

## Sotheby's Buoyed by Sale of Big Ticket Boyd and Strong Clearances

By Jane Raffan, on 22-Aug-2011

**A slight pall hung over the room before the Sotheby's Important Australian & International Art auction last night. No doubt this was fuelled in part by the results at Bonham's the night prior, but auctioneer Martin Gallon was upbeat and, luckily for Sotheby's, was able to bring the hammer down on most lots – including the million dollar Boyd – to rack up a total around \$4.1 million; just one Fred Williams and a couple of bread and butter Gleasons short of the vaunted pre-sale low-end of \$4.6M.**



The Frightened Bridegroom, estimated at \$1.0 - 1.2 million, was sold on the money, in just a few bids, to phone bidder 812, who ended up being the chief contributor to the sale's strong clearance

serious, if not somewhat dour.

The only exception was during Rah Fizelle's *Woman in Pink Blouse* (Lot 9 ) , which was boisterously bid to \$90,000 by a collector who rather shocked the auctioneer by calling out bids significantly over increments. In relief at his success, the collector told this correspondent that he had been waiting for a similar work "all his life", having first been entranced by the artist's Modigliani-like women in 1990, at a David Jones exhibition where, coincidentally, they were priced around \$100,000. The same collector picked up lot 42, George Lambert's *Black Cravat*, at low-end.

As expected, the family provenance of Arthur Streeton's *Ocean Blue, Lorne* (Lot 17 ) proved a great lure and a clear counter to its relatively late date of execution. The work generated a slow but determined bidding war that saw it achieve a staggering \$150K over low-end estimate to sell at \$230,000, which surprised most of the 100 or so attendees, including the Fizelle buyer, who shook his head in disbelief throughout.

Another private collector in the room was responsible for chasing Elioth Gruner's *Spring in the Orchard* (Lot 39 ) over estimate to \$70,000, earning him a kiss and a hug from his wife, and a big smile from the auctioneer, who at that point would have reckoned on evens for the subliminal progressive low-end tally, despite the eight lots passed or referred (6, 16, 23, 25, 28, 30, 32 and 35).

Mercifully Gallon did not labour over works that had no support on the books or the room and, along with his concise and precise control of actual bidding engagements, the sale ticked over in reasonable time. As the sale progressed and the lots kept selling, Gallon was even thanking the underbidders for their contributions, and didn't show any signs of auctioneer tetchiness when telephone land-lines failed at lot 52, causing a scramble for mobiles and a mini reordering of proceedings.

As expected, the contemporary works at the sale's end by Mari Funaki were all but pre-sold, with the highlight being *Object (2010)* (Lot 60 ) , which had at least 5 active bidders. Estimated at \$10-15,000, the typical murmurs from amongst the non-participating sections of the audience fell silent at \$26K and Gallon's relaying of bids dropped to a whisper before bringing

*The Frightened Bridegroom* (Lot 14 ) was sold on the money, in just a few bids, to phone bidder 812, who, in Geoffrey Smith's hands, ended up being the chief contributor to the sale's strong clearance by both lot and by value of over 78%, (AASD calculations) spending nearly \$1.7 million (hammer) on eight lots across the board from colonial to contemporary.

Buyer 812 snaffled up the two top lots at low end; the second being the Drysdale highlight *Deserted Outstation* (Lot 22 ) at half a million. They were also responsible for a couple of the few results significantly over estimate, chasing Conrad Martens' *The Tia River Falls* (Lot 37 ) to a hammer price of \$50K against expectations of \$18-25,000, S.T. Gill's *Fryers Creek, Castlemaine* (Lot 19 ) just over the high end for \$32K, and Sali Herman's *Little Red Car* (Lot 44) for \$28K, against a low end of \$18,000.

The pattern followed with sculpture: Kelly's camouflaged *Cow Up a Tree* (Lot 24 ) was added to buyer 812's ticket for \$55,000 against its high end of \$40K. Elsewhere other sculpture had broadly mixed results, with Klippel's *No.261* (Lot 8) selling at its low end of \$45,000 and Perceval's gremlin-like angel, lot 32 not inspiring a bid.

Overall, very few lots were demonstrably keenly contested. In the face of this, and seemingly enjoying his return to the Sotheby's podium, Martin Gallon did a fine job adding some drama and flare to the proceedings throughout, which would otherwise have been very

down the hammer at \$28,000. The other works (bar 1 passed in, lot 64) all sold at low end.

And in a sign that he was enjoying the show (if not what its success meant for the state of the market), Denis Savill exclaimed in mock shock and awe when the last lot, Lucien Freud's *Woman with an Arm Tattoo* (Lot 67 ) , made \$70,000 hammer (it was a mid estimate result, after-all). The auctioneer certainly didn't mind. Savill was responsible for a rather large slice of the sale's clearance, acquiring (at least) Fred Williams' *Murray River, Mildura* (Lot 4 ) for \$30,000, John Olsen's *Landscape Wounded by Summer* (Lot 5 ) for \$250,000, Arthur Boyd's *Shoalhaven Landscape* (Lot 26 ) for \$85,000 and Olsen's *Spoonbills and Frogs* (Lot 48 ) for \$46,000.

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

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