

Copley Fine Art Auctions, Hingham, Massachusetts

A Decoy and a Wildlife Painting Make Auction Records

by Frances McQueeney-Jones Mascolo
Photos courtesy Copley Fine Art Auctions

One of the most eagerly awaited summer sales is Copley Fine Art Auctions' annual summer sporting sale, which is a reliable draw for collectors from all points to the Plymouth, Massachusetts, harbor. The COVID-19 pandemic dictated a very different event for July 23: no gala cocktail party, no show-and-sell setup, and no opportunity for collectors to gather and renew friendships and compare notes. They made do, however. Auctioneer Peter Cocoluto conducted a live sale, which was streamed from Copley's Hingham, Massachusetts, headquarters; the phones, the Internet, and absentee bidders were busier than ever. Some 150 new bidders joined the action.

The auction included two lots that set records.

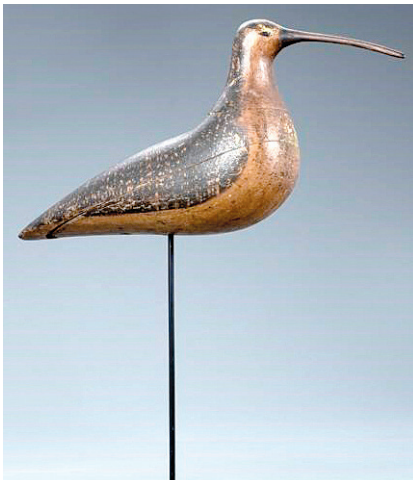
Speaking days after the auction, Stephen B. O'Brien Jr., principal of Copley Fine Art Auctions, said the online auction was a new venture for Copley and that he had purposely kept the auction small at 294 lots. He has noted an uptick in recent months of private sales of decoys and sporting paintings

Small or not, the auction included two lots that set records: the O'Brien-Nelson hollow Nantucket curlew that brought \$108,000 (including buyer's premium), and *Electric Mountain*, a painting by Thomas Aquinas Daly (b. 1937) that sold for \$16,800.

Copley's winter sale is scheduled for February 13, 2021, in conjunction with the Southeastern Wildlife Exposition in Charleston, South Carolina, and will include session two of the collection of Dr. Peter J. Muller Jr. It is hoped that the sale and the exposition will be live; should COVID-19 interfere, the sale will be streamed. Other major collections will also be offered.

Session one of the Muller collection, held on February 15 in Charleston, brought over \$1.5 million and was 100% sold, making it one of the only white-glove decoy sales.

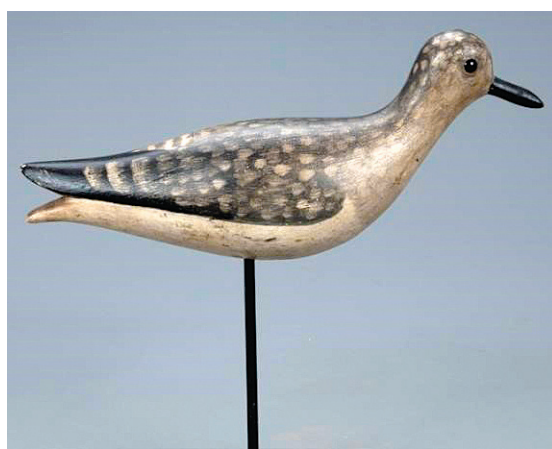
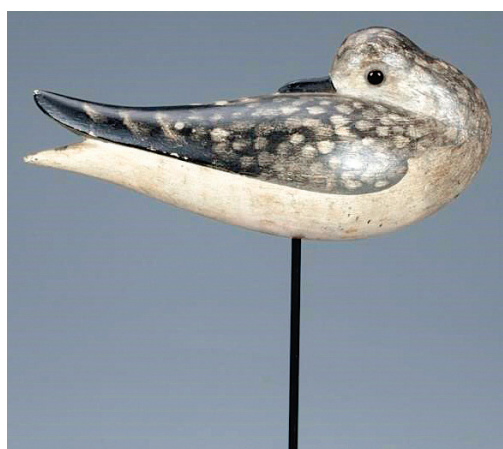
For more information about Copley auctions, visit the website (www.copleyart.com) or call (617) 536-0030.



