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HOME

Sporting Art And Decoys Pop At Copley Auction

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Copley Fine Arts principal Steve O'Brien Jr with the star lots of the auction. The Philip Goodwin oil titled "October Hunting" was featured on the cover of Scribner's in 1911. It sold at \$161,000. The rare Gus Wilson eider decoy was the top lot of the auction, selling to folk art collector Jerry Lauren for \$172,500, a record price paid at auction for a Wilson eider.

The first of the Americana Week in New York City events for 2013 witnessed healthy results, with Copley Fine Art posting solid performances for both the extensive selection of sporting art and for the vast assortment of wildfowl decoys and shorebirds. Running in loose conjunction with Keno

Auctions, Copley got the Americana Week ball rolling on Monday, January 21. Sharing the uptown Wallace Hall facility with Keno, who ran the following day, in regard to the exhibition and sales space, the two sales could not have been more different in content, although they did seem to complement each other.

“This is our third year at Wallace Hall,” commented auction house principal Steve O’Brien prior to the auction, “and we are pleased that interest in the event has continued to grow.” The auctioneer commented that there had been substantial interest expressed in all of the major items during preview †and that even some smaller lots seemed to attract an unusually large amount of interest. “We expect that the bigger lots are going to create a lot of interest, but we have seen a lot of action on many of the smaller lots,” he said prior to the auction, pointing in particular to an assembled grouping of shorebirds by contemporary carver Mark McNair, and also a lot that contained numerous muskie floats in bright, folksy paint.

O’Brien also commented on three color prints that had received an extraordinary amount of interest. The limited edition prints by Robert Bishop were titled “Map of Well-Known Saltwater Gamefish,” “Map of Surface Feeding Ducks” and “Map of Diving Ducks.” Each was conservatively estimated and they constituted the first three lots of the auction.



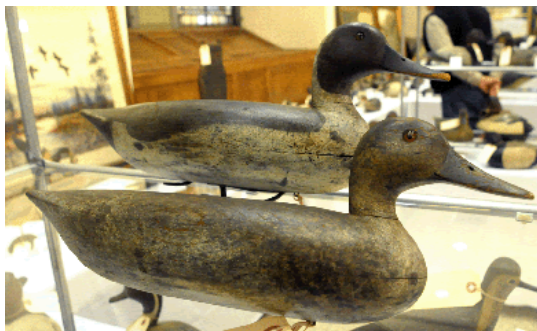
The Ansel Adams gelatin silver print “Grand Tetons and the Snake River, Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming, 1942†realized \$54,625.

Setting the tone for the day, the first lot of the auction was Bishop's saltwater fish map, numbered "one of a thousand," that blew past the \$400/600 estimate, selling at \$3,450. Bishop's freshwater duck map was next, and the \$100/200 estimate seemed comical as it quickly made its way to a selling price of \$2,185, and the diving duck map doubled estimate at \$1,265. Several other Bishop lots followed, each doing quite well. All sold to a determined bidder standing in the rear of the hall who competed with telephone and Internet bidders.

The first painting of consequence, a David Maass marsh scene titled "Canvasbacks Coming In," opened at the low estimate with a flurry of bidding, selling moments later over high estimate at \$16,100. An Aiden Lassell Ripley watercolor titled "Black Ducks Coming In" was the next lot to be offered, and the momentum pushed it to \$26,450.

It was not long before the star lot of the day crossed the auction block, the dramatic and colorful Philip Goodwin oil titled "October Hunting" that depicted two men landing a birchbark canoe at camp, laden with large moose antlers. The painting was featured on the cover of *Scribner's* in 1911. Stunning, with a bright yellow sky against crystal waters and a red bandana-clad hunter ceremoniously waving his hat from the rear of the canoe, the image was iconic. With eight telephones lined up for bidding, the lot opened at \$120,000 and took off at a rapid pace, finishing moments later at \$161,000, squarely between the \$125/175,000 estimates.

Other paintings that did well included a Harry Curieux Adamson oil on board titled "Medina County Impressions." The well-executed painting by the former Ducks Unlimited "artist of the year" depicted a delicious looking group of pintail, mallard, teal and widgeon taking off from a remote river landscape. The painting was hotly contested, selling at \$43,125. A classic portrait of setters working in the field by Percival Rosseau, titled "Irish Setters on Point," realized \$34,500.



