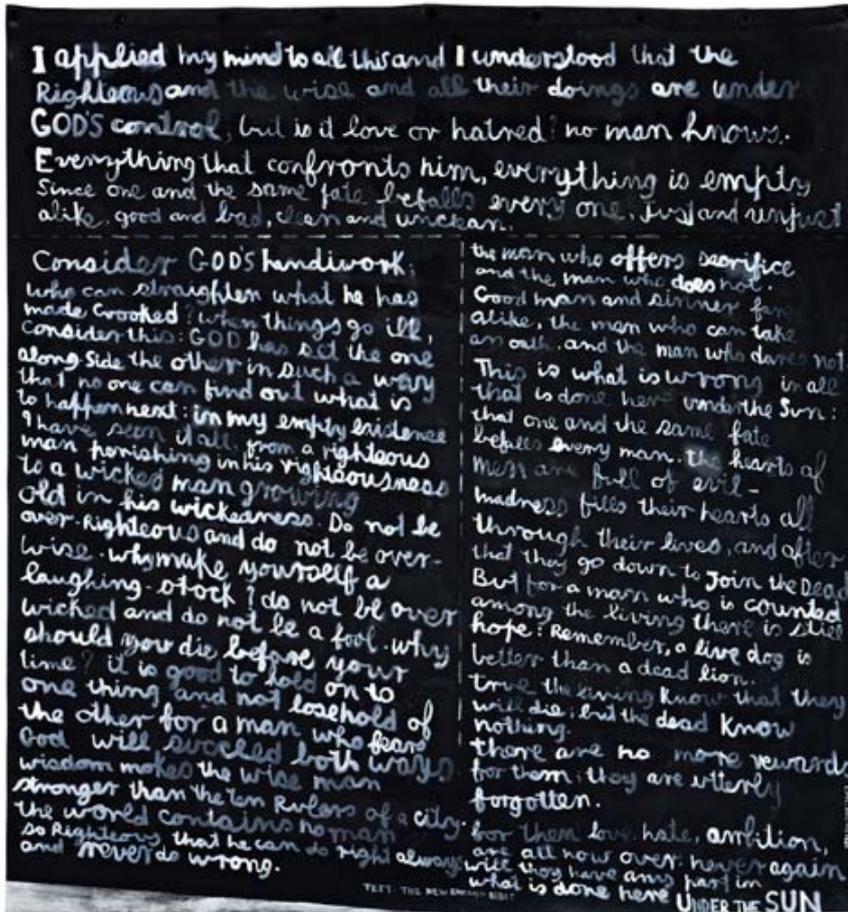


Deutscher & Hackett Sale Navigates End of Year Ennui and with New Records Tallies \$4.7 Million

By Jane Raffan, on 17-Nov-2010

The failure of a couple of high profile lots is an obvious statistical element to clearances of 76% by lot and 59% by value, but end-of-year auctions are notoriously unpredictable for works tilted at the top of a tired market, and sale successes need to be measured more broadly



In the absence of million dollar hammer falls, market stamina needs to be gauged elsewhere, and in this regard the auction demonstrated continued breadth and depth, as well as a good measure of ennui.

William Robinson's heavily contested *Construction with Wrecks, Dunny and Bull, 1984* (Lot 10 ) was the star performer. In an audacious move, Michael Nagy entered the fray with the winning bid at the high-end estimate and captured a new record for this series with a final price of \$440,000. The previous top price for a farmyard construction (\$300K) was achieved at the market's peak.

The press around the deaccessioned Fairweathers from the AGNSW may have been divided with regards to museological merit, but the prototypical iconography and composition of *Summer, 1964* (Lot 6 ) ensured its popularity with collectors.

The painting achieved the best result against estimate of the five works by the artist in the sale, with the hammer falling after steady competition at \$270,000 against its pre-sale estimate of \$180-240,000. The artist's *Tombs in Peking, 1936* (Lot 8 ) secured a similar result, drawing \$390,000 from a phone bidder against a low-end of \$270,000.

The mystical allusions of an earthly paradise in the other Chinese

Clearance by number was 76%, but the failure of two highest estimated lots to sell on the night, including this work by Colin McCahon, brought the clearance rate by value down to 59%.

Fairweather, *River at Hangchow, 1945-47* (Lot 1 ) proved alluring; the work pulled in bids to tally \$48,000, setting the sale off with a spark. This was closely followed by determined bidding for Whiteley's version of a Sydney paradise, with *The Spilt Second Summer Began, 1979* (Lot 3) being chased well above estimate to settle at \$82,500.

The deaccession of *Gethsemane, 1958* (Lot 7 ) was the most controversial of the two from the AGNSW, with Snr Curator Barry Pearce having grumbled about his disquiet to the press. It was also the hardest picture amongst the Fairweathers to excite buyers given its heavily muted palette and rather dour Christian subject matter.

Literary luminary David Malouf was spotted in the audience, but fantasies about authors trying to conjure the genius of Patrick White through possession of his favoured work of art evaporated when the painting sold to a phone bidder for \$800,000 after stalling briefly at \$700K.

