

## Sporting Art and Decoys Approach \$5 Million at Copley's Winter Sale

PLYMOUTH, MA - Copley Fine Art Auctions, LLC ([copleyart.com](http://copleyart.com)), the nation's premier decoy and sporting art auction house, just completed its most successful Winter Sale ever, realizing **\$4.9 million in total sales**, and shooting over the auction's high estimate of \$4.6 million. The auction surpassed the company's record Winter Sale high of \$3.4 million posted in 2020. The two-day 600 lot auction, live-streamed on February 19 and 20, was **98% sold** by lot, extending Copley's unrivaled track record in the industry. The largest number of participants in the firm's history filled both days with energetic bidding. Copley's owner and principal Stephen B. O'Brien Jr. reports, "The bidding on all platforms was strong with an unprecedented number of new buyers coming away with lots. It is a good sign for the future growth of the decoy and sporting art market. Though markets go up and down, once you get hooked on sporting art, it's a tough arena to stay away from. Our clients live the sporting and coastal life and they enjoy objects that conjure memories of days afield. One buyer told me that the first duck she shot with her father as a young girl was a ring-neck and so she bid on and landed a miniature carving of that species. The gentleman that took home the oil *On Fish* by Emile Gruppe told me it reminded him of his youth and being with his grandmother along the Maine coast as they were both fascinated by the sailing vessels and the commercial fisherman's quest for the big haul."

Bidders participated via phone, absentee bids, the Copley Live app, and two online platforms, Bidsquare and Live Auctioneers. There was robust bidding across all categories, including antique and contemporary decoys, decorative carvings, paintings, prints, folk art, canes, and Americana. Established collectors and dealers competed against bidders who were new to the field, resulting in a high number of new buyers and seven lots achieving six-figure prices.

Since the company's inception, Copley's team has focused on handling the top paintings and decoys in the sporting art field. Over the past twelve years, the firm has sold more of the top 100 decoy lots at auction than the rest of the field combined. Additionally, the team has set dozens of world records for top sporting artists, among them: Ogden Pleissner, Aiden Lassell Ripley, Edmund Osthaus, Lynn Bogue Hunt, and Chet Reneson.

In this major sale, single-owner collections and estates led the day with the three top collections each surpassing their high estimates. Day one kicked off with Session II of **The Dr. Peter J. Muller Jr. Collection of American Bird Decoys**, which blew through its pre-auction high estimate of \$1,051,000 to reach \$1,117,000 and was just one lot shy of being 100% sold. The historic Muller Session II catalog included a 24-page biography of the legendary collector. The session achieved an average price per lot of over \$28,000. In line with Copley's philosophy of highlighting single-owner collections, all six of the firm's single-owner catalogs have now eclipsed the \$19,000 average price per lot set at the sale of the Distinguished Collection of Dr. James M. McCleery in 2000. "When these great Sporting Art collections come in, everyone at Copley feels a great deal of responsibility to present these works in the proper light and get it right. These collections are often decades in the making and the collectors who put them together deserve a great deal of credit," notes Copley's owner Stephen O'Brien Jr.

Several carvings hailed from the collections of both William J. Mackey Jr. and Dr. Muller. Two decoys by Nathan F. Cobb Jr. garnered abundant attention: the Mackey Cobb Feeding Brant landed well above the \$100/150,000 estimate at \$186,000 and the Cobb Feeding Curlew reached its high estimate of \$120,000. Additionally, the Mackey Ruddy Duck swam past its \$10/15,000 estimate to reach \$31,200 and the Mackey Shourds Plover topped out at \$20,400, over five times its \$4,000 high estimate.

The Muller collection included a coveted canvasback pair by the Ward Brothers which more than doubled its low estimate of \$50,000, stretching out to \$129,000. The Swimming Red-Breasted Merganser Pair by Daniel Leeds paddled to \$55,200, above its \$30/50,000 estimate, setting a record price for any Leeds waterfowl. The Hollow Hissing Goose by Ira Hudson brought \$43,200 on a \$35/45,000 estimate.

Shorebirds from the collection also excited buyers with the Charles Sumner Bunn Reaching Greater Yellowlegs shooting past its \$20/30,000 estimate before settling at \$50,400, the Bunn Ruddy Turnstone bringing \$45,600 on a \$20/30,000 estimate, a Feeding Robin Snipe by perennial favorite Obediah Verity coming within a feather of its \$50,000 high estimate, and a Rogers Rig Ruddy Turnstone more than doubling its high estimate to hammer at \$20,400, a new record for the unknown maker.

Copley's Decoy Specialist Colin S. McNair reflects, "It was encouraging to see continued interest in the Southern birds: Cobb, Dudley, Ward, quail, ruddys, and woodys were all standouts. Additionally, the shorebird market has continued to spread its wings, which is logical as they tend to follow the waterfowl."

