

## The cream rises to the top at Copley's inaugural New York City auction

By Decoy Magazine

Photos courtesy Copley Fine Art Auctions

The cream rises to the top is a worn out cliché, but that phrase aptly describes the results of Copley Fine Art Auctions first "Winter Sale," held on January 17, 2011 at The Church of St. Ignatius Loyola in New York City, as the top ten decoy lots in the auction grossed \$626,175, almost 60% over their average estimate and nearly 70% of the total dollars of all the decoys sold.

A rare hollow feeding Canada goose by John Tax of Osakis, Minnesota was the top lot in the auction, selling to a phone bidder for \$115,000, exactly double its estimate and an auction price record for its maker. A rare pair of hollow-carved goldeneyes by A.E. Crowell of East Harwich, Massachusetts, branded JWW for John Willard Ware and formerly in the collection of Dr. James McCleery, brought \$109,250 from another phone bidder, nearly double the estimate.

Three of Crowell's decorative shorebirds, all with the early oval brand, also



*Feeding Canada goose by John Tax of Osakis, Minnesota (est. \$46,000/69,000) sold to a phone bidder for \$115,000, the top price in the sale and an auction price record for its maker.*

finished in the top ten: Hudsonian curlew for \$74,750, golden plover in non-breeding or juvenile plumage at \$48,875 and running black-bellied plover for \$37,375, all at or above estimate. Three more of his decorative shorebirds made the top 25 list: preening lesser yellowlegs with lifted wing for \$11,500, black-bellied plover at \$8050

and greater yellowlegs at \$4888, all below estimate. Two of his duck decoys also fell short: swimming red-breasted merganser at \$8625 and green-winged teal at \$4888.

A rare, possibly one-of-a-kind mallard



*Rare, possibly one-of-a-kind mallard by Joe Lincoln of Accord, Massachusetts (est \$23,000/34,500) sold to a Bay State collector for \$86,250.*

*Pair of hollow-carved goldeneyes with crossed wing tips by A.E. Crowell of East Harwich, Massachusetts (est. \$46,000/69,000), formerly in the collection of Dr. James McCleery, sold to a phone bidder for \$109,250.*



*Stylish canvasback by Lee Dudley of Knotts Island, North Carolina (est. \$34,500/57,500), with his personal "LD" brand on the bottom, sold to a Tennessee collector for \$80,500.*



*Early decorative Hudsonian curlew by A.E. Crowell (est. \$69,000/103,500) sold to a phone bidder for \$74,750.*

by Crowell's contemporary, Joe Lincoln of Accord, Massachusetts, sold to a Bay State collector for \$86,250, exactly triple its estimate. A feeding yellowlegs by Lincoln's neighbor, Elisha Burr of Hingham, fell below estimate at \$4888.

Canvasbacks by Lee Dudley of Knotts Island, North Carolina are held in high esteem among collectors of southern decoys, particularly those from the maker's personal rig, which are branded "LD." The one in this auction was especially rare as it had the original bill. It sold to a Tennessee collector for \$80,500, nearly double its estimate.

There were four Virginia decoys on the top 25 list, all by different makers: black duck by Ira Hudson of Chincoteague at \$11,500, hollow-carved swan by Charles Birch of Willis Wharf at \$11,500, hollow-carved brant by Dave "Umbrella" Watson of Chincoteague at \$7475 and brant by Nathan Cobb Jr. of Cobb Island at \$6900. All but the Cobb made estimate.

An outstanding 19th century hollow-carved red-breasted merganser credited as the work of Levi Rhodes Truex of Atlantic City, New Jersey sold to a phone bidder for \$37,375, over double its estimate and an auction price record for its maker. The underbidder thought it was made early in his career when Truex lived in Tuckerton.

