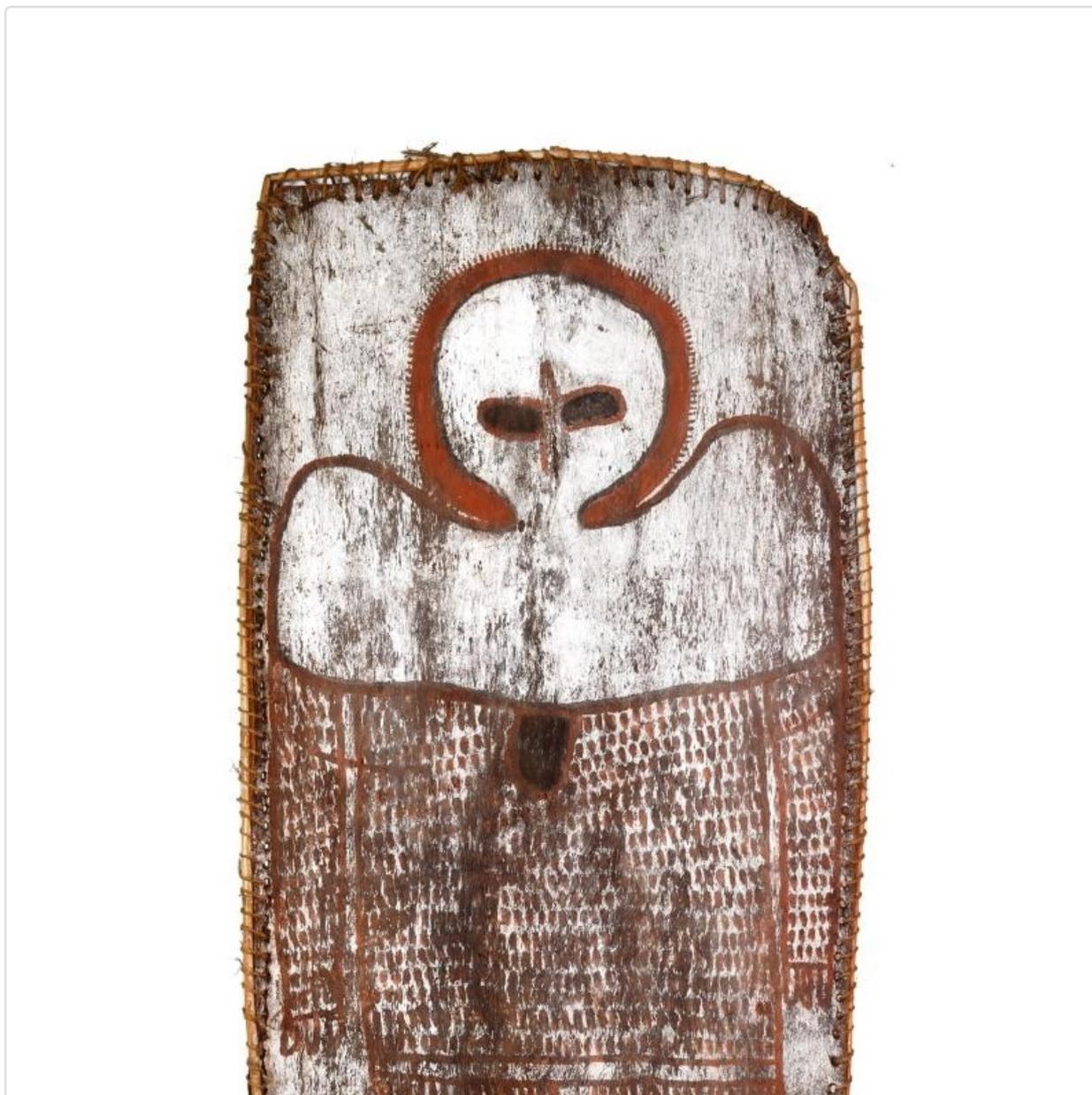
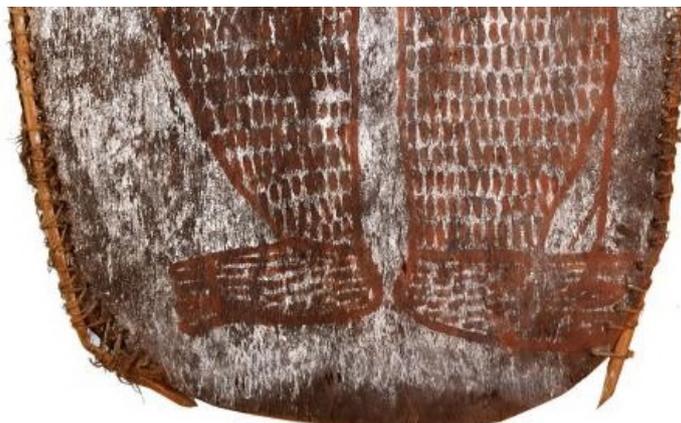


