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The Sporting Sale 2022 Surpasses \$3.1 Million

PLYMOUTH, MA - On July 14 and 15, Copley Fine Art Auctions' 17th-annual Sporting Sale brought **over \$3.1 million**. This major two-day auction, consisting of 675 lots, was one of the company's largest to date. The sale had a **96% sell-through rate**, came close to cresting its \$3.3 million high estimate, and set several new world records. All fourteen cover lots sold. Bidders participated via phone, absentee bids, the CopleyLive app, and two online platforms, Bidsquare and Live Auctioneers. Every category, from antique and contemporary decoys to decorative carvings, paintings, prints, folk art, fish decoys, canes, gunpowder tins, and Americana, saw lively bidding.

The top lot of this year's Sporting Sale was the Harmon Hollow Nantucket Curlew, est. \$150/250,000, which sold for \$228,000, doubling the previous world record for a Nantucket decoy. With the drop of that gavel, Copley added another 6-figure lot to the firm's annual total, bringing the count to five. No other firm has sold a decoy for six figures in 2022.

Paintings were led by exceptional canine art. Both major Osthause dog paintings shot above their high estimates, with the artist's oil of setter puppies, est. \$60/90,000, selling for \$102,000 and a late addition work bringing \$78,000, over its \$55/75,000 estimate. Another popular dog painting at the sale was *Steady*, an oil on canvas by A.F. Tait depicting two setters pointing quail, est. \$50/80,000, which landed at \$73,800. A work depicting setters on point by Gustav Muss-Arnolt leapt over its \$35/45,000 estimate to reach \$48,000, the second-highest price ever for the artist's work at auction. A painting of two setters by S. Edwin Megargee bested its \$5/7,000 estimate when it hammered at \$9,225. This marked the second-highest price ever for the artist's work at auction.

A well-known Aiden Lassell Ripley grouse shooting watercolor realized a strong \$60,000, one of the top prices ever for the artist's upland bird hunting watercolors. This 1946 watercolor is number four in a print series of six scenes done for *Field & Stream* entitled "Gunning in America." The gentleman pictured to the right is most likely the artist, with his favorite dog, "Chief," by his side. It is by many accounts the most important grouse hunting watercolor the artist ever produced.

Arthur Burdett Frost's *The Christmas 'Possum*, the original gouache for an engraving in a 1900 *Harper's Weekly* magazine, shot above its \$30,000 high estimate and reached \$43,050. *Wild Chorus* by Bob Kuhn hammered just shy of its low estimate at \$57,000. Though small in size, Ogden M. Pleissner's *Riverman* is bold in stature, and bidders agreed as the work made its way to \$26,400, within its estimate.

Day two got off to a lively start as Chet Reneson's unestimated watercolor, *Netting the Catch*, set a record for a watercolor by the artist when it stretched to \$11,685. Copley also holds the world record for Reneson. The firm continues its perfect record in offering choice works by Emile Gruppe, as it has now sold four Gruppe lots for five figures, eclipsing any other auction company.

Bird paintings also captivated collectors. The watercolor *Woodcock* by Archibald Thorburn achieved \$20,910, landing squarely within its estimate. George Browne's *Mallards Gleaning the Stubble* landed within estimate at \$36,000, the second highest price ever for one of his waterfowl scenes, and *Wild Turkey* by Francis Lee Jaques reached \$20,400, also within its estimate. \$7,800 was the highwater mark for *Pintails at Dusk* by Richard E. Bishop.

Ogden M. Pleissner's *Complete Set of Eight Etchings* led the offering of prints. This rare lot brought \$30,750, within its estimate. William J. Koelpin's popular bronze, entitled

Storm Warning, reached \$24,000, far above its \$8/10,000 estimate. The firm has now sold nine of this artist's top ten works.

Copley continues to dominate the sporting art market with world records for works by Pleissner, Ripley, Frost, Reneson, Jaques, Hagerbaumer, Koelpin, de Groot, Hunt, Muss-Arnolt, and Fuertes, among others.

Copley Fine Art Specialist Leah Tharpe reports, "With three online platforms running to help us offer a broad array of fine art, from top dog paintings to works without estimates, I was pleased to see such active participation in the sale."

Decoys and Decoratives were led by the Harmon Hollow Nantucket Curlew, est. \$150/250,000, which shattered the previous world record for a Nantucket decoy when it landed at \$228,000. The Captain Wyer pair achieved \$12,000, outstripping its \$5/8,000 estimate and establishing a new record for this well-documented Nantucket shorebird hunting guide and carver.

Other decoys reaching new heights were Rhodes Truex's ruddy turnstone, which hit \$13,200 on a \$5/8,000 estimate, a highwater mark for any Truex shorebird decoy, and the Art Fizer's Canada goose, which set a world record for the maker at \$7,200.

