

## Quality collections and a distinction-level clearance of 86% sees Deutscher and Hackett claim an impressive year-end tally

By Jane Raffan, on 01-Dec-2016

The cover lot of the Important Fine Art and Aboriginal Art sale held in Sydney by Deutscher and Hackett on 30 November 2016, was a delicate golden view of Lavender Bay by Brett Whiteley titled *Dawn*, 1974 (Lot 39). It snared the sale's top lot position with the hammer falling at \$450,000, improving marginally on its last market outing in 2011. The sale's most exciting result, however, was for another more modest work that focused on the effects of light: a fresh-to-the-market impressionistic depiction of a French village riverside scene in summer, which sparkled with a myriad of hues from sunshine on moving water and dappled shade.



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Emanuel Phillips Fox's, *The Blue Shutters*, c. 1909-1911 (Lot 43 🎨) carried a conservative estimate of \$60,000-80,000, which was quickly eclipsed: tense and strong bidding led to excited murmurs from the crowd at \$190,000, and it was hard fought to finally sell at \$240,000. The result generated a round of applause, at which point auctioneer Roger McIlroy declared "lovely picture; lovely price!".

The Phillips Fox was a highlight from the mixed vendor portion of the overall sale – about 50 lots from 135 – and from which several other 'lovely priced' pictures emerged. Works by William Robinson and Brett Whiteley alone racked up a million dollars.

Robinson's majestic *Carvarnon Gorge Afternoon Light, 2009* (Lot 38 🎨) made \$150,000, while his more typical (and less beautiful) *Landscape with Two Waterfalls, 1990* (Lot 41 🎨) sold just short of its low-end at \$170,000.

Aside from the dawn picture, Whiteley was represented with two nudes, a serene Balinese lake view, and a rare-form ceramic from the Crebbin Collection. The ceramic tile with attributed descriptive title *The Tree* (Lot 28 🎨), was the best-performing, selling for \$32,000 (despite a large crack) against expectations of \$6,000-9,000, and generated appreciative claps.

An ungainly female in repose executed with ink on cotton, *Nude, Bali, 1980* (Lot 40 🎨), made \$170,000 (est. \$180,000-220,000). Later, there was much more interest for Whiteley's more interesting and careful drawings. *Nude, Bath, 1976* (Lot 80 🎨) climbed well over estimate to reach \$30,000 (est. \$12,000-18,000), and the sinuous ink on paper *Lake Kintamani, Bali, c. 1990* (Lot 81 🎨) was fought over for a hammer fall at \$25,000 (est. \$10,000-15,000).

Elsewhere in the mixed vendor component, Arthur Boyd's *Sleeping Nude, 1962* (Lot 42 🎨) – which carried the provenance of actor Susannah York – was won for \$80,000, well below its estimate of \$100,000-150,000, but which nevertheless added to the sale's top echelon. The result was also a pleasant surprise for the buyer, with McIlroy quipping from the podium that "he looks very happy, either that or he is having a heart attack!"

The Crebbin and Langsworth collections added three more top results. Crebbin's *Boy in Costume, c. 1949* by Justin O'Brien (Lot 1 🎨) topped-out at its high-end estimate of \$80,000, while Langsworth's *Midsummer, c. 1895* by Walter Withers (Lot 53 🎨) brought more glow to the sale, selling to David Hulme at \$100,000 (low-end). A busy inner-city Melbourne scene (looking very much like Europe) by Frederick McCubbin from the same collection proved that the appeal for Australian Impressionism (no matter how late) lives on – *Princes Bridge, 1910* (Lot 54 🎨) sold \$85,000, just under its low-end.

As has been the case with past Deutscher and Hackett sales, sculpture featured strongly. The company's consistent support of the medium over the years has generated a growth in profile, interest and results, which will ensure its prominence in their consignment chases going forward.

The top lot (by dollar) was for Bronwyn Oliver's sinuous *Lick, c. 1991* (Lot 48 🎨), which made its estimated high-end of \$140,000, while an unusually stiff and imposing two metre work by Clement Meadmore, *Through Way, 1965* (Lot 46 🎨) made \$50,000 (probably appealing more to fans of *2001: A Space Odyssey* than typical Meadmore collectors).

