

Museum Quality Work Dominates Top Tier at Deutscher & Hackett's Important Fine Art Auction

By Jane Raffan, on 14-Apr-2010

Much like the long awaited autumnal break in the weather, Deutscher & Hackett's April 28 Sydney sale feels like a breath of fresh air. To be sure, there are no headliner multi-million dollar pictures, but the sale boasts several major works by mid century icons with high calibre provenance that bolster a stimulating and solid mix of traditional, modernist and contemporary work. The contemporary component, in particular, is very strong, and at around 23% by volume sets the sale apart from its competitors in tenor and tone.

Following recent record breaking sales, Bronwyn Oliver devotees will have a chance to snap up another three works, including *Insignia*, 2003 (Lot 8 ) for \$120–160,000, and *Volute*, 2002 (Lot 5 ) , which is priced at a highly accessible \$40-60,000. An iconic sawn soft-drink crate assemblage by Rosalie Gascoigne is also up for grabs. With so few appearing on the market, *Ship's Log*, 1997-98 (Lot 7 ) should easily exceed its Post-Bust conservative estimate of \$150,000.

Deutscher & Hackett is also confident of establishing a strong secondary market record for rising star Daniel Boyd, one of the current crop of new painters exciting the contemporary scene. *I'm Still in Love with You*, 2008 (Lot 2, \$14-18,000) is related to another work in the current Art Gallery of New South Wales exhibition *Wilderness*.

Major public institution exhibition provenance features prominently in other highlights.

John Brack's exceptional work *Promenade*, 1978 (Lot 40 ) , has featured in both Brack retrospectives organised by the National Gallery of Victoria. Still smarting from the loss of the long term loan Nolan Kelly to NSW, the NGV would surely be attracted to securing this major work for the comparatively modest outlay of \$400-500,000.

Lloyd Rees' highlight painting, *Summer in the Suburbs*, 1964 (Lot 37, \$220–320,000), was included in the 1970 AGNSW retrospective and is important in the artist's oeuvre for its treatment and perspective. This work should also appeal to collectors interested in connecting with the artist on a more intimate level; it is documented as bringing great pleasure to Rees during its painting. The current Sotheby's sale also features a summery Rees, which carries a much bigger price tag of \$450,000, but without any museum cachet. One can almost hear the crackle of the cicadas in the D&H picture, which radiates with warmth, while the Sotheby's Rees offers buyers the prospect of a cooler, more impressionistic treatment with distant harbour.

Deutscher & Hackett has wooed seven works by Charles Blackman from collectors, including sale highlight *Alice*, 1956 (Lot 44, \$140–180,000), which has been on long term loan to the Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria, since its last trade in 2003. Its medium might shorten the list of potential buyers, being painted on cardboard, but the tale's classic iconography is offered up in a dynamic composition that may well prove enticement enough for a savvy collector to take the plunge. The sale also includes an interesting dark work from the *Schoolgirl* years, with *Girl in the Lane*, 1952 (Lot 43, \$40–60,000).

One major lot of the sale has travelled all the way from Chile through to Frank MacDonald at Potts Point, Sydney. Rupert Bunny's *A Quiet Evening II*, c.1908 (Lot 25 ) is on offer for \$180–240,000. Its companion painting of the same name, which features a third female figure, was traded twice in the late '90s for around \$300,000. Bunny's appeal is high, with a success rate at auction around 75-80%. This work's freshness and reasonable estimate should ensure it adds to this statistical pattern.

Neville Gruzman, AM, was a Sydney architect, collector and sometimes contentious persona, most often in his role as Mayor of Woollahra in the '90s. The highlight of the estate works on offer is Ian Fairweather's *Figure Group IV*, 1970 (Lot 14, \$180–240,000), from the artist's late period, which was selected for the 1994 Queensland Art Gallery retrospective.

From the same collection, John Olsen's aptly titled tapestry *Joie de Vivre*, 1964 (Lot 15 ) is competitively priced at \$100–120,000. It is unlikely that its artist proof status will detract from its appeal, given two works from the edition of six are in state institutions and the last example traded in 2006 for \$162,000.

The Gruzman estate selection also features six paintings by Eric Smith, who won the Archibald Prize in 1970 with a portrait of the architect, but more notably contributes a selection of sculpture, including two by Robert Klippel (Lots 16, 17), and two late figural casts by Auguste Rodin (Lot 21, \$30–40,000, and (Lot 22 ) , \$60–80,000).

The 3D works in this auction are a refreshing component, and along with photography, comprise about 15% of the lots on offer. They provide a strong contrast to the painting and other works on paper, and should also assist buyers to refocus on individual works as they peruse the catalogue.

A solid representation of Bill Henson's work from the 1980s to 2000 (Lots 11-13, 218, 219) headlines the photography component, which also offers works by Dupain and Helmet Newton. Weightier works by Clement Meadmore (*Start Up*, 1999, Lot 61, \$65–85,000) are complemented by the delicacy of Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's *Still Life with Four Bowls*, 1998, (Lot 6, \$25–35,000). Prosaic name aside, this work could be a sleeper, given it is almost identical in components to *Shadow*, 2003, which was sold by D&H in 2007 for \$45,600.

With its 244 lots providing a low end total of \$5.5 million, this sale falls well shy of the competition's tallies in the first round, but Deutscher & Hackett's 'steady as she goes' approach is paying off. Their yearly totals since the crash have not fallen as sharply as the other big two, and last year they handled the highest priced work for the year, with their total turnover nearly matching Menzies. Given their stance and relative youth in the game, if the buoyant start to this year's sale calendar is

maintained and flows through to contemporary art, they will continue to punch above their weight.

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

About The Author

Jane Raffan runs ArtiFacts, an Art Services Consultancy based in Sydney, with a specialist focus in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art. Jane is an accredited valuer in Aboriginal Art for the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program. She has over 20 years experience in the arts sector, working initially for the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and then over twelve years in the auction industry. www.artifacts.net.au.

The Australian Art Sales Digest is published by John Furphy Pty. Ltd., Melbourne, Australia.