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Decoys And Sporting Art Fly High At Copley Fine Art Auctions' Sale



Copley Fine Art beat its own previous record for a decorative running curlew by A. Elmer Crowell when a circa 1912 example sold for \$257,250.



Copley Fine Art set a record with "Springers and Pheasants" by Aiden Lassell Ripley when it brought \$97,750.

PLYMOUTH, MASS. — Maybe repetitive but certainly not boring, Copley Fine Art Auctions added to its roster of outstanding prices for decoys and sporting art at its July 21-22 sale. The first was for a 17-inch decorative running curlew carved by A. Elmer Crowell around 1912 that, at \$257,250, beat Copley's own former record of \$189,000 for a decorative Crowell carving, also a running curlew. Six phones, the Internet and bidders around the room pursued the boldly carved bird that opened at \$35,000, but an agent in the room on his cellphone, relaying messages to a Midwestern collector, was the victor.

Crowell carved the bird during his transition from carving working decoys to creating decorative ones. Catalog notes suggest that the bird was carved for one of his patrons, Dr. John C. Phillips Jr or Dr. John H. Cunningham Jr. It came from a collector who acquired the bird no later than the 1950s. Speaking after the sale, Stephen B. O'Brien, principal of Copley Fine Art, called the curlew "arguably the best of the best." He cited two other birds as "the best of the best" in their categories also: Crowell's miniature Jack (or Hudsonian) curlew that achieved another world record when it sold for \$12,650. The bird was one of the carver's earliest examples and its pig-



The pair of watercolors by Frank W. Benson, "Hunter and Retriever," left, and "Hunter with Decoys" fetched \$109,250.

ment and pattern were nearly identical to the running curlew. The other was a miniature ruddy turnstone, circa 1910, that went for \$11,500. The Jack was among the collection of 50 miniature bird carvings gathered by Boston lawyer William V. Tripp III, a collector of sporting art whose interest in miniature birds developed after visiting O'Brien's gallery when it was on Beacon Hill. The bird went to a phone bidder who took several choice lots from the Tripp collection. The miniatures brought prices within and well above estimates, reflective of that market.

The vibrantly painted miniature ruddy turnstone was described in the catalog as "amongst the finest shorebird miniatures Crowell ever created."

A Crowell miniature Eskimo curlew, circa 1910, sold for \$7,763, while a miniature preening golden-eye drake brought \$9,200 from a buyer in the room; a miniature green-winged teal drake by Joseph W. Lincoln of Accord, Mass., circa 1910, realized \$7,475. Lincoln's miniature American merganser drake, also circa 1910, brought \$5,750 from another phone bidder.

A rare Joseph W. Lincoln miniature loon with more than 150 checker pattern feathers was graphically compelling and drew \$7,188 from a buyer in the room. A miniature loon with more than 160 checkered feathers by George Boyd of Seabrook, N.H., sold for \$6,900. A miniature swan by Boyd from Tripp's collection fetched \$5,463 on the phone.

Auction Action In Plymouth, Mass.



The two canvas-covered old squaws were made by Lothrop Holmes of Kingston, Mass., circa 1870. The swimming old squaw, right, brought \$218,500; the old squaw drake sold for \$74,750.



A life-size bobwhite quail in trophy form by A. Elmer Crowell was photographed hanging from one of Crowell's workshop doors, which was not for sale, sold on the phone for \$48,875.

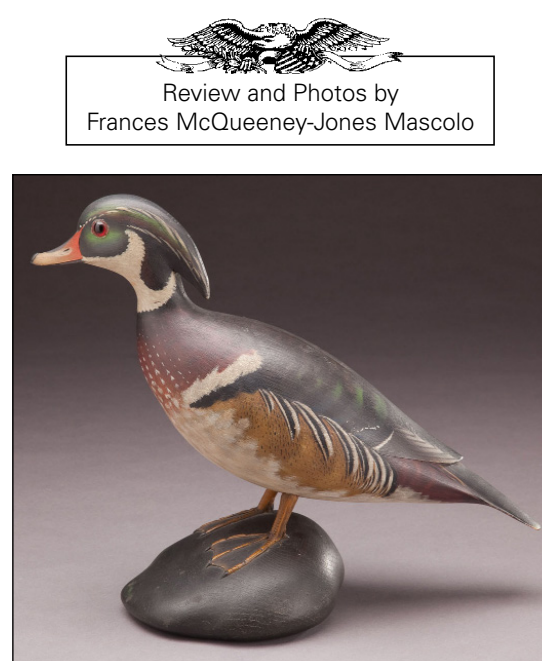
O'Brien put together a two-day sale that topped \$2.5 million and, with a sporting show in an adjacent ballroom, attracted a crowd of dealers and collectors whose roles are interchangeable. Both groups include buyers who appreciate decoys as folk art and those who appreciate birds as antiques from a hunter's perspective. Buying and selling on the part of all participants went on throughout the two-day event in and out of the auction room.