The most intriguing and important examples in the medium came from the Crebbin Collection, which brought to the sale thirty-five quality works with a core of sculpture by Robert Klippel for whom the Crebbins were patrons.

This core of fresh Klippel works from the 1940s and 1960s/70s – all but one acquired directly from the artist – unsurprisingly attracted broad interest. Surprisingly, however, given that big-things-mostly-equal-big results, it was the smallest amongst them that provided the Collection's star lot.

Excited participation from the room was on show for the very rare early works in wood. A miniature and exquisitely conceived and carved piece, *No. 21, Pointed Theme, 1945* (Lot 3 🎨) had expectations in the thousands matching its size in centimetres 14.5cm (est. \$15,000-20,000), but the eagerness for the rare gem in the artist's oeuvre saw plenty of room bidders compete with the inevitable absentees on phones and the auctioneer's book, before selling to a mystery man (it's never a mystery woman ...) at \$66,000.

Scott Livesey, D&H's auctioneer for the sale's second half was later overheard referring to the piece as "rich man's chachka". Jokes made in the aftermath of an end-of-year sale aside, prominent buyers were, of course, in the chase, including women, such as the underbidder, dealer Annette Larkin. After missing out on lot 3, Larkin secured lot 8, *No. 39, (lot 8) Scherzo, 1948* for the "amazing bargain" of \$20,000 (est. \$10,000-15,000), but missed out on

another star lot, as *No. 51, Constructional Carving*, 1948 (Lot 9 🎯) sold to a private in the room for \$68,000 (est. \$15,000-20,000).

The later metal sculptures brought results closer in-line with expectations – along with a few failed-to-sells – with the elegant *No. 316, Metal Sculpture*, 1966-76 (Lot 11 🎯) adding to the top-lot crop, achieving \$110,000, close to its high end.

Traditional pictures from the Estate of Roger Langsworth filled out the sale's solid success in the \$30,000-50,000 range, including a McCubbin Macedon landscape (Lot 55 🎯) (\$55,000); a Penleigh Boyd harbour view (Lot 56 🎯) (\$30,000) and an unusual New England (NSW) landscape (Lot 59 🎯) by Elioth Gruner which made back its 2004 purchase price plus change, selling for \$35,000.

And the work of William Rubery Bennett achieved extraordinary prices – not seen since the blue-streak of traditional pictures sales in the 1980s – with *Wollondilly River*, c.1955 (Lot 62 🎯) making a lofty \$22,000 after tortuously slow bidding (est. \$8,000-12,000), while *The Grand Burragarang Valley* (Lot 63 🎯) went to a different buyer for \$20,000 (est. \$5,000-7,000). This work last traded in 2012 for \$6,137. The artist's best price since then was for another Burragarang Valley work, which sold in 2014 for \$7,200 (also D&H).

The Estate of Judith Murray also contributed to this important statistical 'domestic' buyer range, with Roland Wakelin's original gift to Grace Cossington Smith, *The Skillion, Terrigal*, 1926 (Lot 67 🎯), achieving \$50,000 against a humble estimate of \$40,000-30,000. The cataloguing could have made more of this work's exhibition history, given it featured in the AGNSW's Sydney Moderns exhibition where it was described as showing the artist's commitment to "the modern movement" following his return from Europe, in its "emphatic endorsement of Cezanne's reductions to essentials".

A work by Cossington Smith herself added depth to the sale from the mixed-vendor field, with *Wild Grasses*, c. 1936 (Lot 71 🎯) achieving \$30,000 (low-end). An early work by Donald Friend, *Lucky Digger Hotel*, 1953 (Lot 72 🎯) had the benefit of an extensive catalogue entry, and plenty of bidding, reaching its upper-end estimate of \$40,000; the subject matter and academic importance of the work overshadowing the recent fracas over Friend's personal life[i] and the dilemma concerning appreciation of his art.

