

## From Rubbish to Rare Treasure – Christie's UK Salvages Historical Works via iPhone App for First Australian Art Outing in Two Years

By Jane Raffan, on 07-Sep-2010

**An eye hook used to be understood as a simple fastener. Now it means your story is sexy enough to guarantee PR. And so it does: the tentative venture back into the market for Australian art by Christie's London is suddenly a story about the salvation of historical Blamire Young works via their iPhone app.**

The vendor could just as easily have googled Blamire Young and discovered an artistic legacy of significance, but luckily for Christie's he asked his hip neighbour instead. The works depicting Light Horse and artillery units (Lot 7 ) were once owned by General Edward 'Curly' Hutton who became the first commander of the Australian Army at Federation three years earlier. They are being offered as a pair and carry expectations of £20,000 to £30,000.

The military pictures are amongst 48 lots in Christie's South Kensington's September 23 auction of *Modern and Contemporary Australian Art*, which will be their first sale of Australian art in London since December 2008.

After the exit of Christie's Australia in April 2006 the company promised to continue their presence in the Australian art market through the sale of important pictures in London. In December 2007 they made good on their word and moved £2.5m in an auction of 98 lots that cleared 65%. When the cumulative effects of the crash gained clarity, the financial market expats who didn't go under went to ground. Christie's Australian art sale a year later barely managed to scratch up a half million pounds, moving only 36% of the 85 works on offer. Nineteen months after that pounding cashed up expats are still thin on the ground, but Christie's are braving the waters with a select offering carrying a low end value around AUD\$1 million.

Despite its title, which appears to be designed to capitalise on current local trends that preference modern and contemporary art, around 50% of the sale would be classified as appealing to traditional tastes. And in contrast to certain local auction trends of the past couple of years, the auction features many works fresh to the market, including another noted as having also been retrieved from a dusty attic: Charles Blackman's *Child* from 1961 (Lot 30 ) , estimate £15-20,000.

Other highlights, like the sale's top lot by John Peter Russell, *Belle-Ile-en-Mer* (Lot 4 ) , estimate £150-200,000, have been on the walls of stately homes since they were painted long ago. And several of the modern works were snapped up at London exhibitions, *de rigueur* for the Australian avant-garde, most notably Arthur Boyd's reflection tree, (Lot 35 ) , estimate £70-100,000.

If the market holds, the current strength of the Australian dollar promises a good result for Christie's, as most of the best works are reasonably estimated, including: Grace Cossington Smith's *Flowers in a Jug, 1931* (Lot 22 ) at £18-22,000; Robert Dickerson's *Man and Boy* (Lot 29 ) , at £7-10,000; Robert Klippel's *Metal Construction, Opus 71* (Lot 31 ) , at £20-30,000; and a very strong watercolour by Albert Namatjira, *The Valley, Macdonnell ranges, NT* (Lot 24 ) . Painted in the larger of the artist's two main formats, this work will be a steal if sold within its pre-sale value range of £10-15,000.

Sale Referenced: [Modern + Contemporary Australian Art, Christies, London, 23/09/2010](#)

### 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](http://www.artifacts.net.au).