The highlight of the sale and a record for a Nantucket bird was this early three-piece curlew carved by Charles F. Coffin (1835-1919) of Nantucket, dating to about 1870, that brought a record price of \$108,000 (est. \$125,000/175,000). The 15½" long hollow-carved bird is known as the O'Brien-Nelson Nantucket curlew. It was carved by the same hand as the curlew from the Donal C. O'Brien Jr. collection featured in *The Bird Decoy: An American Art Form* by Paul A. Johnsgard. This bird came from the collection of Grant Nelson, who acquired it from Stephen B. O'Brien Sr., father of Copley Fine Art principal Stephen B. O'Brien and brother of Donal C. O'Brien Jr., whose collection was sold at Copley three years ago.

Few, if any, Coffin curlews are held outside the O'Brien family. Back in the 1960s the O'Brien brothers, Donal and Stephen Sr., spent many happy and productive hours searching for decoys on Nantucket. Sixty or so years ago old decoys were often simply discarded, making ripe pickings for anyone so inclined. Even the dump was fruitful for pickers. The island is one of the few regions where hollow birds were carved, and the carvings are among the most refined. Catalog notes indicate that decoys by Coffin and those attributed to Franklin Folger Jr. (1842-1918) are considered the best made on the island. Both Coffin and Folger were from early Nantucket families.

Electric Mountain, this 20" x 30" oil on board by Thomas Aquinas Daly (b. 1937), is among three paintings the artist created in the 1990s. It depicts a Colorado mountain with four elk in the dusky foreground and bears the artist's distinctive signature, "tAdaly." The catalog quoted Daly: "To the best of my recollection, this is the largest picture I have ever painted. I also think it's one of my best. (At least it's a personal favorite!)." Bidders agreed, and it sold for \$16,800 (est. \$8000/12,000). The price is a record for the artist.



These black-bellied plovers, described in the catalog as "museum-quality," were carved and painted by Melvin Gardner Lawrence (1880-1930) of Revere, Massachusetts, and were sold as separate lots. The birds, a 9" long sleeping example and an 11½" running example, were rigmates by Lawrence, whose output was minimal, perhaps a dozen or so, and of whom little is known. They came from the collection of John S. du Mont and later Thomas K. Figue. The hardwood decoys were on loan at the Museum of American Bird Art at Mass Audubon in Canton, Massachusetts, for about ten years and were showcased in *Massachusetts Masterpieces: The Decoy as Art*, curated by Gwladys Hopkins. The sleeping plover served as the cover for Hopkins's 2016 book of the same name; both decoys are illustrated and discussed in the book. A rigmate is illustrated in Quintina Colio's 1972 *American Decoys*, although it was attributed by many at the time to A. Elmer Crowell. Both birds were sold from the collection of the late William J. Mackey Jr. at Richard A. Bourne Co., Inc., in July 1973. Rigmates were further illustrated and discussed by Ted Harmon in *Snipe Hunt: Identifying the Shorebirds of Melvin Gardner Lawrence* in the Summer 1997 *Decoy* magazine. The sleeping example was estimated at \$30,000/50,000 and brought \$42,000. The running plover, with an estimate of \$20,000/30,000, brought \$13,200.

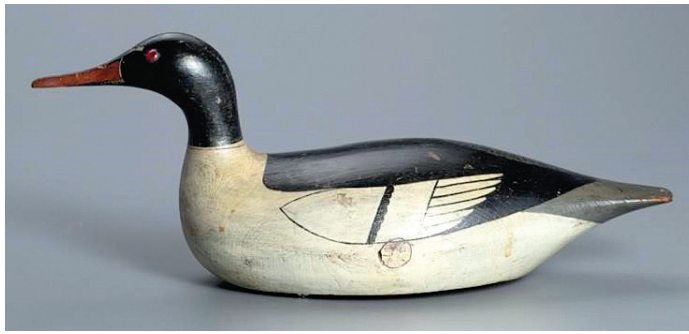


This full-bodied willet, 13" long, by Anthony Elmer Crowell (1862-1952) of East Harwich, Massachusetts, is carved with a split tail and a drawn-back head and has exceptional stippled paint and glass eyes. The paint is original, with minor gunning wear. Dating from about 1910, the decoy is branded "P.W.W." twice for Parker Williams Whittemore (1872-1959), an early and important Crowell patron. Whittemore is featured in *Elmer Crowell: Father of American Bird Carving* by Stephen B. O'Brien Jr. and Chelsie W. Olney. Whittemore, a Boston manufacturer, hunted on Cape Cod, where Crowell made exceptional rigs for him. The decoy also bears a "Nelson" stamp, indicating the Grant Nelson collection, and an early collector's sticker, "1," designating the decoy as the number one shorebird from the collection of Duxbury, Massachusetts, collector Winsor White, who influenced collector Dr. George Ross Starr, also of Duxbury. The bird has been published extensively. Estimated at \$25,000/35,000, the willet fetched \$38,400.



