

Longing for another You Yangs, Bonhams Secures a Yin and Yang Result

By Jane Raffan, on 13-May-2014

It is rare these days for an auction's saving grace to be attributed to the performance of Aboriginal art. And yet for Bonham's back-to-back autumn sales of the *The Roxanas Collection of Aboriginal Art* (Sunday 11 May) and *Important Australian Art* (Monday 12 May), this proved to be the case. With fewer audience members than the 67 lots on offer, the mixed vendor sale of *Important Australian Art* only managed to sell 40% for a hammer total of \$1.282 million, representing a rather scary clearance of 33% by value and hardly living up to its grandiose title, which, like the current 'budget emergency', is a purposely overstated marketing ploy, and one frequently used by all major players.

The Roxanas Collection, amassed over more than 30 years by Sydney psychiatrist Dr Milton Roxanas and his wife Alma, chiefly comprised bark paintings from the 1960s through 1980s and around 60 lots of work from desert artists. With all lots apparently for sale without regard to the typical practice of low-end reserves, results showed a market appetite well below estimation at times (often half to a third), but for the majority of the works the opposite applied, and against a strategically modest pre-sale expectation of \$462,800, 89% of the Collection sold for a hammer total of \$503,034, representing a clearance of 109% by value.

The cover lot – a beautifully composed and wonderfully expressive *Lumaluma* by 'the Picasso of Australian art', Yirrawala (Lot 5 ) – soared to a hammer price of \$21,000 against its pitched \$8-12K. Tripled and quadrupled estimate results were common throughout the sale's 226 lots, which were gobbled up by bidders active across all platforms (in room, on phones and online), and amongst whom were eighty-eight buyers new to Bonhams.

Many lots were rather savagely underestimated: (Lot 20 ) a handsome and highly detailed example by John Bulun Bulun was estimated at a paltry \$1,000-1,500 and made \$4,000; (Lot 16 ) a rare 1960s *Wagilag Sisters* by Dawidi Djulwarak sold for \$9,500 against its estimate of \$2-3K (and probably went to an institution); and a painting by another 'old master', Djunmal (Lot 70 ) – identical in composition to a work in the collection of the National Museum of Australia – sold for \$2,600 against a throwaway estimate of \$200-400.

Aside from Yirrawala – whose works always bump up sale totals, as was the case here with nine works providing a solid \$95K – Ivan Namirrki made a welcome contribution with five works totalling just over \$28K, including the very stylish and superbly sinuous *Ngalyod and Waterlily* (Lot 85 ) which made \$13,000 against \$5-7K.

Other highlights included: Wandjuk and Mawalan Marika's *Djankawu and his Sisters* (Lot 36 ) which, unlike many contemporary works, didn't suffer from its collaborative nature and sold for near double estimate at \$19,000; (Lot 106 ) *Rainbow Serpent Beneath Waterlilies*, by Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerrek, which made \$12,000 (against \$7-10K); Deaf Tommy Mungatopi's *Coral Designs* (Lot 60 ) a striking expression of Tiwi ancestral presence that reached its top end of \$20,000; and a group of works by another renowned Tiwi, Kitty Kantilla, which tallied \$22,300 and featured a gutsy, albeit modestly sized *Pumpuni Jilimara* canvas (Lot 167 ) that sold at low end for \$12,000.

The Tiwi works were tactically placed in transition from the barks to the colourful desert paintings, which saw fewer star results: recent RAKA Award nominee, the late Tommy Mitchell, sparked with the sale of *Tjunka's Country* (Lot 182 ) for \$8,500 against an absurdly low estimate of \$3-5K; and a cache from Papunya Tula proved the enduring allure of the genesis story, adding \$64K to the total with Anatjari Tjakamarra's *Pintupi Four Part Dreaming* (Lot 189 ) the best performing at \$23,000 (against \$12-18K).

The Roxanas Collection of Aboriginal Art wasn't expected to turn heads, but it did turn out to be an unexpected and most welcome follow-up to Bonhams' successful sale of the *Clive Evatt Collection* late last year.

Sale Referenced: [The Roxanas Collection of Aboriginal Art, Bonhams, Sydney, 11/05/2014](#)

About The Author

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