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Auction Action In New York City



A top collector of Mason decoys, Hinesburg, Vt., dealer Loy Harrell had only good things to say about Copley's selection of the factory birds. Favorites included, left, the mallard drake salesman's sample of circa 1910, \$12,650, and the mallard, right, one of a pair from a rig commissioned by George K. Schmidt of Chicago. Of the latter, O'Brien said, "The conditional is phenomenal. It sat in a bank vault and was never used." The circa 1905 pair brought \$48,875. To Harrell's right is, top, "Two Loons," a 1990 oil on board by John Swan, \$920, and, bottom, "Hunter Retrieving Duck," an 1893 oil on canvas by Arthur Beckwith, \$1,725.



Copley Fine Arts Chairman Stephen O'Brien Jr with the sale's top lot, left, "In the Cedar Swamp," \$241,500, an oil on canvas by Carl Rungius. Right is Bob F. Kuhn's 1974 acrylic on board "A Two Brooks Idyll," \$17,350. From left, a circa 1920 Sandhill crane by Gus Wilson, South Portland, Maine, \$4,600; swimming bluebill drake by John Blair Jr, Philadelphia, circa 1920, with John Blair Sr's Belgian shotgun, \$13,800; eider drake by Amos G. Wallace, West Point, Maine, circa 1910, passed at \$6/8,000; and a carved eagle plaque by John Haley Bellamy, Kittery, Maine, circa 1890, sold within estimate at \$21,850.

Copley's Winter Sale Hits \$1.9 Million

Rungius Wildlife Painting Leads, But Decoys Find Solid Support

NEW YORK CITY — Stephen O'Brien Jr, chairman and chief executive officer of Copley Fine Art Auctions, started his career as a dealer in decoys and sporting art of historical interest. He hosts an annual summer sale on Cape Cod that attracts other specialty dealers and collectors in his field. Last year, in an effort to reach buyers in Manhattan for Americana Week, he introduced his January Sale at Wallace Hall on Park Avenue in the East 80s. Copley and Keno Auctions share the space, preview hours and even some staff, an arrangement benefiting all involved.

Though Copley is still working out the exact formula, it is clear that cross-pollination benefited the January 16 Winter Sale. The auction of 465 lots of decoys, folk art and fine art exceeded last year's total of \$1.5 million, grossing just over \$1.9 million, and setting ten new auction records. It is worth noting that Copley's 15 percent buyer's premium on bids up to \$1 million is lower than any of his Americana Week competitors. All prices shown here include the premium. The company registered more than 532 bidders.

The January Sale was close to 90 percent sold by lot. That said, several major lots failed to sell, including two cover lots: Alexander Pope's canine portrait "Waiting for Master," estimated at \$100/200,000, and Charles Birch's large, circa 1920 carved and painted swan decoy, estimated at \$90/120,000. It appears that potential buyers were scared off by aggressive reserves.

The morning session started with 24 lots of contemporary bird carvings before moving quickly to decoys from the Mason Factory, in operation between 1896 and 1924. Masons are a known quantity with an avid following. In good condition, they fly. Copley opened with a mallard drake salesman's sample of circa 1910. Seven phones lit up before the premier grade, two-thirds-size sample was hammered down for \$12,650.

The next lot was a circa 1905 premier grade snaky head mallard pair. From a rig commissioned by Chicago banker George K. Schmidt, whose brand marks their bottoms, the decoys for years were stored in a bank vault and are in pristine condition. They made \$48,875.

Mason shorebirds were also solid, with most selling within



"We almost doubled the record price for a bronze by William J. Koelpin," said O'Brien. Measuring 27 by 12 by 11½ inches, "Storm Warning" of 1880 sold for \$20,700, exceeding estimate. It is number one from an edition of 24.



"We are lucky to have with us here today a living legend," O'Brien said, introducing Mark S. McNair, a carver from Craddockville, Va. McNair's swordfish weathervane, circa 2010, crossed the block at \$11,500. Son Colin McNair is a decoy specialist with Copley Fine Art Auctions. Rear left is Louis Agassiz Fuertes' 1924 oil on canvas "Wild Turkey." It was knocked down in the room to Erik Brockett of Arader Galleries in New York for \$86,250, doubling the high estimate.



"This black-bellied plover was made by Obediah Verity of Seaford, N.Y., around 1880. Estimated at \$25/40,000, it fetched \$28,750. "We had it a few years ago and it sold for about the same price," said O'Brien.



"This is a big, bold shore bird that came out of the same rig as the famous Gardner and Dexter dowagers in the McCleery sale at Sotheby's in 1990. Unfortunately it didn't photograph well," said O'Brien. The circa 1885 hollow turned-head willet from Little Compton, R.I., fetched \$46,000.

estimate. Leading the flock was a salesman's sample golden plover of around 1905. It left the room at \$18,400.