AUCTION

This 19" long merganser drake carved and painted by Joseph W. Lincoln (1859-1938) of Accord, Massachusetts, dates from about 1890 and sold for \$45,000 (est. \$50,000/70,000). The swimming bird was made as one of a pair. The decoy is stylish, with original paint and even gunning wear. The underside retains the "A.B.F." brand and Starr collection stamps. Captain Arthur B. Fuller of Padanarum, Massachusetts, purchased the pair directly from Lincoln and years later sold them to Dr. George R. Starr of Duxbury, who published them in his 1974 *Decoys of the Atlantic Flyway*. The drake came most recently from the collection of Thomas M. Evans Jr. It was also illustrated with its rigmate in Cap Vinal's 2002 *Joseph W. Lincoln*. The hen is held in a private collection.



Described in the catalog as "among the finest yellowlegs that Anthony Elmer Crowell (1862-1952) ever created," this calling (winter) yellowlegs with an open wooden bill and dropped wings sold for \$90,000 (est. \$60,000/90,000). The East Harwich, Massachusetts, artist gave the 11" long bird finely detailed wet-on-wet paint, and it is mounted on a carved clamshell, the underside of which bears an early oval brand. Crowell made a related calling yellowlegs hunting decoy in 1910 for his patron Harry V. Long of Boston and Cohasset. This bird came most recently from the collection of Thomas M. Evans Jr., and before that it was owned by photographer Carolyn Crossett Rowland.



The rare, possibly unique, alighting tern by Anthony Elmer Crowell (1862-1952) of East Harwich, Massachusetts, is life size, with a 19 1/2" wingspan. The bird is painted beautifully, using wet-on-wet feathering on all four surfaces of the wings, and the forked tail has incised feather carving. The underside of the base retains Crowell's rectangular stamp. Estimated at \$15,000/20,000, the graceful bird realized \$16,800. A Crowell flying tern is illustrated and discussed in Stephen B. O'Brien Jr. and Chelsie W. Olney's 2019 *Elmer Crowell: Father of American Bird Carving*. Crowell's flying terns are illustrated and discussed by his early patron Dr. John C. Phillips in his 1928 *A Sportsman's Scrapbook*.



Pheasants Near the Old Farm by Boston artist Aiden Lassell Ripley (1896-1979), a 19" x 28 3/4" watercolor depicting pheasant hunting, came from a private collection and sold for \$14,400 (est. \$12,000/18,000). The picture retains a label from The Sportsman's Gallery, New York City.

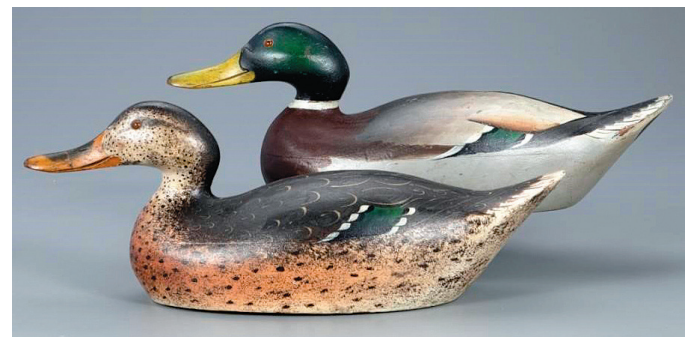
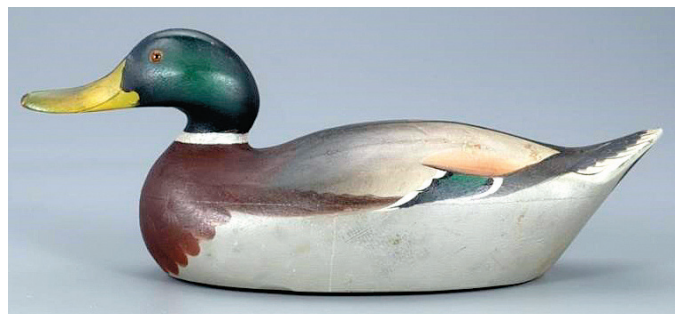