**The William K. du Pont Collection of Decoys, Bird Carvings, and Waterfowling Artifacts** was 100% sold, making it Copley's third "white glove" sale in the past four years. The collection soared to \$410,000, well over its \$192/288,000 estimate. The du Pont 1936 Canvasback Hen and Drake both fetched prices over their respective \$15/25,000 estimates. The Crowell Preening Curlew hit its low estimate of \$60,000 and the Ward Canada Goose Pair was a hair shy of its \$35,000 low estimate. The collection's Mackey Flying Merganser by Ira Hudson flew way past its \$15,000 high estimate before finally going to a phone bidder for \$46,800. A rare punt gun out of the collection found ready buyers and hammered at \$14,400. A set of miniature quail by James Joseph Ahearn sold for \$3,600 to a buyer on the phone and is believed to be a new auction record for the carver. The collection's iron redhead by Capt. Benjamin F. Dye achieved \$2,700. The top book lot of the sale consisted of six Derrydale Press books from the du Pont Collection, which sold for \$2,500.

**The Dr. Leonard O. Oden Collection of Bird Carvings** blew past its \$33/54,000 pre-auction estimate, surging to over \$92,000. The collection's miniature carvings by Allen J. King proved to be hot commodities with a turkey pair shooting to \$14,400 on a \$3/4,000 estimate, a woodcock pair hitting \$4,500, and a mourning dove pair reaching \$5,500. Additionally, a mourning dove by Oliver "Tuts" Lawson achieved \$6,000 on a \$2/3,000 estimate, with the carver's quail pair a good pick-up at \$3,900. Three miniature pairs by Brig. Gen. Chester deGavre each brought \$1,800, more than four times the high estimates. A miniature house wren by Jack and Bette Holt hopped well over the \$800 estimate and fetched \$1,200, while a miniature bobwhite quail family carved by Helen Lay Strong reached \$5,500 and a pair of quail by Harry W. Vreeland landed at \$1,400.

**Paintings** were led by the top lot of the sale, *Redheads in Flight*, an oil painting by Frank W. Benson which landed at \$270,000, within its \$250/450,000 estimate. Benson's oil of a goose hunter, stretched to \$69,000 above its \$40/60,000 estimate. The top Benson etching of the sale, *Pointer Dog*, brought \$2,500 over its \$2,000 high estimate.

The A. F. Tait market, which had been relatively dormant, snapped back with the sale of eight painting lots from a private Massachusetts collection. All eight lots sold for a total of \$122,000, landing within the estimate range of \$91/142,000. *Settlers on Quail* settled at \$57,000, *Doe and Two Fawns* bounded to \$36,000, and *Ruffed Grouse* reached \$19,200; all three oils were within or above their estimates.

New England coastal artwork from the **Dale W. Farrell Collection of Coastal and Fish Paintings** performed well, as all seven paintings sold for a total of \$109,500, landing near the high end of the estimate range of \$76/116,000. Emile Gruppe's masterwork *On Fish* led the group and sold for \$55,200, the second-highest price achieved at auction for the artist. Works by Anthony Thieme found eager buyers as *Rockport*, an oil-on-canvas piece, raced by its \$7/10,000 estimate to hammer at \$13,200, while another oil entitled *Fishing Smacks* landed just shy of its \$25/35,000 estimate at \$24,000.

Other top painting results include the Edmund Osthaus oil, *Pointer with Quail*, which sold within estimate for \$180,000, and Ogden M. Pleissner's oil *Jimmy's Pool on the Restigouche*, which brought \$240,000 on a \$60/90,000, the second-highest auction result ever for this important American artist. Other Pleissners in high demand were *Rising Mist - Cran Serre*, *Moisie River*, landing at \$49,200, and *Fishing in a Mountain Stream*, shooting above its \$20,000 high estimate to \$27,600.

New world records were set for Chet Reneson, at \$13,500 for bonefishing scene *Island Clouds*, and Maynard Reece, at \$9,200 for *Mallard Ducks, Banking for Landing*, among others.

A ten-point buck painting by renowned wildlife artist Bob Kuhn reached \$84,000, within its \$80/120,000 estimate. An oil depicting a leaping sailfish by William Goadby Lawrence surpassed its high estimate of \$2,000 and brought \$6,600.

Contemporary sporting artists' works also sold well, with Dutch painter Ewoud de Groot's black-bellied plover oil more than doubling its low estimate when it sold for \$18,000, and *Silver Buck* reaching \$10,800, squarely within its \$8/12,000 estimate. *Beech Grove - Passenger*

*Pigeons*, a watercolor by David A. Hagerbaumer, soared past its \$7,000 estimate to hammer at \$8,600, nearing the world record for the artist.

*Spanish Angels, Snowy Egrets*, an oil painting by Jim Rataczak, the Bonefish & Tarpon Trust's (BTT) 2021 Artist of the Year, went above the high estimate and sold for \$5,700. Funds generated from the sale of this painting will benefit this conservation organization and support research on bonefish, tarpon, and permit, along with their sensitive ecosystems.

