

Deutscher~Menzies – 86% Clearance & Highest Price for 2009 to Date

A business-like atmosphere pervaded the Menzies Art Brand sale of 23 September, which achieved an impressive clearance of 86% by lot for a total hammer yield just over \$5 million, or 87% by value. The sale rarely exhibited spirited bidding, with 66% selling below the low end estimates, but the 120 strong crowd flexed muscle where it counted and all but 4 from the top 15 lots valued over \$100,000 sold. In a quietly determined bidding war between three phones and the room, the centrepiece lot, Whiteley's *'The sunrise, Japanese: Good Morning!'* claimed the expected top position, securing a hammer price at the low end estimate of \$1,100,000.



Proving the desert still invokes powerful responses in the Australian psyche, two of the better performing top tier secured prices above their low-end estimates: lot 41, Sidney Nolan's *'Crossing River (Burke and Wills Expedition)'*, achieved \$290,000 (depicted), while lot 42, Russell Drysdale's *'Desert Children'*, secured \$330,000.

In some cases it was clear that vendor reserves were negotiated to recoup purchase prices.

Despite interest from four phone bidders and the room, John Olsen's *'Landscape and Night Heron'* (lot 33) passed in at \$190,000, well below its low-end estimate of \$220,000. It last traded in 2004 for \$239,000 (incl. BP).

Blackman's *'Mother and Daughter'* tipped over its low-end estimate to make \$150,000, assisted perhaps by the buyer's earlier disappointment at being outbid on Nolan's Burke and Wills picture, and no doubt also pleasing the vendor who paid \$150,000 (including BP) only last year. Despite its highly keyed colour, the rather dour *'Mother and Child'* by Drysdale (lot 40) did not fare so well, passing in at \$240,000, significantly lower than its



expectation of \$300,000. In contrast, a portrait by Drysdale of his daughter Lynne (lot 34) was pursued by 4 phone bidders and the room, selling at \$260,000.

Charles Blackman's mid '50s *'Shrinking Alice'* (lot 35, depicted) attracted another low-end estimate sale price of \$340,000, and lot 43, William Robinson's *'Landscape (Canungra)'*, also reached its pre-sale expectation of \$200,000.

The unusual *'Balinese Woman'* by Ian Fairweather drew healthy interest to reach

\$140,000; while Jeffrey Smart secured two of the top 15 spots, albeit under low end estimates, with 'Study for the Discussion' (lot 31) making \$90,000, and 'Near Pisa' at \$330,000. Nolan's Parkville, however, didn't find any appeal estimated at \$110-130,000 and was passed in at \$90,000.

Getting the top lots away took time, and with a slow rate of 50 lots per hour there was little exuberance being shown for the task, despite the big numbers at stake. The bidding battle of the night was reserved for an untitled work by Margaret Preston of Mosman Bay Bridge (lot 64, depicted). As the only known example of this work the estimate was clearly conservative, and the coloured woodcut was chased by 4 phone bidders and the room to achieve a whopping hammer price of \$44,000, almost double high end.



Around 8pm and lot 80 the audience halved, but the momentum picked up and there was plenty of interest in the Australian settler narratives made popular by Pro Hart, Darcy Doyle and Hugh Sawrey, with the chase for lot 118 by the latter bringing the phone table alive to secure it for \$23,000 against a high end estimate of \$15,000. An example of a more modern cultural mythology in the making, Nolans' Gallipoli watercolour (lot 121), also exceeded its high end estimate to make \$11,000.

Aboriginal art demonstrated the same hammer price patterns, although was hit harder statistically due to the large number of highly priced works in the modest number on offer, and the withdrawal of lot 103, a work by Clifford Possum. Rover Thomas' Mount House (lot 38) carried the hope of its expectations selling at \$300,000, while the equal top lot by Emily (lot 37) failed to find a buyer just shy of its low end at the same price. The sale's other over-scaled three metre work by Makinti Napanangka (lot 105) also passed in; as did the early board by Paddy Jaminji (lot 106), which attracted little interest. Black Hill, another work by Rover Thomas attracted the only really spirited bidding of the indigenous works to exceed its high end estimate, selling for \$45,000 (lot 104).

A salient lesson in the value of artist/collector cachet was made early in the sale. Lot 2 was another work from an edition of Klippel bronzes, two of which sold recently in the Gleeson Estate auction. The Gleeson bronzes, which were APs and gifts to Gleeson and Frank O'Keefe from the artist, sold for \$4,000 and \$6,000. Lot 2 managed a hammer price of \$1,700.

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