Quail Hunting by Ogden Minton Pleissner (1905-1983), 1940, was the highlight of sporting art across the block. A 15" x 29" watercolor, it is inscribed "To W. Howard Cox, With best wishes" and sold for \$37,200 (est. \$40,000/60,000). The New York City-born and trained Pleissner established himself as a painter of southern hunts, and Cox was among the northern industrialists and executives who traveled south in the winter to hunt wild turkey and quail and who commissioned artists like Pleissner to paint themselves and their family members hunting. Catalog notes point out that *Quail Hunting* has it all: tall pines, a distant cabin, mossy oaks, and fields, as the dogs point a covey of quail and the handlers stand at attention. The painting had descended in the Cox family.



Boston artist Aiden Lassell Ripley (1896-1979) painted *A Pair of Pheasants*, this 21" x 29" watercolor, in 1948. Trained in Boston and later in Europe, where he painted watercolors *en plein air*, he initially painted New England scenes, but during the Great Depression he turned to sporting art. He was a committed hunter and fisherman. This painting was a gift to Henry Booth around 1950 and had descended in his family. It is illustrated in *The Art of Aiden Lassell Ripley* by Stephen B. O'Brien Jr. and Julie Carlson Wildfeuer. Estimated at \$14,000/18,000, it realized \$16,800.

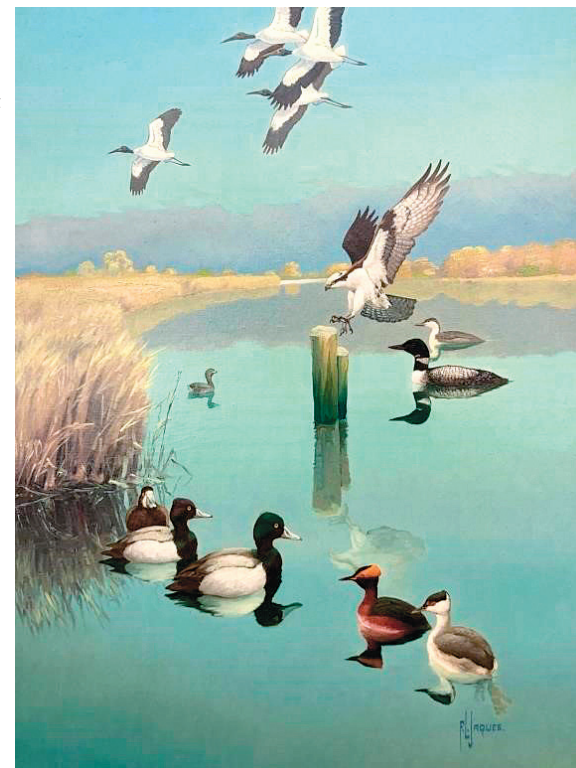
The 17 1/4" long mallard commissioned by Chicago banker George K. Schmidt from the Mason Decoy Factory (1896-1924) is among the finest mallards known. Dating from around 1900, it is prized for its paint, form, and provenance. Hollow, and marked with the large and small "G.K. SCHMIDT" brands, it has never been used—merely handled by admirers—and was held in the basement of a bank for 40 years. It came most recently from the Thomas M. Evans Jr. collection. Estimated at \$15,000/20,000, it sold for \$16,800. It was published in the 1993 *Mason Decoys: A Pictorial Guide* by Russ J. Goldberger and Alan G. Haid and in the 2002 *Fish and Fowl Decoys of the Great Lakes* by Donna Tonelli.



This pair of snaky-head mallards, circa 1910, from the Mason Decoy Factory, with outstanding original paint, came from the Thomas M. Evans Jr. collection and sold for \$15,600 (est. \$10,000/15,000).



This tidal creek view by Francis Lee Jaques (1887-1969), a vibrant 28" x 21" oil on canvas, was painted for *South Carolina Bird Life* by Alexander Sprunt Jr. and E. Burnham Chamberlain, published in 1949. In that book it was captioned "Flying: Wood Ibis. Alighting on piling: Osprey. Left center: Pied-billed Grebe. Right center: upper, Common Loon (winter plumage); lower, Common Loon (breeding plumage). Bottom, left to right: Lesser Scaup (female), Lesser Scaup (male), Greater Scaup (male), Horned Grebe (breeding plumage), and Horned Grebe (winter plumage)." It came from a South Carolina collection and realized \$8400 (est. \$10,000/15,000).