O'Brien called on Grogan & Company to manage the logistics of the sale; Michael B. Grogan and Hercules Pappachristos called the sale and other Grogan staff handled bidding and other auction essentials. O'Brien's wife, Cinnie O'Brien, and his father, Stephen B. O'Brien Sr, worked the phones with Grogan staff.

The sale catalog was detailed and well researched, truly a keeper. O'Brien, a hunter since childhood — he took his



The Canada goose stick-up by Charles Hart is one of only two known examples and it realized \$34,500.



A decorative carving of a wood duck, circa 1915, by Anthony Elmer Crowell was one of three such examples made by the carver and brought \$115,000.



The miniature ruddy turnstone by A. Elmer Crowell, described by O'Brien as "the best of the best," brought \$11,500.



The canvasback drake carved by the Ward brothers of Crisfield, Md., sold for \$63,250.



Stephen B. O'Brien Jr, principal of Copley Fine Art, is calm and collected prior to the opening of the sale, remaining so throughout both days.

first duck when he was 8 or 9 — has written extensively on sporting arts.

Two canvas-covered old-squaw decoys crafted by master carver Lothrop Holmes of Kingston, Mass., circa 1870, were part of the same rig back in the 1960s, but had since parted company. The birds, with ash ribs and clearly defined heads with upswep bills, came from two separate collections and remet at auction. A swimming old-squaw, the only known example, brought \$218,500 in its first time at auction, and the old-squaw drake sold for \$74,750. Both birds were in outstanding condition and showed minimal gunning wear. The swimmer came from the collection of Roger D. Williams and the drake from that of Phillip DeNormandie. The birds have been reunited, as both went to the same buyer.

bill partially open on a feather and with stellar ticking, was signed "A.E. Crowell, Cape Cod" and sold on the phone for \$37,375. An early Crowell yellowlegs was carved delicately, circa 1915, and sold for \$16,100 to a phone bidder who was a consistent buyer. The bird came from a Midwest collection.

A canvasback drake by Lee Dudley of Knott's Island, N.C., was described in the catalog as "one of the finest examples of a Dudley canvasback ever to be offered." Plenty of people agreed, and drove its price to \$69,000.

A proud-looking canvasback drake carved by the Ward brothers, Lemuel T. and Stephen, of Crisfield, Md., in 1936, was signed, dated and branded with a "P" for the Purnell collection. Highly regarded for its form and rarity, the bird came from a Martha's

vineyard collection and fetched \$63,250.

A carved knot, circa 1890, by the Long Island, N.Y., carver known as John Dille was painted exquisitely and realized \$16,675. Provenance included the William Purnell collection and the Megargee collection.

By Milwaukee carver William Schultz, a circa 1968 prize-winning redhead pair brought \$13,800 against the \$4,5/6,500 estimate. Provenance was clear: it was noted on the bottom of the drake, "First Award / Redhead, International Decoy Contest, Davenport, Iowa, 1968. Carved for Eva Brauer by William L. Schultz." A dashing Canada goose stick-up decoy by Charles Hart of Gloucester, Mass., circa 1890, is one of only two known examples, and it sold for \$34,500. Both birds were trad-

plowed field as birds take flight. Ripley's 1948 watercolor "Gobblers," a view of two turkeys in a wood, brought \$29,900 from another phone buyer.

Not a record, but a handsome sum anyway, was the \$109,250 a phone bidder paid for a 1926 pair of watercolors by Frank W. Benson, "Hunter and Retriever" and "Hunter with Decoys." Benson painted the pair for Edwin C. Webster, who may have been a hunting companion at Swan Island on Currituck Sound, N.C.

"The Beginning of a Feast," an oil on canvas view of a powerful marlin breaking the waves by William Goadby Lawrence, brought a record \$8,050. The picture was signed and inscribed in the back, "Blue Marlin." Another Lawrence picture, "Evening Sail," with the fish nearly perpendicular to the water, sold for \$6,325. The 1955 painting was awarded to James O'Donnell, a Maryland lawyer who with eight fish won the International Light Tackle Sailfish Tournament that year, beating out baseball's Ted Williams. The painting descended in O'Donnell's family.

"The Alder Cover — Nova Scotia," a watercolor view of hunters along a stream by Ogden M. Pleissner, came from an unidentified New England institution and sold to an absentee bidder for \$51,750. "Winging In" by Harry Curieux Adamson depicted one of his favorite subjects, pintails, and realized \$18,400.

All prices quoted reflect the 15 percent buyer's premium. For information, 617-536-0030 or www.copleyart.com.



The Crowell miniature Jack (or Hudsonian) curlew achieved another world record when it sold for \$12,650.

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