

Buyers World Over Compete with Bay Bidders for 100% Clearance at Hoffman Estate Sale

By Jane Raffan, on 03-Aug-2010

Aside from the withdrawal of ten high profile lots, the sale of the Hoffman Estate Collection was positive experience, garnering a clearance rate of 100% by value and 93% by lot. The response from the market was highly attentive, with the sale fielding nearly 300 online bidders and over 100 participants in the Double Bay auction room.



Given the bleak reviews of the art market in recent times, it was certainly refreshing to see most items outperform estimation. And while it has to be said that the collection was conservatively priced in general, this is not unusual with estate dispersals.

Despite the appeal of low estimates, securing strong sale results for a collection with such disparate and, in some cases, esoteric material is always tricky. International trade conventions and the hazards of shipping fragile items across the globe impact on bidder interest, with risks being counterbalanced by the particular draw of an item's rarity. Trade in ivory has fallen dramatically since the enactment of CITES legislation, for example, but the huge appetite for this material apparent at the Hoffman auction clearly outweighed the inconveniences of paying attention to protocols and applying for permits.

The Chinese ivory selection was the most hotly contested of the sale's 700 or so lots, and outperformed artefacts from all other cultures. Lot 227, a lion-like figurine with a rather Cheshire Cat like expression reached a staggering \$10,782 against an estimate of \$500-800. Three Ching Dynasty prayer boards (Lot 234 ) sold for \$7,787 against an estimate of \$400-600.

While Chinese ivory propelled the momentum of the sale, the top lots went to two Benin ivory staffs. Estimated at \$2,000-4,000 each, they stole the show with a sale price of \$13,178 including BP (Lot 355 ) (Lot 356 ). A third staff (Lot 357 ) made \$8,985. The fragile baked clay figurative Nok sculpture (Lot 398 ) was, however, a steal for the same price. It had been conservatively estimated at \$15,000-20,000.

African material sold in Australia tends to be overlooked by Europe, which has a vast reserve available to its markets from colonial times. The two best prices were for lot 385, a Bamana antelope mask from Mali, which sold for \$10,782 against an estimate of \$500-700; and lot 369, two life size Bemileke figures from Cameroon, which attracted a total sale price of \$8,386 against a very reasonable \$3-5,000.

The Double Bay audience included many people who knew Lillian Hoffman, and possibly some of the dealers whose inventory found its way into her collection. As expected, the Potts Point/Burmese carved temple elephants were keenly contested, with lot 133 reaching \$7,427, and lot 132 selling for \$6,014. All four elephants on offer were estimated at \$2,000-4,000; these examples had the best form, with ears intact.

The international reach of the online sale environment proved a boon, securing 30% of lots by volume, and nearly 50% of the sale total of \$360,000. The executors are pleased, and the two as yet unnamed local charities that are destined to share the proceeds will no doubt also be happy. The sale was one of the best on record for Guy Earl Smith's East Australian Consolidated.

Sale Referenced: [Fine Tribal, Oceanic Art & Antiquities - Lillian Hoffman Estate, Guy Earl-Smith, Sydney, 01/08/2010](#)

About The Author

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