

Fred Williams, Footy Players and Femmes Fatales Fill Top Tier at Deutscher & Hackett's Fine Art Auction

By Jane Raffan, on 18-Aug-2010

A sublime Fred Williams Lysterfield painting with a price tag of \$1.2–1.6 million promises fanfare in Deutscher and Hackett's spring auction on 1 September, while diehard Collingwood fans should be pleased with pre-sale expectations for John Brack's *Three of the Players*, 1953 (Lot 16), which has been out of circulation since the early '50s and holds second spot on the ladder at \$800,000–1.2 million.

Hillside at Lysterfield II, 1967 (Lot 15 ) , set the record for the highest price paid at auction for a work by the artist in 2002. The vendor was no doubt enticed to consign following Deutscher and Hackett's market topping achievement in November 2009 with \$1.38 million for Fred William's *Evening Sky Upwey*, 1965. The current record for the artist was established in 2007 at the market's peak. If they can push bidding beyond the low end, a new record will be set and Deutscher and Hackett will also break Menzies' dominance of year-to-date top ten sales, albeit nearly two thirds of the way through the season.

The auction features three works by Williams in the top five, representing 28% of the low end sale total. *Lysterfield V*, from 1965 (Lot 14 ) is estimated at \$400–600,000, while *Blackwood Wattle*, from 1976 (Lot 20 ) holds fourth spot at \$280–320,000. Lot 14 is being sold by the Jackson family who founded the MCA's Primavera exhibitions in memory of their daughter Belinda. Proceeds will go to the MCA for their Art Foundation and the Bella Program supporting art education for children with special needs.

The majority of sale highlights over \$100,000 are contemporary; one of the company's hallmark features, including two striking examples of Rosalie Gascoigne's reflecting road sign works: Lot 18 at \$160–200,000 and Lot 5 for \$100–140,000. Bronwyn Oliver's masterful take on the mysteries of *yin yang* titled *Unity*, (Lot 6 ) , \$120–160,000, provides an interesting philosophical contrast to William Robinson's take on creation in his *Forest with Ferns, Tallanbanna*, (Lot 19 ) , \$140–180,000; while John Olsen's *Burning Trees, Pilbara*, 1983 (Lot 41 ) , \$100–140,000, paints an altogether different picture of nature's potency.

Fleshing out the top tier is a Norman Lindsay offering the usual titillation in abundance. *Incarnation*, (Lot 32 ) , \$140–180,000, has all the hallmarks of the artist's most highly favoured works: an Orientalist setting enabling the display of ample flesh in different tones and postures, and a powerfully seductive central *femme fatale* surrounded by ominous minions and handmaidens. The vendor may have been entranced by the picture, but the spell did not last long; they acquired the work in March 2008 within the same estimate range.

The Lindsay headliner should bring additional attention to the group of Mackennal bronze sculptures being offered from a single entity listed as a Melbourne company collection. The six works (lots 25–30), whose total pre-sale value sits at \$198,000, were acquired over a period of several years from a number of secondary market and private sources, both local and international. Given that three of the works moved directly from private collections to the company collection, it's entirely possible that the latter entity could be a Melbourne dealer.

The sculptures' female forms are drawn from allegorical, mythological and historical genres, with the *femme fatale Circe*, (Lot 25 ) , attracting the highest estimate at \$80–100,000. Like the Lindsay, the spell of the sorceress was also short-lived on the vendor, who acquired the work in December 2008. *Circe*, is the artist's most famous work, and in 2007 at the height of her power (and the market) she seduced a buyer at \$210,000 (incl.BP). For the high minded, Mackennal's naked *Truth*, (Lot 26 ) , \$70–90,000, is another fine example by the acclaimed sculptor.

The auction's 170 lots contain a core of 3D works that comprise around 10% of sale volume. Top lots included, works are well priced and pitched within current market trends, with most predominantly priced in the \$5,000–25,000 bracket. Lisa Roet's Astro chimp *Ham*, no.29, 2006 (Lot 156 ) , should easily find appeal with contemporary collectors and sci-fi aficionados alike at \$6–9,000, while Lynn Chadwick's enigmatic *Winged Figures*, 1973 (Lot 46 ) , \$48–60,000, will test the attention of the international market.

New media and photography also make their presence felt despite the small quantity, with work by favourites Shaun Gladwell (Lot 59 ) , at \$9–12,000, Bill Henson (Lots 146, 147), Max Dupain (Lots 142, 143) and Jane Burton (Lots 144, 145).

As we've come to expect from Deutscher and Hackett, the sale also offers an interesting modern component. Sidney Nolan's *Goldfields*, 1945 (Lot 33 ) , estimated at \$150–200,000, offers a grim portrait of life without prospect; the piles of spent diggings suggestive of freshly dug graves; too ironic, no doubt, for a magnate's wall. Similarly, Charles Blackman's *Man Floating*, 1953 (Lot 35 ) , \$40–60,000, is a powerful and difficult picture from the artist's most important period.

Margaret Preston's pretty *Mixed Flowers*, c.1925 (Lot 21 ) will no doubt have wider appeal. At \$120–160,000 the work carries cachet, coming from the collection of the artist's husband, and subsequently the Art Gallery of Queensland. Other moderns should also draw strong competition, in particular Roy de Maistre's Cubist *Still Life*, (Lot 23 ) , at \$45–65,000, and Grace Cossington Smith's *Kitchen Interior*, with a Braque-like garden view through the window (Lot 24 ) , at \$50–70,000.

And one muses on the prospects for Garry Shead's *Republican Expression*, 1995 (Lot 53 ), attractively estimated at \$40-60,000. Professor Sasha Grishin has noted that the Queen was Australia's white goddess in the 1950s and '60s, and that at the base of much opposition to the republic is a profound panic at the idea of losing a female deity[i]. At election time, with the promise of a distant republic being flagged by Gillard to propel the 'moving forward' discourse, this image of Blinky Bill giving the Queen the heave-ho might just be the perfect litmus test for current sentiment about female deities and female heads of state.

Deutscher and Hackett has indicated they were swamped with enquiries to consign to this auction, which totals a very healthy \$6.750 million, a significant rise from their April round, both in sale total and average lot value. One hopes that this was a result of rising confidence in the market rather than fear over the Cooper Review recommendations to ban art from self managed super funds. The auction features 31 works with 'company collection' provenance, representing 19% by volume and 13% of the low end value. The appeal of the sale, and in particular the works carrying additional GST, should now be boosted following the rightful drubbing of the recommendations.

[i] Sasha Grishin and Garry Shead, *Encounters with Royalty*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1998

Sale Referenced: [Important Australian + International Art, Deutscher and Hackett , Sydney, 01/09/2010](#)

About The Author

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