From the Crebbin Collection, Eric Wilson's view of a bridge over the river Seine mostly obscured by large dark tree trunks (Lot 2 🎯) highlighted the artist's interest in formalist concerns, but didn't stimulate buyers enough to meet its estimate of \$45,000-65,000, selling for \$42,000. In contrast, and from another vendor, a much smaller and prettier work showing the same formal concerns by Clarice Beckett found strong favour, with *After Sunset*, c. 1929 (Lot 89 🎯) making \$45,000 against a lowly estimate of \$10,000-15,000.

Elsewhere, mid-century modernist maverick Ian Fairweather fared well, with *Warrior*, c. 1955 (Lot 73 🎯) making \$58,000, just over its high-end estimate. The ever-bankable Fred Williams set the trend earlier with *One Tree Hill, Ferntree Gully*, 1968 (Lot 37 🎯) selling to art consultant David Hulme for \$60,000. Hulme bought nine works on the night, including *Kaleidoscope*, 1994 (Lot 47 🎯) for \$55,000 by another bankable contemporary artist, Rosalie Gascoigne, and, after a longish tussle, a colonial view of George Street (Lot 86 🎯), for \$12,000 (est. \$5,000-10,000).

Importantly, all sections and collections performed well, including Aboriginal art which has seen very patchy results in recent auctions. The component of 32 lots didn't generate a buzz, but nor did it fizz out, clearing at 81%. The top lots were Paddy Bedford's *Twenty Mile*, 2001 (Lot 105 🎯), which sold below estimate for a bargain price of \$31,000 and Bill Whiskey Tjapaltjarri's *Rockholes and Country near The Olgas*, 2006 (Lot 106 🎯), which was competitively bid to \$26,000 against an estimate of \$15,000-20,000.

Only 40 or 50 people were present at the start of the night, and only slightly more than a handful by the end, but they were serious, including a representative from Wentworth Galleries, who was buying up Aboriginal works for stock and their rental arm, both of which will likely move at a greater pace with the business' imminent move to 1 Martin Place from Bligh Street.

The Aboriginal art section also saw the most activity from the internet, which throughout the evening interrupted the auctioneers' flow and concentration with errant bid amounts. This suited the theatricality of the venue and provided some banter in an otherwise very quiet saleroom. The bulk of the sale's buying and bidding occurred via the phones (including public institutions), and Damian Hackett's elegant French cuffs were kept aloft throughout the night.

Deutscher and Hackett's *Important Australian, International & Aboriginal Fine Art* sale (Sydney, 30 November) carried a pre-sale estimate of \$3.2–4.5 million. Across the board, the sale sold 86% by volume and 108% by value (including the buyer's premium at 22% of hammer) to tally \$4,235,391, a result that Damian Hackett declared "historically not too shabby for a November auction."

Calendar nuances aside, the strong result gives the company a year-end tally close to \$19 million – only one good Whiteley, Brack or Williams away from matching Menzies – and their best result in seven years.

### **Sold after hammer-fall**

Lot 44 – Sydney Long, *The Pumpkin Patch*, 1895, \$60,000.

### **Major lots under negotiation at time of publication**

Crebbin Collection – Lot 10 – Robert Klippel, estimate \$80,000-120,000

Estate Judith Murray – Lot 68 – Ronald Wakelin, estimate \$40,000-60,000

### **Major unsold lots – Collections**

Estate Roger Langsworth – Lot 58 – Frederick McCubbin, estimate \$30,000-40,000

McKay Superfund – Lot 109 – Rover Thomas, estimate \$18,000-25,000

### **Major unsold lots – Mixed vendors**

Lot 45 – Arthur Streeton, estimate \$100,000-140,000

Lot 74 – Margaret Olley, estimate \$60,000-80,000

[i] Elloise Farrow-Smith, "Biography and portrait of paedophile Donald Friend removed from Tweed art gallery", *ABC North Coast*, 30 November 2016

Sale Referenced: Australian + International Fine Art and Aboriginal Art, Deutscher and Hackett , Sydney, 30/11/2016

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

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