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Nesting Canada goose by A. Elmer Crowell (1862–1952), East Harwich, Mass., circa 1910.



Calling yellowlegs with dropped wings by A. Elmer Crowell, circa 1910.

Magnificent Seven — Decoys By A. Elmer Crowell To Be Offered

PLYMOUTH, MASS. — Seven major works by famed decoy carver A. Elmer Crowell (1862–1952) of East Harwich, Mass., will be placed on the auction block July 15 and 16 as part of Copley Fine Art Auctions' sporting sale at the Radisson Hotel.

Originally commissioned by prominent New England sportsman Harry V. Long between 1910 and 1920, and descended through the Long family, this extraordinary group has never before been offered



Preening pintail with raised wings by A. Elmer Crowell, circa 1910.

Copley Fine Art Auctions' 2009 Sporting Sale

on the market. The decoys are currently on public exhibit for the first time at the Massachusetts Audubon Visual Arts Center in Canton, Mass., through May 10.

Of the historic group of carvings, Copley Fine Art Auctions' chairman Stephen B. O'Brien Jr said, "This is the most important collection of A. Elmer Crowell works to have ever come up for auction. For decoy collectors, the birds are akin to discovering the Holy Grail times seven. There had been whispers of the existence of these birds for years and to have the opportunity to bring them to market is an honor for our firm. We have estimated the group between \$1.6 and \$2.6 million, collectively. However, these birds are some of the pinnacle works by one of the world's most revered decoy and folk art carvers of all time, so in some regards the estimates are irrelevant."

Included in this iconic group is the third and final piece of Crowell's famed "Long Trinity" of Canada geese — a folky gander described by Crowell schol-

ar Gladys Hopkins as "the best of the three." Estimated at \$600/900,000, this exquisite sculpture is carved in a nesting position and is considered by experts to be one of the finest waterfowl carvings in existence.

The two other "Long Trinity" goose carvings are no strangers to the spotlight. The hissing goose sold for \$605,000 in April 2004 at a Guyette & Schmidt auction. The preening Canada goose was featured in the *Wall Street Journal* in May 2000 when it sold at a Sotheby's and Guyette & Schmidt auction for a then-record \$684,500. The same goose appeared on the cover of the *Boston Globe* in September 2007, when O'Brien brokered the bird privately for \$1.13 million.

Other legendary Crowell decoys in the auction include a robust preening pintail drake with elaborate raised wings (\$500/800,000). The only other known Crowell preening pintail drake belonged to *Field and Stream* editor Russell B. Aitken and was featured in *The New York Times* in January 2003 when it sold at a Christie's and

Guyette & Schmidt auction for a then-record price of \$830,000. The same bird was later sold by O'Brien, along with the preening goose, for a record-tying \$1.13 million.

The preening pintail drake and folky gander are accompanied by a sublime swimming black duck and a plump merganser drake with crossed raised wings (\$100/200,000 each).

Rounding out the seven are three of Crowell's finest working shorebird decoys: a highly unusual yellowlegs in a calling position (\$150/250,000) and two classic "dust jacket" plover decoys (\$100/200,000 each). The one-of-a-kind yellowlegs displays a delicate open bill and retains paint identical to Crowell's famous "dust jacket" plovers illustrated on the cover of William J. Mackey Jr's *American Bird Decoys*, 1965.

Consignments for the July sporting sale are being accepted until April 30.

The Radisson Hotel is at 180 Water Street. For information, www.copleyart.com or 617-536-0536.

www.AntiquesandTheArts.com

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