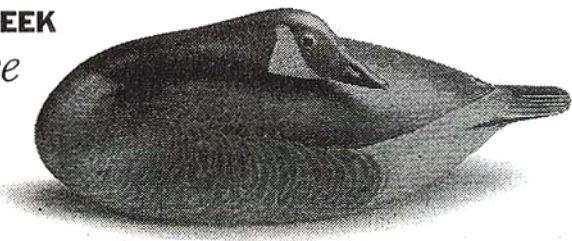


OBJECT OF THE WEEK*Ducks Deluxe*

Object: *Sleeping Canada
goose decoy, Elmer
Crowell, circa 1917*

Estimate: \$400,000 to
\$500,000

Sold For/Buyer: \$684,500/Stephen B. O'Brien Jr.



Sotheby's

DECOYS AREN'T JUST for duck hunters anymore.

Waterfowl decoys, and American folk art in general, are appealing to a wider range of collectors now. Decoys used to draw only, well, decoy collectors, usually sportsmen and hunters. But a recent sale of American waterfowl decoys at Sotheby's drew a flock of folk-art folkies.

Earlier this year, Boston dealer Stephen B. O'Brien Jr. bought this decoy of a sleeping Canada goose, created in 1917 by noted bird carver Elmer Crowell, setting a record price for waterfowl decoys.

"The field is coming to the attention of people beyond the rank and file," says Nancy Druckman, head of Sotheby's American Folk Art department. "There's been an influx of new collectors who have never looked at a decoy before. They're looking not just for the category, but for something that is appealing for itself."

Bird decoys were used by hunters to lure wild birds within the range of their weapons—and they are said to be the only major folk art indigenous to North America. American Indians made decoys at least 1,000 years before Europeans set foot on the continent. American settlers began to carve more elaborate, lifelike wooden birds in the late 1700s. Crowell, who lived from 1852 to 1952, is known for the quality and range of his one-of-a-kind decoys, decorative carvings and miniatures. Collectors have begun to discover new pockets in American folk-art collecting, such as the decoy. "The aesthetic of these decoys has drawn people who have been collectors of American folk sculpture," says Ms. Druckman. "They have become sensitized to the appeal of waterfowl decoys."

Not every decoy commands such a high price—many fine ones can be had for only a few hundred to several thousand dollars.

—Robert J. Hughes