The bronze wild turkey pair by sculptor Walter T. Matia brought \$12,000, four times the high estimate of \$3,000. A 37 lb. trophy Atlantic salmon carving by Scottish carvers and painters John and Dhuie Tully leapt over the \$18,000 high estimate to \$19,600, possibly a new world record for the makers. The top folk art cane featured carved animals, was made in 1907, and brought \$1,600. Additionally, a carved "Gay Head" quarterboard sign performed well, bringing \$7,300, over eight times its high estimate of \$900.

Copley's Fine Art Specialist Leah Tharpe reports, "We were pleased to see continued strength in the American sporting art market. With thousands of bidders watching the live-streamed event comfortably from their homes, demand for quality paintings with conservative estimates and good provenance proved strong."

Bird carvings and decoys were highly sought after throughout the sale with the Bobwhite Quail Pair by perennial favorite Elmer Crowell soaring to \$221,000, more than quadrupling its average estimate and establishing a new auction record for any of the maker's upland bird carvings. Several of his other carvings created competitive bidding: a decorative woodcock rose above its high estimate of \$70,000 to reach \$90,000, an early set of twenty-five miniature waterfowl made \$56,500, squarely within its \$50/60,000 estimate, a reaching greater yellowlegs on a clamshell base extended beyond its \$35/45,000 estimate to \$49,200, and a miniature bluebird realized \$5,800, more than six times the high estimate of \$900. Additionally, one of his earliest miniature quail rushed to \$6,000, above its \$5,000 high.

Winter Sale bidders enthusiastically vied for the **factory decoys** on offer, with the Mason Decoy Factory's Mackey "Double-Blue" Teal bringing \$12,000, the Mackey Pintail hammering at \$9,600, and a goldeneye achieving \$6,900, all well above their respective high estimates. The J.

N. Dodge Red-backed Sandpiper also saw lots of action, racing past its high estimate to land at \$11,400.

The Ward Brothers' Bishops Head Black Duck Pair turned heads as well, surpassing the high estimate of \$70,000 to land at \$75,000. The High-Head Canada Goose by Jim Schmiedlin not only reached its \$60,000 high estimate, but also set a new world record for the carver and established a **new record for a modern decoy**.

The Oscar Alford mallard pair set a new world record for the maker when it hammered at \$14,400. This follows a trend that the company is seeing. Copley established a high-water mark for the Illinois River region in March when the firm sold a pair of Charles Schoenheider mergansers for \$360,000. "The Illinois River market has sprung back to life after being in the doldrums a few years ago. I think the Peoria Riverfront Museum and Zac Zetterberg, in particular, have done a great job promoting decoys not only from their region, but across the United States. Their exhibition was and their accompanying book, *American Decoy: The Invention*, is first rate. With many new collectors just opening their eyes to the beauty of decoys, their Center for American Decoys will pay dividends," said O'Brien.

In this sale Copley provided the convenience of phone, absentee, app, and online bidding. A full list of prices realized from Copley's Winter Sale 2021 is available at [www.copleyart.com](http://www.copleyart.com). All prices include a 20% buyer's premium and an additional 3% for online purchases. All record prices cite [AskArt.com](http://AskArt.com) or *Decoy Magazine*.

Copley Fine Art Auctions, LLC is currently accepting consignments for The Sporting Sale 2021 this summer. For a free confidential auction estimate, call Decoy Specialist Colin S. McNair or Fine Art Specialist Leah Tharpe at 617.536.0030 or email [info@copleyart.com](mailto:info@copleyart.com).

### **Top Ten Lots:**

Frank W. Benson (1862-1951), *Redheads in Flight*, oil on canvas, 36 ¼ by 45 in., Estimate: \$250/450,000, Sold for \$270,000

Ogden M. Pleissner (1905–1983), *Jimmy's Pool on the Restigouche*, oil on canvas, 24 ¼ by 36 ¼ in., Estimate: \$60/90,000, Sold for \$240,000

Exceptional Bobwhite Quail Pair, A. Elmer Crowell (1862–1952), Estimate: \$40/60,000, Sold for \$221,400

The Mackey Cobb Feeding Brant, Nathan F. Cobb Jr. (1825-1905), Estimate: \$100/150,000, Sold for \$186,000

Edmund H. Osthaus (1858-1928), *Pointer with Quail*, oil on canvas, 27 by 36 in., Estimate: \$150/250,000, Sold for \$180,000

The Purnell-Muller Ward Canvasback Pair, The Ward Brothers, Estimate: \$50/80,000, Sold for \$129,000

The Cobb Feeding Curlew, Nathan F. Cobb Jr. (1825-1905), Estimate: \$80/120,000, Sold for \$120,000

Exceptional Early Woodcock, A. Elmer Crowell (1862–1952), Estimate: \$50/70,000, Sold for \$90,000

Bob Kuhn (1920-2007), Ten-Point Buck with Does, acrylic on masonite, 22 by 33 in. Estimate: \$80/120,000, Sold for \$84,000

The Bishops Head Black Duck Pair, The Ward Brothers, Estimate: \$50/70,000, Sold for \$75,000