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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Copley's \$3.4 Million Winter Sale Is One For The Record Books**

CHARLESTON, SC - Copley Fine Art Auctions, LLC ([copleyart.com](http://copleyart.com)), the nation's premier decoy and sporting art auction house set a company record for one of their Winter Sales realizing \$3.4 million in total sales. The February 15th auction was held in conjunction with the Southeastern Wildlife Exposition (SEWE) at the Charleston Marriott in South Carolina. There was a frenzy of over 900 bidders participating from all platforms and across all categories, including antique and contemporary decoys, paintings, prints, folk art, canes, and Americana. The auction, consisting of 533 lots, was 96% sold, extending Copley's unrivaled track record in the industry.

The auction hall was filled with energy and plenty of foot traffic throughout the sale. At the auction's start, every seat was filled and bidders were standing against the walls as established collectors, dealers, and institutions bid against new buyers in town for SEWE and the Dr. Muller Collection. The Winter Sale 2020 had nine lots reach six figures and fifty-seven items sell for five-figure prices.

Robert Shaw, past curator of the Shelburne Museum and author of the definitive *Bird Decoys of North America*, described Dr. Muller as "a collector's collector, one of the great connoisseurs of the art of the decoy...Peter's quest set a new standard for decoy research and curation that should provide a model for all future publications and collections." Bidders raised their paddles in agreement; Session I of The Dr. Peter J. Muller Jr. Collection of American Bird Decoys was 100% sold, making it one of the only "white glove" sales in the field of decoy collecting. The session achieved an unprecedented average price per lot of over \$35,800 and accounted for six of the sale's top ten decoy lots. This historic session was published in Copley's fourth dedicated hardbound catalog which included a 24-page biography on the legendary collector.

Copley's owner and principal Stephen B. O'Brien Jr. reports, "I am thrilled for the Mullers, our consignors, our buyers, and the entire Copley team, having just launched the most successful auction of its kind, ever in the South. The bidding on all platforms was on fire—the live audience was energized, the phones were burning, and the internet bidding netted many of the items under \$10,000. We had bidders from eleven countries and over 230 unique buyers came away with lots. To end up 96% sold and shoot well over the auction's \$3.2 million high estimate? I have to pinch myself."

The top lot of the sale was the Mackey–Muller Swan by Charles Birch (1867–1956), which set a new world record for the maker landing at \$210,000, within its \$150/250,000 estimate. This was the second highest price for any swan decoy at auction; the only swan to fetch a higher price is a Whistling Swan by John Haynes Williams (1857–1937) from the collection of Peggy and David Rockefeller.

New Jersey duck decoys hit records with The Mackey–Muller Shourds Long-Tail by New Jersey carver Harry V. Shourds (1861–1920) selling for \$174,000 on a \$80/120,000 estimate, a world record for any Shourds duck decoy. The following lot, the Mackey–Muller Shourds Merganser Drake, more than doubled its low estimate of \$80,000, stretching out to \$162,000 and besting the record for a Shourds merganser by over \$60,000.

The Muller Webster Raised-Wing Golden Plover decoy from Nantucket flew past the \$60/90,000 estimate, landing at \$102,000 and smashing the world record for this important Nantucket carver set at the McCleery Sale in January 2000 at \$63,000. In addition, the price realized by this iconic shorebird represented an all-time high for any Nantucket decoy at auction.

The Mackey–Gregory–Muller Hooded Merganser Pair by Ira Hudson (1873–1949) landed at \$168,000, within its \$150/250,000 estimate, and the Mackey–Muller "Dust Jacket" Merganser Hen by John Dawson (1889–1959) achieved its high estimate of \$90,000.

Copley's Decoy Specialist Colin S. McNair reflects, "The success of the Muller Collection illustrates a continuation of strength at the top of today's decoy market which began with the Donal C. O'Brien sessions in 2017. Yet, looking past the nine six-figure decoy lots, it was a very well-balanced sale, with not only veterans, but also new bidders participating with confidence. The estates we offered proved enticing with every single one of the 240-plus lots from the Muller, Kramer, Butler, and King Collections finding buyers. Dr. Muller was a pioneer in x-raying decoys, beginning in the 1970s, so it was fitting to continue what he started on that front. We took over 200 x-rays for this sale."