A hollow-carved Canada goose by



*Early running black-bellied plover decorative by A.E. Crowell (est. \$17,250/28,750) sold to a phone bidder for \$37,375.*



*Early decorative golden plover in non-breeding or juvenile plumage by A.E. Crowell (est. \$17,250/28,750) sold to a folk art collector for \$48,875.*



*Outstanding hollow-carved red-breasted merganser by Rhodes Truex of Atlantic City, New Jersey (est. \$13,800/20,700) sold to a phone bidder for \$37,375, an auction price record for its maker.*

## Top 25 Lots at Copley's 2011 Winter Sale New York, New York, January 17, 2011

Rank	Description (catalog no.)	Av. Est.	Price
*1.	John Tax (MN) feeding Canada goose (359)	\$57,500	\$115,000
2.	A.E. Crowell (MA) HC goldeneye pair (263)	57,500	109,250
3.	Joe Lincoln (MA) mallard (245)	28,750	86,250
4.	Lee Dudley (NC) canvasback (331)	46,000	80,500
5.	A.E. Crowell (MA) curlew, dec. (259)	86,250	74,750
6.	A.E. Crowell (MA) golden plover, dec. (258)	23,000	48,875
7.	A.E. Crowell (MA) running BB plover, dec. (257)	23,000	37,375
*7.	Rhodes Truex (NJ) HC RB merganser (275)	17,250	37,375
9.	Ferdinand Bach (MI) canvasback (352)	28,750	23,000
10.	Clark Madara (NJ) HC Canada goose (277)	28,750	13,800
11.	A.E. Crowell (MA) preening yellowlegs, dec. (262)	23,000	11,500
11.	Ira Hudson (VA) black duck (329)	12,075	11,500
11.	Charles Birch (VA) HC swan (330)	11,500	11,500
14.	Mason factory (MI) Premier canvasback (165)	11,500	9,200
15.	A.E. Crowell (MA) swimming RB merganser (265)	17,250	8,625
16.	A.E. Crowell (MA) BB plover, dec. (260)	9,775	8,050
17.	"Umbrella" Watson (VA) HC Canada goose (328)	8,625	7,475
18.	Nathan Cobb Jr. (VA) brant (327)	7,250	6,900
18.	Mason factory (MI) Challenge brant (163)	5,750	6,900
20.	Mason factory (MI) Premier pintail pair (162)	14,375	6,325
21.	A.E. Crowell (MA) GW teal (264)	8,625	4,888
21.	Elisha Burr (MA) feeding yellowlegs (221)	7,590	4,888
21.	A.E. Crowell (MA) yellowlegs, dec. (261)	9,775	4,888
24.	Blair school (PA) HC Canada goose (279)	5,750	4,600
24.	Mark McNair (VA) swimming Canada goose (195)	5,750	4,600
TOTALS		\$556,715	\$738,014

**Key:** HC - hollow-carved      RB - red-breasted      BB - black-bellied  
 GW - green-winged      dec - decorative  
 \* - auction price record for this maker

The top 25 lots (13.2% of the 190 sold) accounted for \$738,014 (81.4% of the \$906,373 gross) and were 32.6% over their total average estimate.

Clark Madara of Pitman, New Jersey brought \$13,800, the only bird on the top ten list to fall short of estimate. A hollow-carved 19th century "Blair school" Canada goose with excellent form but little original paint made its low estimate \$4600.

An oversized canvasback by Ferdinand Bach of Detroit, Michigan, marked with the maker's incised "signature" on the bottom, made it low estimate \$23,000. Three lots by the Mason decoy factory of Detroit made the top 25 list: oversized Premier Chesapeake Bay model canvasback at \$9200, Challenge Atlantic brant at \$6900 and Premier pintail pair at \$6325, the first two within estimate and the pintails far short.

A hissing Cobb Island style Canada goose by Mark McNair of Craddockville, Virginia also made the list at \$4600, the only one of eight McNair lots in the sale to make estimate.

The auction, which grossed \$1,554,972, included paintings, bronzes, whales, books and baskets. This report only covers the decoys. Although the top lots had stellar results, there were many bargains further down the line. In addition, 40 decoy lots with a low estimate near \$200,00 failed to sell. But the final numbers more than made up for those shortcomings.

In summary, of 230 decoy lots offered, 40 failed to sell, leaving 190 lots that sold for \$906,373 for an average of \$4770 per lot and were 41.5% over the total low estimate after deducting the low estimate of the unsold lots. The top 25 lots (13.2% of the total sold) accounted for \$738,014 (81.4% of the gross) and were 32.6% over their total average estimate. All prices include a 15% buyer's premium. Michael Grogan served as the auctioneer.



Oversized canvasback by Ferdinand Bach of Detroit, Michigan (est. \$23,000/34,500) with the maker's stylized "signature" on the bottom sold for \$23,000.



Hollow-carved Canada goose by Clark Madara of Pitman, New Jersey (est. \$17,250/23,000) brought \$13,800.