











None of that 'Crusty Old Stuff': Contemporary Art Supports a Solid Show at Deutscher & Hackett's Fine Art Auction

By Jane Raffan, on 28-Apr-2010


Results for Deutscher & Hackett's Fine Art Auction reveal breadth to the recovering market, and while the sale could not be characterized as buoyant, there were strong results achieved within an overall very good clearance of 71% by lot and 76% by value to gross just over \$4 million hammer.


Tellingly, all bar one of the previewed lots sold, with the cover lot by Ian Fairweather (Lot 14 ) being chased over its high end by attendees, including Melbourne dealer William Nuttall, to reach a hammer price of \$260,000. It was purchased by a very keen bidder number 1, acting for clients. Amid the rumble after the hammer fell it was overheard that this same buyer had been seen bidding up big at Sotheby's recent sale, which amusingly drove one auction agent to make an urgent call to a dealer client stressing the need to discover the man's identity.


The other top lots all sold close to, or just below their low end estimates: Gascoigne's assemblage (Lot 7 ) for \$140,000; Oliver's intricate sculpture (Lot 8 ) for \$130,000; Rees' landscape (Lot 37 ) for \$240,000 to Macquarie Group Chairman David Clarke, which places this work in the top 5 results for the artist; Brack's witty walking frames (Lot 40 ) for \$360,000, and now destined to return to Melbourne in the hands of a private collector; and Blackman's Alice (Lot 44 ) for \$115,000.


True to form, Deutscher & Hackett excelled with their contemporary offering, with an overall clearance in line with their sale averages above 70%. Two new records were set for Philip Wolfhagen and Nicholas Harding, with the sale of Wolfhagen's *Eight Passage* (Lot 4 ) for \$57,500, and Harding's *Beach Life* (Lot 73 ) for \$30,000 against \$18-24,000. Dale Frank added a higher number to his top five tally with \$32,000 for *The Sunset View...* (Lot 65 ) and Daniel Boyd now has an established auction benchmark, with the sale of *I'm Still in Love with You* (Lot 2 ) for \$11,000.




In comparison, modern and traditional works, including works on paper and sculpture, cleared around 62%. The only unsold pre-sale highlight came from this group (Bunny; lot 25); while the majority of works by Jeffrey Smart and Norman Lindsay (lots 27, 38, 42, 96, 97), failed to capture any interest, along with a high percentage of works by Blackman and Percival (lots 34, 43, 46, 47).

Of the paintings group the moderns fared best, clearing around 74%, with 66% of contemporary works moving, and traditional pictures at 61%. Cossington Smith's Foxgloves (Lot 33 ) was contested earnestly to reach \$82,500 against expectations of \$55-75,000.

There were few contests in the traditional fare, with Hans Heysen (Lot 93 ) providing a lift in proceedings when it reached \$43,000 against odds of \$20-25,000, which provoked an audible musing from one agent that it '*must be destined for Bellevue Hill*'. A frivolous and happy early 20th picture by illustrator Betty Armstrong of a Hobart regatta crowd proved to be the sleeper in this core of work, re-energising the back-end of the sale with a hammer price of \$30,000 against a benign \$5-8,000.

Works on paper were heavily represented at around 30% of total lots on offer, so it was critical this material performed. And it did, with strong prices achieved in general, and a sold clearance around 70%. John Brack's watercolor *On Stage, 1991* (Lot 59 ) was one of the night's most sought-after pieces, with 6 phones losing out to the room for \$70,000 against \$40-50,000.

Photography drew in plenty of bidders, and sold around 83% by volume. It also attracted the media, with two photographers on hand to witness the exchanges on the Bill Henson lots. His sublime *Untitled, 1990-1991 from the Paris Opera Project* (Lot 218 ) made \$16,000 against an incredibly low estimate of \$3-4,000; almost all his other lots (11, 12, 13, 219) sold within estimates.

3D works, including painted assemblages, cleared very well at 76% by volume, and provided many of the sale's bidding tussles, including two that took results well over high end estimates: William Robinson's ceramic (Lot 106 ) was fought over to reach \$30,000 against expectations of \$12-16,000; and Tim Storrier's Saddle (Lot 81 ) carried a tortuous phone bidding exchange to make \$55,000 against \$30-40,000. All works by Klippel sold (16, 17, 62, 111), as did those by Meadmore (61, 89, 90), with the top sale for *Start Up* (Lot 61 ) of \$60,000 also being made by David Clarke.

The venue was fitted comfortably with 200 seats, which were largely occupied for 2/3 of the sale. Aside from Nuttall and the usual coterie of auction agents, the Melbourne trade was represented in the room by Paul Auckett, and on many of the 7 phones in use throughout the night. Bill Nuttall managed to quietly acquire two works by Ken Whisson (lots 66, 67) for clients, while Auckett boisterously chased works on paper by Whiteley, and a group of works by Wakelin. A parade of private collectors turned up late throughout the course of the night to bid on single works and then leave straight away, which added some dynamism to the slow pace of proceedings, at around 70 lots p/hr. This group also accounted for some of the determined bidding encounters that took sales above low end estimates.

One audience member was overheard appreciating the freshness of the sale's line up, without any of '*that crusty old stuff*'. And it was true that the contemporary component, along with a peppering of interesting works by top tier artists in other categories, retained audience interest. With the first million racking up after 26 lots, followed quickly by the second at lot 40, and the third at lot 69, the sale would have felt more spirited with a faster pace. In the end, it took 3.5hrs to sell 242 lots and tally the \$4 million, the slowness of which took the shine off results that should be characterised as solid, with a nice breadth of support across the whole sale.

Sale Referenced: [Important Australian and International Art, Deutscher and Hackett , Sydney, 28/04/2010](#)

About The Author

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