It is never a surprise when carvings by Cape Cod master A. Elmer Crowell (1862-1952) set the pace, as they did on January 16. The top price for life-size carvings was \$69,000, the amount paid for a black-bellied plover of circa 1910 and for a Hudsonian curlew of about 1930. A top price for a miniature was \$3,105 for a stilt of about 1929.

"We sold all the life-size mantel birds, and most within estimate," said O'Brien. He was disappointed that one of his key lots, a complete, circa 1915 set of 25 mint-condition miniatures in their original, custom cabinet passed at \$95,000 (\$100/150,000).

"We sold the set three years ago for \$92,000," said O'Brien, noting that no assembled set could match this one for condi-

tion and consistency.

Among Midwestern waterfowl decoys, a pintail hen from the Kankakee Marsh in Indiana achieved \$63,250. It is one of only seven drakes and hens of this type known. The group first surfaced at Christie's in 2007, where this and another hen together made \$90,000. The carving is attributed to Herman R. Trinosky. Experts Linda and Gene Kangas write about the Kankakee Marsh carvings in their book, *Great Lakes Decoys*.

Other top decoy lots included the Dexter and Gardner willet, \$46,000, and two record-setting flying ducks by Chauncey Wheeler; \$48,875, which exceeded their \$20/40,000 estimate. A Ward brothers swimming Canada goose, \$27,600 (\$30/50,000), and a black duck, \$1,955 (\$3/4,000), were good buys.

Reels and duck calls had strong showings, with a pair of

circa 1940 carved and painted calls by Illinois carver Charles Perdew fetching \$18,400.

Copley closed the day with 225 lots of sporting paintings, prints, sculpture and reference books. Leading the afternoon session was "In the Cedar Swamp" by Carl Clemens Moritz Rungius (1869-1959), a painter of Western wildlife. Phone bidders pushed the oil on canvas toward the high end of its \$150/250,000 estimate, topping out at \$241,500.

The brilliant oil on canvas "Wild Turkey," painted in 1924 by naturalist and Harvard professor Louis Agassiz Fuertes (1874-1927), doubled high estimate, selling to Erik Brockett of Arader Galleries in New York for \$86,250, a record for the artist at auction.

Also highlighting the paintings category was Richard Goodwin's oil on canvas *trompe l'oeil* "Hanging Game,"



This matched set of fancy duck and crow calls dates to circa 1940 and is one of only four known sets by Charles P. Perdew of Henry, Ill. In original condition, the pair neared its high estimate, selling for \$18,400.

\$37,375, and George Browne's oil on canvas "Yellow Birch and New Snow," \$19,550. Oden M. Pleissner (1905-1983) watercolors ranged in price from \$6,900 for the fishing scene "Poling up The River" to \$48,875 for the hunting composition "Driven Grouse."

"The market for John Whorf has been unsettled, so we were pleased with the \$8,625 we got for the watercolor "Early Morning East Harbor," O'Brien said.

Bronzes were another area of success. The house nearly doubled the record price at auction for a bronze by William J. Koelpin, whose "Storm Warning" of 1880 sold for \$20,700 against an estimate of



James W. Marshall, a carpenter and prospector, carved this hat stand in 1848 from redwood grown in Yosemite Valley. Anna Glud, a part-time prospector, acquired the carving and donated it to the Oakland Chapter of Women and Girl Workers in the Civil War. Estimated at \$8/10,000, this interesting piece of California achieved \$27,600.

\$10/15,000.

Copley Fine Arts Auctions has scheduled its 2012 Sporting Sale for July 12 and 13 in Plymouth, Mass. The auction will include a collection of seven Rungius paintings from a private collection of wildlife art, dog portraitist Percival Leonard Rosseau's painting of two English setters and the number three casting of Charles Shreyvogel's bronze "The Last Drop."

For information, 617-536-0030 or www.copleyart.com.

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Copley Fine Arts was disappointed that this complete set of 25 mint-condition miniature waterfowl carvings by A. Elmer Crowell, East Harwich, Mass., circa 1915 and housed in their original, custom-made wood and glass case, passed in the room at \$95,000 (\$100/150,000). "I don't think I adequately conveyed how important this set is. Sets that are put together piecemeal never have this kind of quality or consistency," said O'Brien.



Only seven pintails — three drakes and four hens — from the Kankakee Marsh of Indiana have surfaced. The pintails' first appearance at Christie's in 2007, where this and another hen together made \$90,000, touched off something of a fever. "It was a completely new decoy form," explains O'Brien. At Sotheby's, a hen and a drake went for \$200,000. The present example is from Herman R. Trinosky's hunting rig and was probably made by Trinosky. Estimated at \$50/70,000, it sold to the phone for \$63,250.

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