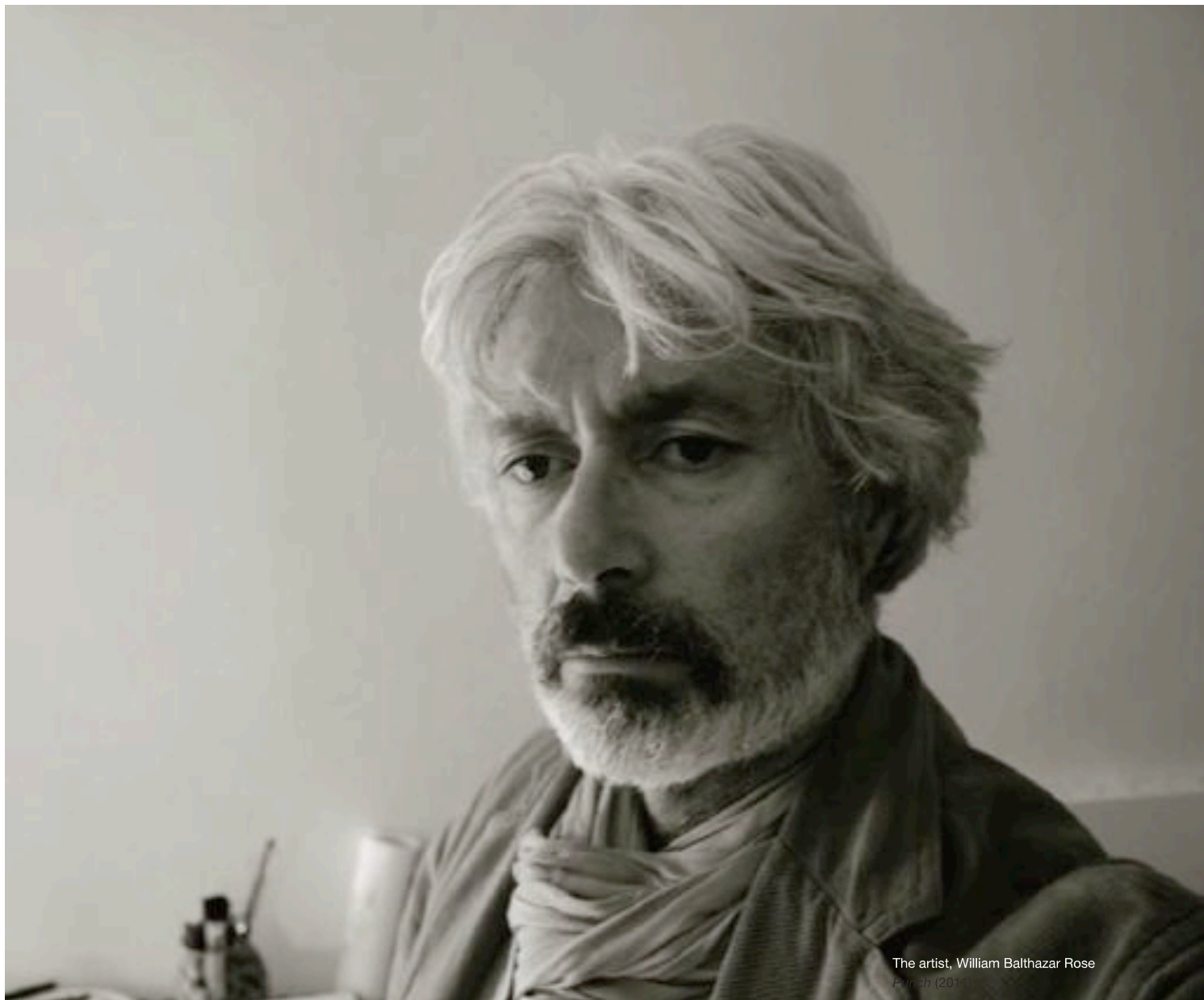
Cabernet Sauvignon
Vintage 2009

93 Wine Enthusiast

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The artist, William Balthazar Rose
Punch (2012)

over the seemingly acrobatic cooks frozen in mid-air. In *The Red Shoe*, Rose's favourite piece from the collection, Michel commented that the judging, red-shoed character reminded him of a *Michelin Guide* reviewer, who in reality carries a red book. Rose explains: "I can't help liking *The Red Shoe* because it is a complex painting yet appears so straightforward. I am delighted that Michel relates it to his own experiences with *Michelin Guide* reviewers; a collapsed cook is held by others while a larger than life authority figure looks on, detached.

"The pose of the collapsed cook being held in the compassionate arms of other chefs was inspired by a medieval painting of the deposition of the crucified Christ. The comic quality to the painting despite its origins in religious iconography speaks of humanity's eternal role as actors on the stage of life, sometimes play-acting with great humour and other times, acting out the gravest of tragedies."

The theme of reflecting elements of contemporary society continues throughout

“The theme of
REFLECTING
ELEMENTS of
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ROSE'S paintings.”

Rose's paintings: *Modern Economics* depicts a cynical vision of political leadership in which two cooks look on and smile while a third trips and falls, while *Punch* takes its name from the satirical magazine which existed in Britain for over 150 years, but also, Rose explains, "depicts the tragedy of violence and the blindness of it." In *Nowhere to Go*, Rose, inspired by early paintings from Picasso's Blue and Rose period, pays homage to Irish playwright and novelist Samuel Beckett, and echoes the end of a Shakespearean

tragedy, where, Rose says, "all that remains is complete devastation". But the humorous part of the painting is the cooks may have simply, "made a bad meal and are now out of work".

A unique and extraordinary collection that is a culmination of 10 years of work by the artist, Rose summarises the pieces: "Cooks can be manic in the kitchen; overworked and pressured, producing wonderful food but suffering to do it. There is a discrepancy between the nirvana they bring forth and the world in the kitchen, the two worlds seem to be masking each other. My paintings have been an attempt to speak of this world which is to some degree, my evoked fantasy of a world I do not know in its depths, but rather guess at." ●

If you want to see more of William Balthazar Rose's work, a major exhibition of his work will be shown by The Brian Sinfield Gallery in London at Gallery 27, Cork Street, from 22-27 October 2012. Visit www.briansinfield.com for more information.