Works by A. Elmer Crowell (1862–1952) continued to be in high demand, perhaps supported by this summer's release of an over-300-page monograph on the "Father of American Bird Carving." The top lot by this carver, a "Dust Jacket" Yellowlegs, landed at \$150,000 on a \$100/150,000 estimate. The maker's Dr. Fritz Talbot Willet more than doubled the high estimate of \$60,000 and brought \$126,000. Shorebirds weren't the only Crowells to hit their stride; an important set of Twenty-Five Miniature Waterfowl surpassed its \$90,000 high estimate on its way to a \$114,000 sale price, a new auction record for one of the carver's miniature waterfowl sets.

The McCleery Nichols Feeding Yellowlegs, a pinnacle shorebird by Massachusetts carver Fred M. Nichols (1854–1924), surpassed its \$85,000 high estimate, finally going for \$102,000 to a phone bidder.

A spectacular contemporary decorative carving by Pat Godin (b. 1953) entitled *Trillium Woods Drummer* sold for \$27,600, outstripping its high estimate of \$20,000 and setting an auction record for the world champion master. The top carving by Mark S. McNair (b. 1950), an early wood duck drake, hammered down at \$7,800, more than doubling its \$3,500 high estimate.

Carvings by Oliver "Tuts" Lawson (b. 1938), of Crisfield, Maryland, maintained their perennial popularity as a Flying Bobwhite Quail Pair shot to \$6,000 on a \$3/5,000 estimate.

Session II: Paintings, Works on Paper, and Bronzes started off with a bang when *Turkey Point Ice*, a watercolor by Thomas Aquinas Daly (b. 1937), brought \$5,700 on its \$2/3,000 estimate.

Copley's Fine Art Specialist Leah Tharpe reports, "I was very happy to see continued strength at all levels of the sporting art market. Paintings of sporting dogs by Muss-Arnolt, Rosseau, Wardle, Blinks, and Osthaus performed especially well, and there was even at least one well-behaved dog who came through the auction preview! A good number of our top painting lots hammered to bidders in the room, attesting to the combination of quality art and holding our sale at a desirable location, alongside SEWE's celebration of the sporting lifestyle."

The top painting lot of the sale was a little gem by Thomas Blinks (English, 1860–1912) depicting an English springer spaniel with a pheasant in oil, which sold to a Charleston gentleman in the room for \$72,000, well above its \$24,000 high estimate. Two lots prior, Gustav Muss-Arnolt's *Two Setters* set a new world record at auction for the noted dog artist when it sold for \$51,600, more than doubling its \$24,000 high estimate. Percival Rosseau's *New England* brought \$66,000, outstripping its \$50,000 high estimate, and Arthur Wardle's *Setters Working* sold for \$11,400, well over its \$3/5,000 estimate.

Copley's 97% sell-through rate for the fine art portion of the sale demonstrated a continuing strong market for high-quality sporting art. Active interest and bidding led to multiple world records being set, including for the artists John Loren Head (1913–1997), Travis Tuck (1943–2002), John Kobald (b. 1967), Jerome Connolly (1931–2016), and Walter Wilwerding (1891–1966). A watercolor by William J. Schaldach (1896–1982) depicting a *Leaping Male Eastern Brook Trout* that appeared on the cover of Ray Bergman's 1952 book, *Trout*, leapt to \$7,800, setting a record for a watercolor by the artist.

A watercolor depiction of western pheasant hunting by renowned sporting artist Ogden M. Pleissner (1905–1983), sold for \$48,000, within its estimate. Interest in the works by Chet Reneson (b. 1934) continued, with an acrylic on board titled *Tug O War* leaping to \$10,800, above its high estimate of \$7,000. *The Hunters*, a bighorn sheep hunting scene by Frank Stick (1884–1966), shot to \$15,600 on a \$12/18,000 estimate.

Items from the Estate of Alfred F. King III, late owner of The Sportsman's Edge in New York, were 100% sold by lot. This selection was led by Bob Kuhn's masterful acrylic, *Tiger*, which brought \$37,200. An engraving by Wilhelm Kuhnert (1865–1926) sold for \$5,700, and an oil on canvas depiction of mallards by Manfred Schatz (1925–2004) landed at \$5,100.

Two works by Dutch contemporary painter Ewoud de Groot (b.1969) saw competitive bidding, and his work, *Curllew*, glided over its high estimate of \$12,000 and struck the block at \$19,200. *Resting Oystercatchers* sold for \$15,600, also exceeding its \$8/12,000 estimate.

A large watercolor by David A. Hagerbaumer (1921–2014), titled *In the Thick Stuff*, sold for \$7,200, a new world record for this perennially popular artist. Additionally, four of his five watercolors offered hammered down above their high estimates. A classic canvasback scene by modern master David A. Maass (b. 1929) brought \$14,400, well above its \$6/9,000 estimate.

