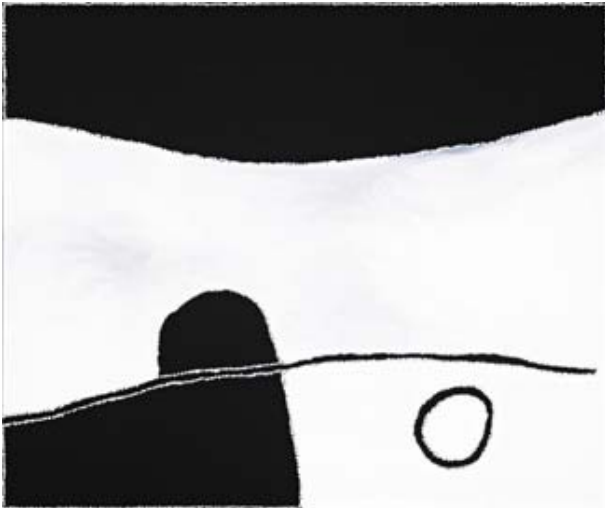


## Bonham's Saved by a Bolter: Paddy Bedford Sale Streaks Ahead of the Field.


By Jane Raffan, on 22-Nov-2011

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and Tom Roberts' *Como Chiasso* (Lot 13 ) for \$15,000 (against \$13).

The major lot of the catalogue from amongst the multi-vendor consignments was almost a non-starter. James Hendy tortuously jockeyed vendor bids waiting on a phone bidder connection. In the end, Brett Whiteley's *Shui (Water wader), 1978-79* (Lot 23 ) was passed-in and later re-opened, selling to the late-comer for \$400,000 (its low end reserve) and relief all 'round.

Generally, works in the multi-vendor catalogue were over estimated, especially the contemporary group, which accounted for its lower clearance compared with the Perth core. A couple of late passed-in works sold under estimate after the auction before results came on line (38, 41) to bring this number up closer to 50%.

Overall 30% of works sold above low-end, with two from the multi-vendor offering: Donald Friend's *The Artist's Cottage at Hill End* (Lot 16 ) made \$14,000 (against \$10K) while Bill Henson's *Untitled* (Lot 32) made \$23,000 (against \$18K). William Mora bought a work back into the family collection, securing Joy Hester's *From an Incredible Night Dream* (Lot 34 ) for an easy \$2,600; it carried Georges Mora provenance. Only one from the second half of the catalogue exceeded expectations. Elioth Gruner's *Pastorale, c. 1912* (Lot 40 ) , with another painted study verso, made \$11,000 (est. \$7-9K).



Mora was smiling when he picked up the Hester, but perhaps he knew the Paddy Bedford sale was already a clear odds-on favourite. The auction attracted plenty of invested onlookers, including Colin and Liz Laverty, and also new blood. And of course there was the bank of 8 phones. The international previews paid off. In the end 40% of the works went to overseas collectors and/or their local agents.

As predicted, the two MCA provenanced works were among the most strongly contested. *Brumby Springs* (Lot 2B) was the most dramatic result, with a hammer price of \$140,000 against expectations of \$80–120,000. The other MCA work, *Dolly Hole* (Lot 14B), sold just above the same pre-sale estimate for \$86,000. Agathon Galleries dealer John Ioannou heavily underbid many works in the sale, including lot 2, and was successful on lots 17 and 18, both around the low end mark.

The crowd did not appear to preference any particular works from the balance on offer. And it was clear that personal taste

On paper, volume clearances and totals for both categories of Australian art seemed fairly matched, with the *Australian Fine Art* sale managing 55% and 76.5% by value for a total of \$1,148,100 hammer, and the two Aboriginal catalogues clearing 58% and 61% by value, for a total of \$1,291,000. In the room, however, it was clear that the Paddy Bedford sale dominated the Aboriginal results and, significantly for the number crunchers, helped round out the stats for the other mixed vendor catalogue, which failed to sell any of the key major lots.

