

THE DAILY EXPRESS

6 MAY 1948

John sells nine £1,000 pictures by lunchtime

People were queueing in Leicester-square yesterday to buy pictures at 1,000 guineas each.

Inside the entrance to the Leicester Galleries a tall, white-bearded man, wearing a battered grey trilby and a red-striped shirt, stood chain-smoking while actresses, peers, and company directors stood six feet deep in front of his paintings. Seventy-year-old Augustus John, son of a Welsh solicitor, and Britain's most famous artist was holding his first exhibition of paintings for 15 years.

More than 50 pictures were on view, many of them priced at about £1,000. Nine were sold before lunch.

Portraits of Winston Churchill and the late Aleister Crowley, the black-magician with the staring eyes, were on show in the same room. Lady Killearn, ex-ambassador's wife, is near a red-complexioned barmaid from the Cathedral Hotel in Salisbury.

People politely pushed and edged past each other to gaze at a 12-foot painting called "The Little Concert," a group of Irish peasants painted entirely in grey.

Augustus John built his exhibition round this. He has been working on it for three years and postponed the exhibition several times until it was ready. It arrived, still wet, in the gallery a few days before the opening. But if you want to buy it I must warn you that it is too large and gloomy for any house smaller than a medium-sized palace.