A pair of pintail by Charles Schoenheider, the only ones known, went out at \$54,625.

A classic painting by Lynn Bogue Hunt titled "Grapes and Grain" depicted pheasant on a rock wall at field's edge. It sold well above estimate at \$28,750.

The decoys in the auction represented the strength in the sale, and many of the lots had captured the attention of not only decoy collectors, but also folk art enthusiasts. One in particular, the Gus Wilson preening eider drake, was termed by O'Brien as "one of the finest traditional Maine decoys to ever be offered at public auction." Previously featured in numerous books and magazine articles, the decoy was inspected by virtually every collector in attendance. As the lot crossed the block, it was termed a "very special thing." Bidding on the Wilson eider came from folk art collector Jerry Lauren, flanked by agents Sy and Susan Rappaport, who claimed the lot at \$172,500, a record price paid at auction for a Wilson eider.

Also attracting a great deal of attention was a rare pair of pintail by Peoria, Ill., carver Charles Schoenheider. The only pintails that the carver was known to make, the stylish birds retained their original paint with moderate gunning wear, including the combed paint detail on the back of the drake. Estimated at \$25/35,000, the pair of birds opened for bidding at \$21,000 with three telephone bidders getting in on the action. Bids bounced back and forth between the phones, with the lot climbing to \$54,625.



The Ward Brothers broadbill made for Dr Edgar Burke attracted a lot of attention, selling at \$51,750.

A Ward Brothers broadbill that was made for Dr Edgar Burke, the famed illustrator of sporting books, in 1936 was another of the decoys to attracted a lot of attention. O'Brien cataloged the decoy as "considered by many to be the finest Ward Brothers broadbill known to exist, this folk art carving ranks among the greatest examples of the species we have ever seen." Listing a provenance of the William Mackey collection and the William Purnell collection, the decoy had been featured in books,

including Eugene Connett's *Duck Shooting Along the Atlantic Tidewater* . Opening for bidding at \$27,500, the lot sold to a phone bidder at \$51,750.

Another folky decoy was the wonderfully carved Ira Hudson bluebill drake with turned head. Once owned by "the first collector of Southern decoys," Carter Smith, this bird had also been illustrated and widely written about. The rare decoy, in original gunning paint, sold at \$48,875.

Working decoys and shorebirds by Elmer Crowell continued to exhibit strength in the marketplace, with a classic redhead drake with carved raised and crossed primary feathers and pristine original paint selling above estimate. O'Brien termed the bird an "exceptional and bold decoy&†with expertly blended paint and carved bill detail." The attractive decoy fared well, realizing \$43,125.



The Nantucket-made split-tail Eskimo curlew by William Folger brought \$41,400.

Crowell shorebirds attracted substantial attention, with a rare split-tail dowitcher, circa 1910, in original pristine working paint leading the list at \$46,000. A pair of unused yellowlegs decoys by Crowell in near mint paint was attractively mounted on a piece of driftwood. With one bird in the running pose and the other in a sentinel pose, the rare pair achieved \$35,650. A golden plover in original paint with even gunning wear was an early example by the carver. It went to the telephones at \$34,500.

A decorative carving by Crowell of a preening Jack curlew sold at \$23,000. A rare early Nantucket-made split-tail Eskimo curlew by William Folger was in excellent condition, and went out at \$41,400.

Seeming somewhat out of place in the auction, an Ansel Adams gelatin silver print titled "Grand Tetons and the Snake River, Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming, 1942" was offered. The rare image, measuring 15½ by 19½, sold between estimates at \$54,625.



Susan and Sy Rappaport flank folk art collector Jerry Lauren with his newly purchased eider drake by Gus Wilson.

Contemporary decoys by Mark McNair were well received, with particular attention paid to an assembled grouping by the artist made up of eight terns atop a crabfloat. Executed by McNair in 1990, the stylish and folksy piece sold above estimate at \$6,900.

A small collection of pike and muskie floats, many acquired from author Henry Fleckenstein Jr, featured 21 brightly colored bobbers of various form. O'Brien related that considerable interest had been expressed in the lot, estimated at \$1/2,000, and come sales time several collectors were lined up to do battle for the lot. More than doubling estimates, the colorful grouping brought \$4,025.

Prices reported include the buyer's premium.

Copley's next auction is scheduled for July; consignments are currently being accepted. For additional information, www.copleyart.com or 617-536-0030.