The sale price equals the top result for the artist, and is a new record for this style. The work is also likely to be tightly held; soon to travel back to Queensland and cocooned in the personal collection of Phillip Bacon.

Accounting for the sale's low clearance by value was the failure of two of the three most expensive highlights: Fred Williams' *Two Green Clouds, 1966* (Lot 11, est.\$1-1.4M) and Colin McCahon's *I Applied My Mind, 1982* (Lot 12, est.\$800K-1.2M).

Dealer Martin Browne was in the room to observe the McCahon offerings, both of which passed without referral. New Zealand dealers were active on these lots, but nowhere near reserves; agricultural producers are not alone in counting the costs to

exports from the dollar's current high.

The rest of the top ten pre-sale highlights all sold a couple of bids under estimate. Fred Williams' *Coliban Falls II*, 1979 (Lot 9 ) for \$270K (est. \$280-340,000); James Gleeson's *Tristan*, 1952 (Lot 17 ) for \$135K (est. \$150-200,000) and Bronwyn Oliver (Lot 14 ) for \$195K (est. \$220-260,000).

Notably the major Gascoigne (Lot 5 ) also passed without referral, ending a dream run for this artist at auction this year. Deutscher+Hackett continued their success with Olsen watercolours, however, selling *The Big Sun and Lily Pond*, 1986 (Lot 4 ) for \$143,000 including GST payable on the hammer.

These results typified the tenor of the sale thereafter, with runs of intermittent passes on solid lots and the hammer repeatedly falling below just low end estimates.

Buyer 214 will likely capitalise on his punt on Robert Dickerson's interesting non-formulaic image of race going habitués who scour the ground for winning tote tickets carelessly tossed away. *Emus at Randwick*, 1964 (Lot 34 ) was acquired for \$26,000, several bids under its low-end.

Peppered amongst the middle order were a few highlights that helped break any suggestion of a sustained pall.

James Gleeson's *The Forerunner*, c1950 (Lot 20 ) made \$16,000 against a high-end cap of \$15K, but most works did not surpass estimated expectations, such as John Passmore's *Sand Fight No.6*, 1953 (Lot 46 ) , which created a welcome change in momentum but was only chased to mid estimate, selling for \$22,000.

The first lot to really wake up the crowd was Alexander Schramm's colonial watercolour *Natives of South Australia*, c1850 (Lot 49 ) , which enjoyed the only true spirited bidding on the night to achieve a hammer of \$40,000 against its estimate of \$10-15,000. McCubbin's *Study of Poultry*, c1908 (Lot 54 ) also saw determined bidding to sell towards its upper-end at \$33,000 and provided the only other highlight in the traditional works.

At lot 64 Anita Archer handed over to Scott Livesey who was put on his toes with bidders clamouring for *Two Cows Unpainted*, 1993 (Lot 65 ) , a small unassuming work by John Kelly, which flew to \$11,000 against its modest estimate of \$5.5-7K.

After this initial excitement the general pattern of sales continued, with lots of competition amongst bidders happily chasing works to low-end reserves without any real surprises above estimates, and Livesey settled to move things along in amongst the lower cost modern and contemporary works in a no-nonsense manner.

Most of the repatriated London works found ready buyers within stated ranges, as did the contemporary offering. There were a few spoils for the savvy, however, with political commentator Annabel Crabbe snapping up Guan Wei's *The Last Temptation*, 1997 (Lot 75 ) for \$9,500, well below its vaunted \$12-18,000 estimate.

There were also new entrants to the secondary market, such as Sean Cordeiro and Claire Healy's *Berlin(Lack)*, 2007 (Lot 71 )) making a debut sale for the artists at \$13,000.

In the prints section, the Warhol and Jagger screenprints all sold to one buyer on the phone below low-end estimates.

Australian material fared better. Max Dupain's 1970 print of *Jean with a Wire Mesh*, 1937 (Lot 117 ) sold for \$11,000 against an upper estimate of \$10K. Whiteley's *Silver Eye*, 1988 (Lot 120 ) was the section highlight, with a stack of absentee bids obliterating in-room buyers to sell at its high-end of \$16,000; followed closely by John Brack's *Spectators*, 1956 (Lot 123 ) , which also sold to a paper bid for \$16,000.

Throughout the back catalogue works Livesey regularly sold "to the hat" (Paul Auckett) and the coterie of auction agents that cozy-up in the back-rows of the room, waiting like crows on a wire to pounce on unsupported lots, such as Whiteley's *Towards Sculpture 7*, 1977 (Lot 118 ) , which was knocked down to the hat for \$5,000 against an estimate of \$8K.

Despite the disappointment of not having been able to move the big two on the night, Deutscher+Hackett now have several new records tucked away to counter any criticism not tied to market relevancies.

With a solid 2010 turnover tally developed amid the clamour of internal industry shake-ups and ongoing financial crisis fallouts, they should be well set-up for strategic forays in continuing market mêlées.

Sale Referenced: [Important Australian + International Works of Art, Deutscher and Hackett , Sydney, 17/11/2010](#)

About The Author

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