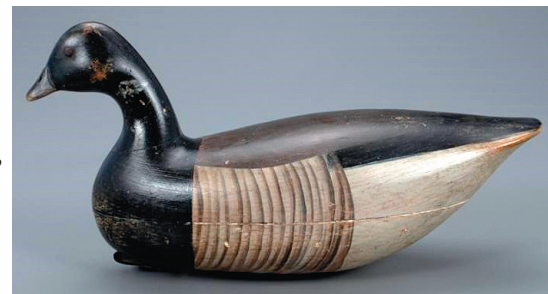


Inland Waterway Scene, painted around 1949 by Minnesota artist Francis Lee Jaques (1887-1969), is a feast of flight, picturing a double-crested cormorant, brown pelicans, two red-breasted mergansers (male and female), and two hooded mergansers (male and female). The artist, who signed his paintings "FL Jaques," was a naturalist and sportsman—as a teenager he reportedly paid \$10 for a taxidermy shop. This 28" x 21" oil on canvas was created for *South Carolina Bird Life* by Alexander Sprunt Jr. and E. Burnham Chamberlain, published in 1949. From a South Carolina collection and estimated at \$10,000/15,000, the painting sold for \$9000.

This pair of pintails from about 1925 was carved by G. Bert Graves (1880-1956) and painted by Catherine Elliston (1849-1953) of Peoria, Illinois. Graves was a carpenter and a police officer before turning to carving full time. The 17½" long birds exemplify Elliston's exceptional painting on the equally exceptional Graves carvings and retain the original paint, with light gunning wear. Each has a "B. GRAVES. DECOY. CO." lead weight on the underside. Estimated at \$15,000/25,000, the pair realized \$18,600. The birds had been owned by Gene Konopasek, a founder and president of the Midwest Decoy Collectors Association, and later entered a private New York collection.



This brant by preeminent New Jersey maker Harry Vinuckson Shourds (1861-1920) of Tuckerton brought \$18,000 (est. \$20,000/30,000). The 16½" long bird, circa 1890, is in fine condition and retains its original paint, with light gunning wear. Catalog notes describe it as "among the best of the maker's brant ever to come to market." The bird had been part of the Dave Campbell collection and was consigned from a New York collection.



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SATURDAY AUCTION
Saturday October 3, 12 p.m.

15 Bockes Rd., Hudson, NH VFW

Preview will be indoors, Auction held outside under a tent; masks required inside and under tent

Furniture includes country, formal, Victorian and mid-century modern, Boston and Salem period side chairs, grain painted 2 drawer blanket chest, pie safe, North Shore Dresser (very rough), apothecary chest, Bruno Mathsson Mid-century modern "Maria" extension table, Wallace Nutting dining trestle table, Eldred Wheeler canopy bed, Glass and china includes rare and unusual American brilliant cut glass, large two-piece punch bowl attributed to J. Hoare, large brilliant cut lamp, water pitcher in Desdemona pattern, colored overlay pieces, signed Sandwich double overlay posset pot and signed New England Glass Co. overlay pokel, art glass, Royal Worcester, Mount Washington cameo cut bowls, Marblehead pottery vase, large selection hand painted Limoges includes punch bowls, vases, chocolate pots, pitchers and more. Violin signed William Watson, bows, violin and cello parts, Oriental rugs, marble bust signed Prof. Antonio Garella, Moe Bridges leaded lamp, gold and silver jewelry, large bronze woman, Jessie Blackstone carved birds, clam basket, wooden ribbed canoe by L.H. Beach, architectural leaded glass windows and doors, Jennings "Chief" slot machine, paintings, prints, photographs, President Franklin Pierce signed ship's document, Norman Rockwell War posters, N.E. postcards, large collection Lowell, MA postcards, photographs and souvenirs, Watch for coming online only auctions containing SW contemporary artwork, a huge collection of die cast toy cars and sports memorabilia.

Preview: Friday October 2, 2-4 p.m. (masks required), day of sale 9 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.

Terms: In House bidders, Cash, check, or credit card; 18% buyer's premium discounted to 15% for cash or check, Online bidders 23%, **Ways to bid:** In person or absentee, phone bidding limited, online bidding available through Invaluable. Limited under tent seating, absentee bids strongly encouraged!

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