Cooee Art MarketPlace's 5th Indigenous Fine Art Auction Signals 'Niche Filled'

By Jane Raffan, on 04-Dec-2019

Coo-ee Art MarketPlace's November 2017 auction[i] raised eyebrows: the specialised sector was still flailing in recovery from a GFC downturn greater than hit the broader Australian art market. Four sales since, they've created opportunity for vendors in a field strangled by restrictive consignment policies from the big houses and blighted with overly conservative-aimed-to-clear estimates at the other end of the spectrum. With a healthy clearance of 73% by lot, and 85% by value, their latest *Indigenous Fine Art Auction* signals 'niche filled.'





Coo-ee Art MarketPlace's late 2017 inaugural auction raised eyebrows; the specialised sector was still in flailing recovery from a GFC downturn greater than hit the broader Australian art market. Four sales since, they've created opportunity in a field strangled by restrictive top-end consignment policies, and blighted with conservative-aimed-to-clear estimates at the other. With a healthy clearance of 73% by lot and 85% by value, their latest Indigenous Fine Art Auction signals 'niche filled'.

And buyers don't miss out either. All lots carry educative catalogue entries, no matter the value. There's a strong sense that Coo-ee's specialist staff care about the intrinsic and academic value of the works they are offering, not just the dollars. This is not to say that others don't, but it is a foundational element of the MarketPlace brand. And, helpfully, all lots online have a shot of the work hanging or installed in a room setting, flanked by other items to assist determine scale and presence. This is particularly useful for international bidders, and locals who can't attend a viewing.

Coo-ee has been growing their international client base, particularly within Europe (58% of sold lots are heading overseas; most to Europe) and they have also seen a steep rise in internet bidding registrations, up from 80 at their first sale to 150 this time around, with 19 sales or 26% of sold lots bought over the internet.

Of course, we all know dollars matter too, and for some firms, matter most (especially to smaller outfits, and firms that can't rely on overseas backing or cemented Chi-Chi branding). Bringing in the bucks takes a lot of work as well as some good luck (cue out-of-the-woodwork random buyers): the 99 lot sale was mostly built on the former and tallied \$1,075,613 including buyer premium.

The top lot, Emily Kame Kngwarreye's "numinous" and luminous *Kame-Summer Awelye*, 1992 (Lot 25 🎯), from her most sought-after period, secured \$185,000 (est. \$200-250K) from an Australian collector, who beat off an American deep pockets, or at least their competitive edge due to the exchange rate.

While the bulk of the sales were made under the low-end estimate, and around a fifth within, 13% exceeded expectations, including another work by Kngwarreye now destined for Paris. Her fabulous fiery late period *Arlatyeeye (Wildflower Dreaming)*, 1996 (Lot 73 🎯) made \$48,000 against an estimate of \$25-45K.

Australian buyers acquired 42% of the lots on offer, including another sale highlight, Alec Mingelmanganu's, *Wandijina*, c. 1976 (Lot 15 🎯), thought to be one of his earliest known works. It sold to a bidder in the room for \$80,000 (est. \$60-80K) who came only for this prize.

Old Master Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri was well represented by a suite of works (5) that nicely illustrated the range of his oeuvre. A rare-to-the-market c. 1975 serpent carving snaking across a branch, *Untitled* (Lot 71 🗨️) was chased to \$14,000 (est. \$6-8K), while a classic period piece from 1989/1990, (Lot 72 🗨️) *Untitled* (Ceremony at Mount Allan), replete with royal associations in way fewer than six degrees of separation, sold for \$65,000 (est. \$70-90K), a tidy increase on its inaugural 2005 hammer of \$50K.

