

## Records tumble at Copley's 2009 \$4.16 million Sporting Sale

On July 15 and 16, Copley Fine Art Auctions held its annual sporting sale in Plymouth, Massachusetts. The 2009 auction shot over its \$3.5 million low estimate settling in at \$4.16 million, making it the most successful in the company's history. Commenting on this landmark sale, Copley Chairman Stephen B. O'Brien Jr. said, "To be up thirty percent from last year's totals in this economy is a testament to the hard work of our entire staff, and the trust that our clients place in us. We make every effort to deliver a pleasurable experience to our sellers and our buyers, and it is incredibly rewarding to see that effort pay off."

The decoy portion of the auction had a strong start with the Barry and Bernice Stavis Collection of Mark McNair carvings. Topping last year's record-breaking success with McNair decoys, bidding once again exceeded expectations and established new world records for the artist. The carver's feeding swan initiated the new records, selling to The Shelburne Museum in Shelburne, Vermont for \$10,925. The record was short-lived, however, as the same institution purchased the next lot, McNair's preening swan, for \$16,100. The impressive prices for the maker's carvings continued as a rig of five golden plover soared past their \$5/10,000 estimate before landing at \$37,375. Not only is this number a record for McNair, but it is believed to be the highest price ever realized for any contemporary decoy carver's work.

The centerpiece and highlight of the sporting sale was the Harry V. Long collection of A. Elmer Crowell decoys. Crowell prices held strong at the auction, and six of the seven sold within their estimates to five different buyers in the room and on the phone. The first Long decoy up on the block, a preening pintail, sold for \$546,250 to a bidder in the room. The plump over-sized merganser sold just over the high estimate for \$207,000 to a Massachusetts collector. This spectacular merganser more than doubled the previous record for a Crowell merganser established at the Sotheby's sale of the McCleery collection in 2000. Bringing in more than any individual item in the auction, the nesting Canada goose sold for \$661,250. Next, the calling yellowlegs brought \$172,500 and more than tripled the previous auction record for any Crowell yellowlegs. Of this historic offering, O'Brien said after the auction, "We were very pleased with the results of the Long collection. It was a terrific group of decoys and a tribute to the exceptional foresight of Harry V. Long. I am sure that Harry would be pleased to know that his collection realized close to two million dollars."

A rare California decoy by John G. Tornberg, one of only five known feeding pintails by the carver, sold above estimate for \$26,500 and broke the previous world record for this maker previously set at \$19,550 in the 2000 McCleery sale. The Holly family's outstanding pair of canvasbacks rounded out the notable decoy sales, selling for \$155,250. This sale set a new world record for the maker and more than doubled the price the pair brought in the McCleery sale in 2000.

The second day of the sale featured a wide variety of sporting paintings, prints, and books. The day began with fourteen Frank W. Benson lots consigned by his great grandson, as well as other etchings and an exceptional watercolor by the artist. Notable Benson pieces included his etchings *Old Tom* and *Marsh Gunner*, which brought in \$14,375 and \$13,225 respectively. His superb *Canada Geese* watercolor hit just above its high estimate at \$80,500.

Shortly thereafter, bidding propelled Louis Agassiz Fuertes' scene of canvasbacks beyond its \$6/9,000 estimate to \$25,300 to establish a new record for a Fuertes work on paper. Aiden Lassell Ripley proved his continuing popularity with *Grouse in the Orchard*, a watercolor that was the object of intense bidding and sold well above its high estimate for \$77,625. For the third year running, Copley set a new world record for works by contemporary artist Chet Reneson of Connecticut with *Goose Hunting* bringing \$12,075.

As in years past, Copley offered a number of works by distinguished American artists. A luminous portrait in oil by Boston-based Impressionist Edmund C. Tarbell sold for \$120,750, and an exceptional 1835 John James Audubon print from the collection of Dr. George Edmund Gifford Jr. entitled *Snowy Heron or White Egret* sold for \$41,400, well beyond its \$20/30,000 estimate.

The auction concluded with the strong sale of a number of sporting books. Herbert L. Stoddard's *The Bobwhite Quail* sold at \$4,888, and P. London Fisher's *The Angler's Souvenir* more than tripled its high estimate with a sale price of \$1,840.

Copley Fine Art Auctions, LLC is now accepting consignments for the 2010 Sporting Sale. Please call 617.536.0030 for information regarding future consignments or private sales. A full list of Copley's realized prices from the 2009 Sporting Sale is available on their website at [www.copleyart.com](http://www.copleyart.com).

#### IMAGES TO INCLUDE:

Nesting Canada Goose by A. Elmer Crowell (1862–1952), East Harwich, MA, c. 1910 (\$661,250)

Turned-Head Feeding Pintail Drake by John G. Tornberg (1902-1971), Mill Valley, CA, c. 1948 (\$26,450)

Canvasback Pair by John "Daddy" Holly (1819-1892) or James T. Holly (1855-1935), Havre de Grace, MD, c. 1885 (\$155,250)

Frank W. Benson (1862-1951), "Canada Geese," 1928, watercolor, 19 ¼ by 23 ¾ inches, framed (\$80,500)

Louis Agassiz Fuertes (1874-1927), Canvasbacks, gouache, 11 7/8 by 19 inches (\$25,300)

Aiden Lassell Ripley (1896-1969), Grouse in the Orchard, watercolor, 21 1/8 by 45 1/2 inches (\$77,625)