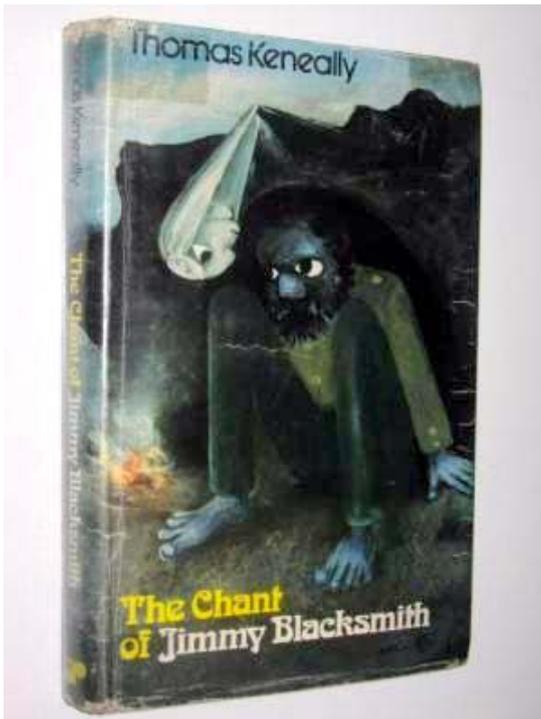


Sotheby's Hopes to Re-Write Press on the Market with \$1M Literati Top Lot

By Jane Raffan, on 07-Aug-2011

Sotheby's upcoming August 23 *Important Australian and International Art* sale boasts a magic million dollar Boyd. *The Frightened Bridegroom, 1958* (Lot 14), estimate \$1-1.2 million, would see the record for this body of work (\$900K, set in 2001) fall to a significantly smaller and quieter example. The work carries an impressive exhibition provenance and significant profile in academic publications on the artist. It also comes with connections to literati, having been used for an edition of Thomas Keneally's classic, *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*.



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Promoting a potentially record-breaking million dollar picture is an important catch-cry in the annual race for the top spot. Given the scarce availability of major works from the acclaimed 1958 series outside public collections, Sotheby's is confident it has this one in the bag.

The excitement of million dollar top-lots aside, some of the most interesting results in the Australian art market over the past couple of years have been amongst the contemporary art offerings. At around the same size as the Boyd, Rosalie Gascoigne's *High Water Mark, 1992* (Lot 29 ) is offered with an estimate of \$45-65,000.

Having successfully tendered the first sculptural piece by contemporary jeweller and metal-smith Mari Funaki to auction in their May fine art sale, Sotheby's is offering the balance of unique heat-coloured and painted steel sculptural work from artist's estate – all carrying recent exhibition history with the NGV – in one splash.

Funaki's sculptures are captivating, both from an aesthetic standpoint – where their cool, folded, origami-like organic/sci-fi forms stand apart from anything else in the sale – and from the perspective of the market, where they might just provoke some fresh curiosity about its future potential amongst jaded auction goers. Object (2010) (Lot 60 ) estimated at \$10,000-15,000 should be enticing for new collectors, while Object (2010) (Lot 62 ) with an estimate of \$30,000-40,000 has already been tested by the sale of a similar work in May that achieved a hammer price of \$34,000.

The six sculptures with a total low end of \$130K are exquisite examples of the artist's late work and, given they represent close to 10% of the sleek sale's 67 lots, Sotheby's is clearly confident of their appeal. Sale potential notwithstanding, their inclusion is a refreshing novel addition to an otherwise tight and obvious selection of mostly high quality works by a broad array of well known Australian blue-chip artists.

Landscapes have consistently fared well over the past two years and the sale offers several major works by some of the most popular exponents in its warm-up first quarter before the Boyd. John Olsen's *Landscape Wounded by Summer, 1985-86* (Lot 5 ) , estimate \$250,000-350,000 is followed closely by William Robinson's *Fading Light, Springbrook To Beechmont 2002* (Lot 7 ) , estimate \$180,000-220,000. Another million dollar standard bearer in the genre, Fred Williams, is represented by *Orange and Green Landscape, 1975* (Lot 28 ) , estimate \$280,000-320,000.

The second top lot in the sale is a landscape with an altogether different ambience. Russel Drysdale's *Deserted Out-Station, 1945* (Lot 22 ) , estimate \$500,000-600,000, comes with a provenance and publication pedigree longer than the Boyd, and deservedly so, being a superb example of Drysdale's surrealist interpretations of our long history of failed attempts at settling/taming the outback.

Another top ten Drysdale, *Country Girl, 1966* (Lot 13 ) , estimate \$250,000-300,000, speaks volumes, but the brown portrait of a rather dour girl with floral hat and lace collar doesn't beckon like his city dwelling girls holding flowers in interiors. There are plenty of traditional brown pictures scattered throughout, and a blue one of note. Arthur Streeton's *Ocean Blue, Lorne, 1921* (Lot 17 ) carries family provenance for its price tag of \$80,000-100,000.

Elsewhere amongst the top lots Olsen is represented by a sizeable oil on board from 1962, when life-force in its diverse manifestations was a focus of the artist. Painted with a vibrant palette and bursting with energy, *Child's Seventh Birthday, 1962* (Lot 30 ) , estimate \$140,000-180,000 commands attention. From the same period John Perceval is represented by a true collector's picture depicting cacophony of a different kind. *Mirka's Studio, 1961* (Lot 31 ) , estimate \$35-45,000, is an intimate painting of Mirka Mora's studio crammed with the painter's accoutrements.

The sale offers an interesting academic pairing with Justin O'Brien's sexualised Classical theme and a religious Donald Friend

picture. O'Brien's *Venus on a Terrace*, 1988 (Lot 1 ) , estimate \$45-55,000, is positioned to excite the crowd and stir up bidding in a sale that offers little time to build momentum. Donald Friend's *Blake Prize* entry, *Acts of John the Baptist, 1951* (Lot 12 ) carries the same estimate. Justin O'Brien won the inaugural Blake prize that year with his triptych altar-piece *The Virgin Enthroned*.

In an obvious sign of the times, the last major lot of the sale, and the largest at four metres, Tim Maguire's luscious diptych *Untitled 20060101, 2006* (Lot 58), is being offered with an estimate more than halved from its last showing in 2009, at \$90,000-120,000.

And in a typical market test, and perhaps a test of the times, Sotheby's is offering a work by the recently deceased doyen Lucien Freud, who is represented by *Woman with Arm Tattoo, 1996* (Lot 67 ) , estimate \$60,000-80,000. The subject may appear to be sleeping, but Sotheby's is sure it will keep collectors awake and in their seats until the end of the sale, strategically placing the etching as the last lot, thereby hoping to place an exclamation mark at the end of their \$4.6–5.8 million dollar rewrite on the state of the market.

Sale Referenced: [Important Australian & International Art, Sotheby's Australia, Sydney, 23/08/2011](#)

About The Author

Jane Raffan runs ArtiFacts, an Art Services Consultancy based in Sydney. Jane is an accredited valuer for the Australian Government's highly vetted Cultural Gifts Program with 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 fine art auction industry. Her consultancy focuses on collection management, market advice and valuations. Apart from published fine art market commentary, Jane also writes and blogs on Aboriginal art, and produces/presents a fortnightly radio program on the arts. www.artifacts.net.au.