

Bonhams Bets on End of Year Trifecta: a Few Classics, a Contemporary Icon Catalogue and the Aboriginal Art Circus Comes to Town

By Jane Raffan, on 10-Nov-2011

There will be no beating the Mossgreen's Ann Lewis estate sale for crowds and kudos, but at least Bonhams has the distraction of three separate sale catalogues to split the focus and scrutiny of its end of year finale on 21 November at the Byron Kennedy Hall in Moore Park, Sydney.



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owner of a philanthropic quinella.

Most eyes will be on the second catalogue, *Selected works from the Estate of Paddy Bedford*, the sale of 26 works by Paddy Bedford, commencing at 7.00 pm, also tallying close to the \$1.5 million mark. On first announcement, amid the forensic investigations into the poor performances of the Aboriginal art sales held to date, brows furrowed in puzzlement everywhere about the decision to bring so many works by the same artist onto a market currently undergoing its worst pall in years.

When Bonham's launched its Aboriginal art department, phoenix-like from the Sotheby's rout, they declared the reinstatement of international previews. These were notably absent from their first major sale of Aboriginal art, and so it is a relief that the Bedford works are enjoying this privilege with the hope of more to come; international previews of Aboriginal art can't be left to Artbank, after all.

Of course, the works themselves are beautiful, and the artist is an icon of the post 2000 new wave, one of only a handful who have enjoyed retrospective exhibitions and, as Bonham's is at pains to point out in their PR material, the only Aboriginal artist to have a catalogue raisonné of their work. The international contemporary art market is strong and Bonhams has strategically targeted the marketing of this sale to that audience, supported by the cred and cachet of MCA exhibition provenance.

The MCA exhibition featured a number of works from the artist's estate that were entrusted to William Mora for sale after the artist's death; the strategy being to release them over an extended period. It is a pity, then, that the Bonham's *Selected works from the Estate of Paddy Bedford* sale contains so few of the MCA works (only two: Lot 2 and Lot 14), as this provenance would naturally be among the most sought-after. In a strategic move designed to bolster the value of the other works, however, international exhibitions were arranged by Mora in the Netherlands and other parts of Europe from late 2010 through to early 2011. In the end, ten works in the catalogue carry exhibition provenance of note.

Interestingly, Bonham's hasn't distinguished any of the works with exhibition provenance by estimates. All works are offered with a flat estimate ranges across 3 scales irrespective of exhibition provenance or aesthetics (4, if you count the gouaches). Works on the two largest scales (122 x 135 cm; 150 x 180 cm) are offered with estimates that will bring their sale totals close to 2010 retail pricing (with buyer's premium and GST). This makes the Paddy Bedford work in the *Aboriginal Art* catalogue look like a steal. *Lerndijwaneman – Bush Turkey, 2000*, (Lot 17B) carries an estimate of \$40,000-60,000, compared to \$150,000-180,000 for works on the same scale in the *Estate* sale. Admittedly it is from the artist's earlier and less highly favoured style, but a 73% downgrade is harsh, even in this climate. Similarly, the eight smallest painted canvases (80 x 100cm) in the Paddy Bedford Estate sale are well priced \$40,000-60,000, sitting under the median of the only other results for

Commencing at 6.00 pm, the small *Australian Fine Art* sale of 43 lots with a low end estimate total of \$1.5 million offers up some fine classic works, including a very enticingly priced *Luxembourg Gardens* by Ethel Carrick Fox (Lot 2 📺) at \$7,000-9,000, and more women in white with Rupert Bunny's *The Convalescent* (Lot 5 📺), estimate \$150,000-250,000 and *Lady Sewing* (Lot 10 📺), estimate \$200,000-300,000. White also makes its mark in John Olsen's very fine *Lake Eyre, The Desert Sea* (Lot 19 📺), estimate \$50,000-60,000.

If the Archibald Prize provenance doesn't draw buyers to the Craig Ruddy portrait of Cathy Freeman (Lot 24 📺), the efforts of its owners might. The 1 egg group is a veritable charitable start-up: a young trio intent on trading up from an egg to \$1 million dollars. Craig Ruddy traded an African Safari for this work, after which their momentum stalled. Good story. Ruddy's portrait of Aboriginal star filmmaker Warwick Thornton now resides in the collection of the Gold Coast City Gallery, and Freeman herself is a Queenslander, so for \$25,000-35,000, the buyer of this work could end up being the proud

works on this scale, poles apart at \$24,000 and \$110,000 (2010). Of these, *Brumby Springs, 2005*, Lot 2B, carries MCA provenance.

The final tranche of the three catalogue sale, the 45 lot sale of *Aboriginal Art* commencing at 7.30 pm is a fairly timid affair, with a smattering of good works and a few highlights. It isn't unexpected to find an early Papunya painting in the midst, especially in light of the NGV's current *Tjukurr tjaju Origins of Western Desert Art* exhibition.

The catalogue cover, Lot 22A, Anatjari Tjakamarra's *Kuningka, circa 1973*, stands apart from the rest with its estimate of \$200,000-300,000. It is also not unusual for such highlights to be compared with comparable works in public collections. In this case it is unfortunate that the reproduced comparison work from the National Museum of Australia is rather more appealing.

Perhaps this was a strategy of a different kind, suggesting instead that a superior version exists in the national collection, in which case the work on offer will not likely be hampered by moveable cultural heritage issues.

Works from this period are becoming increasingly rare, and this painting's strong design qualities and reference in the Bardon literature will surely broaden its appeal.

Much has been made of the Artists Resale Royalty and its impost. The sale features three works carrying the additional 5% on the hammer: lots 9, 26 and 30. According to the AASD's records, the Tommy Watson, (Lot 30A), was unsold at Sotheby's last year. Given the royalty applies to second sales only, one must assume the work traded after the auction.

In any case, it is offered here with a reduced estimate of \$12,000-18,000. The only other work to carry a levy is being sold for charitable purposes. Another early board by *Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula* (Lot 20A) cops the GST on the hammer price, unless exported following sale.

And there are novelties. A large, striking work by Maggie Napangardi Watson, (Lot 28A) comes with Kimberley Art provenance (rather than the art centre Warlukurlangu Artists), as does Lot 12, by Queenie McKenzie.

Lot 25 is not new to the market, but works by the celebrated Dennis Nona are usually sold-out on the retail sector, and the hand-colouring gives his linocuts an edge. And then there's Brook Andrew's colonial circus caravan (Lot 29A). It is being sold on the promise of a favourable review to come, and a career. The painted caravan (campers beware; not as shown) is due to be exhibited in the 2012 Sydney Festival at Redfern's Carriageworks as part of the artist's major commission, *Travelling Colony*.

The Bonham's end-of-year bet is locked in. This bookie places long odds on a trifecta, but there are enough low estimates and high expectations to entice punters to drop something each way on a few favourites, as well as a long shot or two.

Please note: For technical reasons the Australian Art Sales Digest has had to combine and publish the three sales as a single sale. To distinguish the common lot numbers on the Australian Art Sales Digest site, the *Aboriginal Art* catalogue lots have been allotted a suffix of "A", (1A, 2A, 3A etc.) while *Selected works from the Estate of Paddy Bedford* have been given a suffix of "B".

Sale Referenced: [Australian and International Fine Art; Selected Works from the Estate of Paddy Bedford; Aboriginal Art, Bonhams, Sydney, 21/11/2011](#)

About The Author

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