

Hammered Down

Experts discuss recent auction highlights

Judy Penz Sheluk

All prices are inclusive of buyer's premium.

Copley Fine Art Auctions

The Winter Sale 2011: Jan. 17, New York, NY



This is a rare and exceptional decoy by the famous maker Joseph W. Lincoln (1859-1938) from Accord, Mass. This decoy, created c. 1925, was found several decades ago in an antiques shop in Pennsylvania. It is believed to be the only full-size Lincoln mallard drake decoy in original paint that has come to light. During Lincoln's lifetime, wild mallard ducks were rare, and as such working mallard decoys are extremely scarce in any condition. This is without question one of the very best duck decoys by this maker to ever be offered for sale and may very well be his finest puddle duck to have survived. The Lincoln mallard sold for \$86,250 on a \$20,000-\$30,000 estimate.

Copley Fine Art Auctions LLC, 268 Newbury Street, Boston MA, 02116. 617-536-0030. www.copleyart.com.

About our expert: Stephen O'Brien, Jr.'s initial interest in sporting art grew out of an early introduction to the world of waterfowling and fly-fishing. O'Brien comes from a collecting family that spans four generations. Both his father, Stephen B. O'Brien, Sr., and his uncle, Donald C. O'Brien, Jr., are avid environmentalists and collectors of sporting paintings, antique decoys and folk art.

Over the past 20 years O'Brien has orchestrated two thriving businesses in the heart of Boston's Back Bay. Stephen O'Brien Jr. Fine Arts opened in 1997 and today is recognized as one of the finest sporting art galleries specializing in antique decoys and nineteenth- and twentieth-century American, sporting and wildlife paintings. In 2005, O'Brien founded Copley Fine Art Auctions, which quickly established itself as leading auction house for sporting art.



John Tax, Minnesota's most revered carver, is known foremost for his stick-up geese decoys. Designed to be placed in a field to attract passing Canada geese, the carver made stick-ups in three distinct poses: Feeding, nestling and sentinel. Only six of these rare forms were feeding, and each had different head, neck and body angles. Put together as a rig, the group had a truly lifelike appearance. The authentic and dynamic poses of Tax's geese are an important part of decoy history. This remarkably natural carving sold for \$115,000 on a \$40,000-\$60,000 estimate.



This pair of goldeneyes was commissioned by John Ware Willard, who, along with other eminent patrons such as Dr. John C. Phillips, Jr. and Harry V. Long, challenged the maker, A. Elmer Crowell, to reach new heights of artistry with his bird carvings. This hen and drake are early full-bodied hollow-carved decoys in a rare content, or tucked, head posture. They display raised and carved primary feathers, fluted tails, as well as soft stippled feather paint that places them among Crowell's finest working decoys. The pair passed into the collection of Dr. James M. McCleery, a noted decoy collector whose ink stamp can be seen as a stamp of approval for many carvings. The pair sold for \$109,250 on a \$40,000-\$60,000 estimate.