As expected, the small 42 lot *Australian Fine Art* sale shot off to a good start with the strong sale of *Luxembourg Gardens* by Ethel Carrick Fox (Lot 2 ) , which made \$32,000 against a presumably strategically undervalued pre-sale estimate of \$7-9K. The 13 fresh works from the un-named Perth Collection kept the pace up for the first quarter, and it was this core that fared best in the sale clearance-wise. It also provided 2 of the top 3 lots, with Rupert Bunny's *The Convalescent* (Lot 5 ) , selling for \$130,000 (\$20,000 below L/E), and *Lady Sewing* (Lot 10 ) , easily chased above low end to make \$240,000.

Only four other works in the sale managed to clear low end, three of which were from the same Perth collection: Emanuel Phillips Fox's *Cassi, South France* (Lot 3 ) sold for \$36,000 (against \$30K), Walter Withers' *Coming Home* (Lot 8 ) for \$22,000 (against \$18K)

was the main motivating factor rather than alternative international exhibition provenances. Attracted by reasonable estimates, the privates punted on most of the gouaches and works on the two smaller scales. Only two gouaches and one small scaled painting failed to sell (19, 20, 24).

The best performing of the works without any exhibition provenance was *Yoowangeny – Mud Springs* (Lot 22B), which soared above its high end estimate of \$120K, again chased by Ioannou, to sell to the phone for \$145,000. The highest price on the night went to another such work, the very beautiful *Merrmerrji – Queensland Creek* (Lot 23B), which easily made its high end of \$180,000. The other three large scale works in the sale did not find buyers (5, 10, 16), suggesting that anywhere close to retail pricing is not generally acceptable for works without added cachet.

In the end, the Paddy Bedford sale's hard, cold stats (23% by volume unsold; 31% sold below low end; 31% sold at/above low end; 15% sold at/above high end) do not truly represent the success or significance of the event. In the current climate it would be hard to find another Aboriginal artist (or any Australian artist for that matter) that could command a single catalogue with any certainly of strong clearances. Bonham's should be congratulated for taking a bold stand in an overly cautious domestic market, and for promoting the works to an international contemporary art audience.

The large scale Paddy Bedford in the mixed vendor *Aboriginal Art* catalogue did not sell, despite its low estimate, and it was not alone in this distinction. Despite buyers from the Bedford sale engaging on other Aboriginal lots (9, 11, 16, 31, 34–37), 53% remained unsold. Only 9.5% of sales were knocked down under the low end estimate, suggesting tough reserves accounted for the other sold stats. Of the 21 works that did sell, 57% were at low end, 24% were mid range and 9.5% above the high end. The highest prices went to Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula's *Kalipinypa* (Lot 20A), which made its low end of \$35K, and Walangkura Napanangka's untitled work (Lot 37A), ditto at 25,000.

The sale's surprises all came in the closing moments. Bemusement turned to amusement when the crowd noticed James Hendy had accidentally added a zero to the running bids on lot 40, a painted group of wandjina by Manila Karedada. Its sale call of \$18,000 was chuckled down to \$1,800 after mass head turns and whispers signalled the blooper. Not so the next couple of lots. Both grouped bird lots by Maningrida artist Charlie Ikara (lot 42 and 45) flew over their high end estimates to sell for many multiples of their low-ends at \$10,000 and 12,000 respectively, but then again, they carried runaway low estimates.

The *Aboriginal Art* mixed vendor sale tally of \$168,000 hammer won't be leaving anything in the coffers after costs. Luckily for Bonham's this will be ameliorated by the Bedford coup of \$1,123,000. Clearly a lot of time and energy went into marketing this sale. The Bonham's trifecta did not pay off but ended on an upbeat note, with an end-of-year flourish that would otherwise have left them reeling from the performances of the two mixed vendor sales. And as for the Aboriginal art market's next big punt? Don't bet on the jockey, just hope they push to wear contemporary silks.

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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