A Clifford Possum prize popped up recently in a Dallas, Texas sale, with a large (120 x 90 cm) 1973 synthetic polymer paint on composition board bearing Papunya Tula Artists provenance. And while the work wasn't overlooked, being underbid by collectors here and in the US (and probably elsewhere), the price tag of US\$93,750 (approx. \$140K) wasn't at giveaway levels. The result over estimate did, however, make news[i], and will also certainly bring smiles to future recipients of university scholarships, the funding for which was the rationale for selling the unrecognised early masterpiece.

There are no Old Mistresses in Aboriginal art (with a nod to Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker), but Pitjantjatjara elder Nyurapayia (Mrs Bennett) Nampitjinpa has the cred. Painted 5 years before her death, Punkilpirri, 2008 (Lot 44 🗨️) is a stunning example of the artist's mastery of her iconography on a grand scale. This did not go unappreciated, with a French buyer securing the painting at its low-end of \$60,000.

And there were smaller gems to entice throughout. Some well-chased, others not chased well enough. This sale's thumbs-up on the prize-for-waiting-it-out score goes to a fascinating 1950s bark by Charlie Brinkin. *Men's Ceremony*, c. 1950 (Lot 92 🗨️) sold for \$4,000 (est. \$1.5-2.5K), but its design elements speaks to a history worth so much more. The bark painting is adorned with Pintupi iconography arising from the artist's Lajamanu cultural connections, which the catalogue entry tantalisingly suggests presages the early 1970s Western Desert art movement, in particular, the genesis paintings of Papunya-based painters Kaapa, Clifford Possum, Tim Leura and Billy Stockman. Nerd alert!

Adrian Newstead and Mirri Leven were pleased with the sale, and more so with trajectory the MarketPlace sales are moving in, especially with the new blood they see building. And while there's always more work to be done, this enterprise (and their stamina) deserves a 'well done'.

Other lots sold over the high-end estimate:

Lot 7 - Bill Tjapaltjarri *Whiskey, Rockholes and Country, near the Olgas*, 2006, \$7,500 (est. \$5-7K)

Lot 10 - Eubena Nampitjin, *Ladingburra Soak in the Great Sandy Desert*, 1995, \$8,000 (est. 3-5K)

Lot 17 - Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri, *Dingo Dreaming at Marnpi Rockhole*, 1992, \$6,000 (est. \$2-4K)

Lot 39 - Charlie Rrukula, *Bird Carving - Brolga*, c. 1985, \$2,500 (est. \$1.8-2.4K)

Lot 40 - Charlie Tjapangarti, *Pirrinya*, 2004, \$11,000 (est. \$6-8K)

Lot 59 - Judy Napangardi Watson, *Mina Mina Jukurrpa*, 2005, \$14,000 (est. 9-12K)

Lot 70 - Rover Joolama Thomas, *Great Sandy Desert - Canning Stock Route*, 1996, \$28,000 (est. \$20-25K)

Lot 93 - Sam Tjampitjin, *Country - Great Sandy Desert*, 1999, \$7,000 (est. \$3-4K)

Lot 94 - Maggie Watson Napangardi, *Mina Mina Dreaming*, 1999, \$5,000 (est. \$2.5-3.5K)

Lot 99 - Clifton Mack, *Millstream Waterholes*, 2011, \$1,600 (est. \$800-1.2K)

Major unsold lots (over \$20K):

Lot 48 - George (Hairbrush) Tjungarrayi, *Tali Sandhills*, 2003, estimate \$25-35,000

Lot 80 - Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, *Napperby Dreaming*, 1998, estimate \$40-50,000

[i] <https://www.aasd.com.au/index.cfm/news/730-emily-kame-kngwarreyes-earths-creation-i-resets-the-bar-for-indi/>

[ii] <https://www.antiquesandthearts.com/dallas-auction-gallery-romances-bidders-with-aboriginal-native-american-fine-art/>

Sale Referenced: Indigenous Fine Art Auction , CooeeArt MarketPlace , Sydney, 03/12/2019

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, and Vice President of the Auctioneers & Valuers Association of Australia. Jane's experience spans more 20 years working in public and commercial art sectors, initially with the AGNSW, and then over twelve years in the fine art auction industry. Her consultancy focuses on collection management, advisory services and valuations. She is the author of *Power + Colour: New Painting from the Corrigan Collection of Aboriginal Art*. www.artifacts.net.au.

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