Leading the works on paper was a set of seven octavo volumes of *Birds of America* and three *Quadrupeds of North America* volumes by John James Audubon (1785–1851) which sold to an internet buyer for \$24,000, under its \$30,000 low estimate.

The Winter Sale also included a selection of folk art. There was active bidding on an 1829 blanket chest from the Sam and Betty Pierce Collection which brought \$3,600. A circa-1890 punt gun shot all the way to \$2,520. A Travis Tuck (1943–2002) Setter and Grouse Weathervane achieved \$3,600.

Single-owner collections, conservative estimates, and unestimated lots proved to be three keys to the overall success of this historic sale. Copley provided the convenience of online bidding through Bidsquare, as well as the sporting art industry's first app, Copley Live. A full list of prices realized from Copley's Winter Sale 2020 is available at [www.copleyart.com](http://www.copleyart.com). All prices include a 20% buyer's premium (the additional 3% for online purchases is not reflected in the prices listed above), and all record prices cite [AskArt.com](http://AskArt.com) and *Decoy Magazine*.

Copley Fine Art Auctions, LLC is preparing for The Sporting Sale 2020 and will return to Plymouth, Massachusetts, on July 23th. Consignments will be accepted until April 15th or until full. For a free confidential auction estimate, call 617.536.0030 or email [info@copleyart.com](mailto:info@copleyart.com).

For high-resolution images, please contact Chelsie Olney at 617.536.0030 or [chelsie@copleyart.com](mailto:chelsie@copleyart.com).

**Images available to include:**

Gustav Muss-Arnolt (1858–1927), Two Setters, oil on canvas, 22 ¼ by 34 ¼ in., Estimate: \$16/24,000, Sold for \$51,600

Thomas Blinks (1860–1912), English Springer Spaniel with Pheasant, oil on canvas, 18 by 14 in., Estimate: \$18/24,000, Sold for \$72,000

Percival Leonard Rosseau (1859–1937), *New England*, oil on canvas, 28 ¼ by 34 ¼ in., Estimate: \$30/50,000, Sold for \$66,000

Ogden M. Pleissner (1905–1983), Western Pheasant Hunting, watercolor, 18 by 28 in., Estimate: \$40/60,000, Sold for \$48,000

Bob Kuhn (1920–2007), *Tiger*, acrylic, 7 by 8 in., Sold for \$37,200

Ewoud de Groot (b. 1969), *Curlew*, oil on linen, 24 by 48 in., Estimate: \$8/12,000, Sold for \$19,200

William J. Schaldach (1896–1982), *Leaping Male Eastern Brook Trout*, watercolor, 12  $\frac{3}{4}$  by 18  $\frac{3}{4}$  in., Estimate: \$2/4,000, Sold for \$7,800

Arthur Wardle (1864–1949), *Setters Working*, watercolor, 25 by 20  $\frac{1}{2}$  in., Estimate: \$3/5,000, Sold for \$11,400

Frank Stick (1884–1966), *The Hunters*, oil on canvas, 38  $\frac{1}{2}$  by 26  $\frac{1}{2}$  in., Estimate: \$12/18,000, Sold for \$15,600

Mackey–Muller Swan, Charles Birch (1867–1956), Estimate: \$150/250,000, Sold for \$210,000

Mackey–Gregory–Muller Hooded Merganser Pair, Ira D. Hudson (1873–1949), Estimate: \$150/250,000, Sold for \$168,000

Muller Webster Raised-Wing Golden Plover, Estimate: \$60/90,000, Sold for \$102,000

“Dust-Jacket” Yellowlegs, A. Elmer Crowell (1862–1952), Estimate: \$100/150,000, Sold for \$150,000

Dr. Frit Talbot Willet, A. Elmer Crowell (1862–1952), Estimate: \$40/60,000, Sold for \$126,000

Mackey–Muller Shourds Merganser Drake, Harry V. Shourds (1861–1920), Estimate: \$80/120,000, Sold for \$162,000

Mackey–Muller Shourds Long-Tail, Harry V. Shourds (1861–1920), Estimate: \$80/120,000, Sold for \$174,000

Mackey–Muller "Dust Jacket" Merganser Hen, John Dawson (1889–1959), Estimate: \$60/90,000, Sold for \$90,000

The McCleery Nichols Feeding Yellowlegs, Fred M. Nichols (1854–1924), Estimate: \$65/85,000, Sold for \$102,000

Important Set of Twenty-Five Miniature Waterfowl, A. Elmer Crowell (1862–1952), Estimate: \$60/90,000, Sold for \$114,000