

Art in Adelaide – Immigrant Dislocations and Aboriginal Dystopias

Often characteristic of both Adelaide and Perth auctions, the Elder Fine Art sale on Sunday 15 November has a strong regional representation as its feature, from 19th century émigré star Hans Heysen through 20th century Adelaide born and bred.



Hansen is represented by 4 works on paper (Lots 6, 56, 57 and 126, \$8-12,000). A core of the sale is eighteen works by British emigrant Basil Hadley (Lots 73-90). The artist, whose estate sale was handled by Elder in 2006, developed a highly personal body of work in many media from landscape through figuration.

His figurative works were often approached with an element of the naive, which allowed Hadley to exploit his sometimes subversive humour and wit. Standing out from

the artist's landscapes on offer, 'Blue Bird on a Perch' (Lot 74), \$15-20,000 (depicted), is a fine example of the artist's skill and humour.

In the 1950s Adelaide born Jacqueline Hick became famous for her figurative works of Aboriginal people living in circumstances of 'settler entanglement', such as stockmen and mission children. Unlike social realist Noel Counihan, however, with whom she has been compared, her works were romanticised by impressionistic treatment, resulting in a softening of her intended social commentary, which perversely made them popular.



Hick is represented by nine works (Lots 34, 36, 37, 110, 164, 180-183). 'The Sundowner' (Lot 34), \$15-18,000 (depicted), will be seen by some to depict a peaceful moment in an otherwise difficult life, but to others it carries the semiotic load of a people supposed to be in decline.

The 'Dreamtime as utopia' discourse was an active counter to the harsh realism of actual lived experience for contemporary Aboriginal people, and imagery in this vein was also widely popular in the 1950s. Ainslie Roberts, best known his for *Dreamtime* books written in

collaboration with ethnologist/anthropologist Charles Mountford is represented by three works (Lots 30-32).



'The Creator Kala' (Lot 30), \$12-15,000 (depicted), is a prime example of this utopian mythology in action. Lot 216 by James Ferries is a 19th century example of this Romantic idealism, wherein an Aboriginal figure is depicted as Pan.

Lawrence Daws is known to have had a desert epiphany that influenced his work of the '50s and '60s, traces of which are still apparent in the four works on offer (Lots 2, 123-125).

Polish émigré Joseph Stanislaus Ostoja-Kotkowski was also interested in the Dreamtime, having been heavily influenced by his experience in the Central Australian outback, but his art was preoccupied with the mystic transformative effects of light and

colour. The auction includes four works from the 1970s using vitreous enamels on metal (Lots 128-131); the sale also features eight contemporaneous works in the same media by Bernard Hesling who pioneered their use (Lots 112-119).



The Elder art auctions usually feature a large proportion of Aboriginal art, and this sale offers a group of Hermannsburg watercolours with two well priced examples by Albert Namatjira (Lots 54, 55, each \$18-25,000), as well as two nocturnes by Ian Abdulla, who experienced mission life in South Australia a generation later (Lots 16, depicted, and 17, \$2-3,000).

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