



PHOTOS COURTESY OF COPLEY FINE-ART AUCTIONS



Pointer with Quail by Edmund Henry Osthaus (above left); Jimmy's Pool on the Restigouche by Ogden Pleissner (top); and an Atlantic salmon carving by the Scottish duo Dhuie and John Tully (above) all sold within estimate or greater at auction.

OFF THE WALL

SPORTING ART HOLDS VALUE IN THE PANDEMIC.

The effect of the Covid pandemic has been felt in every corner of the global economy. The art auction market has not escaped and to counter shrinking income from more traditional sources of high-end art, auction houses like Sotheby's and Christies have expanded into online sales of luxury items. These have proven attractive to buyers, with a pair of Michael Jordan's running shoes recently selling for \$590,000 and a Himalaya Niloticus Crocodile Diamond Birkin bag bringing in \$380,000.

Sporting art, however, seems to be holding its value quite well. "Salmon angling art, as is the case with most sporting art, is proving to thrive under pandemic conditions," says Colin McNair, carving specialist at Copley Fine Art Auctions. Copley's winter sale hit \$4.9 million and was highlighted by a few Atlantic salmon and hunting pieces.

"Jimmy's Pool on the Restigouche" by Ogden Pleissner brought \$240,000 on a \$60/90,000 estimate, the second-highest auction result ever for this important American artist. Pleissner appreciated the opportunities hunting and fishing allowed him, once saying, "I've seen things and experienced things that are interesting and great fun and paintable. I would never see these things if I didn't have a shotgun in the crook of my arm or my fly rod in hand."

"This year, we've found that as people have been sitting at home with their collections, they've become more engaged with what they have and how they might want to upgrade," says Leah Thorpe, a fine art specialist at Copley. "Classic sporting art, be it angling or hunting, offers a means to capture memories of travel and freedom."

A 37-lb trophy Atlantic salmon carving by the Scottish duo John Tully (1862–1931) and Dhuie Tully (1862–1950) leapt over the \$18,000 high estimate to \$19,600, believed to be a new world record for the makers. John Tully learned his trade by apprenticing for the master fish carver John B. Russell (1819–1893), one of the founding fathers of trophy fish carving. In the 1870s, Russell had a studio in Fochabers, Scotland, on the River Spey. Tully married Russell's daughter,

Isabella "Dhuie," and it was Dhuie that painted nearly all of her husband John's carvings. John and Dhuie Tully were one of the finest artisan duos to have ever worked in the carved and painted wood tradition.

Another item, "Pointer with Quail" by Edmund Henry Osthaus (1858–1928) sold within estimate for \$180,000. Osthaus was born in Hildesheim, Germany, and studied at the Royal Academy of the Arts in Dusseldorf from 1874 to 1882. In 1883, he immigrated to America, becoming an instructor and then director at the Toledo Academy of Fine Arts, refining his painting technique and pursuing his passions: hunting and fishing. "Pointer with Quail" reveals Osthaus at his best. The fit dog is rendered in masterful detail. His taut body is full of energy as he stands stock still while proudly, but gently, holding the quail in his mouth. His bright eyes gaze at his master, who naturally is delighted with this retrieve. With its dynamic artistry and recognition by the marketplace, "Pointer with Quail" is one of America's great dog paintings.

Ogden Pleissner once said, "A fine painting is not just the subject . . . It is the feeling conveyed of form, bulk, space, dimensionality and sensitivity. The mood of the picture, that is most important." Pleissner's works, like Osthaus' and others, convey these moods and are able to transport the viewer. This aspect of the viewing experience has become even more valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic with its restrictions and uncertainty.

—M.S.

Copley's summer sale, which will include four more Pleissners takes place July 9-10. For more information visit www.copleyart.com.