Crowell carvings

Crowell carvings are a perennial auction favorite, and the Elmer Crowell march continued at the Sporting Sale. Despite missing three birds from the set, the East Harwich master's shorebird set shot above its \$80,000 high estimate, landing at \$92,250 and setting a new world record for a Crowell miniature shorebird set. The Crowell Wing-Up Greater Yellowlegs, est. \$30/50,000, shot through the estimate and sold for \$84,000. The Turned-Head Semipalmated Plover certainly turned heads when it tripled its \$15,000 low estimate, hammering at \$45,000. The du Pont Crowell Woodcock

alighted at \$72,000, within its estimate. The du Pont Crowell Mallard Drake and Blue Jay were good buys at \$36,000 and \$10,800, respectively.

Ward brothers decoys

The Sunbathing Wigeon by the Eastern Shore of Maryland's Lem Ward stretched to \$15,600, within its estimate. The brothers' Redhead Pair also landed within its \$14/18,000 estimate at \$16,800. The 1936 Mallard Pair proved to be a good pick-up, going for \$36,000, just below their \$40,000 low estimate.

Wood ducks

Copley continued to make headlines with wood duck decoys, following up on the record-setting Shang Wheeler pair in their Winter Sale, which hit \$216,000 and set a new record for the maker at auction. That pair sold in 2018 at the Christies' Rockefeller sale for \$62,500.

This summer, a Joseph Lincoln wood duck shot above estimate before settling down for \$20,400. Interestingly, it had sold just months prior at Guyette & Deeter's weekly online auction for \$6,776. Another wood duck from the same Guyette & Deeter weekly online sale was a Sterling Wood Duck, which had hammered for \$13,000. In the Copley sale, this same Hunter-Sterling Wood Duck almost doubled its previous result, hitting \$25,200. A third wood duck, the Hunter-Doherty Wood Duck Hen, which had recently sold for \$3,600 at Guyette & Deeter's November 2020 auction, showed its true colors at the Sporting Sale, splashing down at \$33,000. Each of these wood ducks landed with a unique buyer.

"If these results don't show the Copley difference, I don't know what does. Our firm has now sold the top decoy lot at auction three of the last four years and maintained the highest average price per decoy lot nine of the last ten years," stated Copley owner Steve O'Brien Jr.

Bidders enthusiastically vied for the Mackey-Colio American Egret, carrying the important folk art work over its \$30,000 high estimate to \$48,000. The Humphrey Greater Yellowlegs shot to \$14,400, also surpassing its high estimate of \$14,000. The Harry V. Shourds' Parrish Rig Canada goose realized \$54,000 and the Bunn Curlew achieved \$72,000, both within their estimates. The Mackey-Purnell Watson Black Duck also saw a swarm of action, hitting its high estimate to land at \$18,000.

"It was such a well-balanced sale," relays Copley decoy specialist Colin McNair. "There is no secret that curated collections and estates are a key to success in an auction like we've just seen. Focusing in on the individual carvings, the catalog content published on lots like the Mackey-Colio Egret and the flurry of wood ducks has demonstrated that original research adds real value for discerning collectors."

Factory decoys performed well with an unestimated McCleery pintail and black duck lot tallying \$9,000. The Mackey Mason Green-Winged Teal shot above its high estimate of \$20,000 to reach \$26,400. The Mackey Mason Blue-Winged Teal settled down at \$12,000, comfortably within the \$10/20,000 estimate. An unestimated challenge-grade Mason black duck soared to \$3,900. A Havre de Grace, MD, maker, R. Madison Mitchell, carved an unestimated early swan that sold for \$6,900.

Contemporary carvers

Contemporary carvers' pinnacle works were on display and the market spoke, with a hanging pintail drake by Cameron McIntyre swinging to \$7,800, his yellowlegs pair commanding \$3,383, and a miniature white heron by Steve Weaver achieving \$3,300. A Canada goose by Mark McNair brought \$7,800 and the maker's two Phillips-Rig-style shorebirds reached \$2,760.

The Frank Finney market continued to show strength with a passenger pigeon pair shooting above its high estimate, landing at \$10,800. However, the showstopper was the maker's Folk Art Bird Tree, which bounded past its \$6/9,000 estimate to \$33,825, believed to be a new world record for the maker.

Miniature carvings commenced the auction with a bang as the Miniature Dove Family by A.J. King flew past its \$5/8,000 estimate on its way to \$13,200. The Rhode Island maker continues to be in lock-step with Elmer Crowell as one of the premier miniature carvers. The top miniature lot by the "father of American bird carving" was a rare swimming Canada goose, which alighted at \$13,200, crushing its \$5/8,000 estimate.

Miniatures by George Boyd were in high demand with a rare dovekie achieving \$13,200 and a duo of ruddy ducks landing just shy of their \$8,000 high estimate at \$7,200. Works by Wendell Gilley continued their upward climb with the Southwest Harbor bird sculptor seeing strong prices for his osprey at \$10,200, and great blue herons, also reaching \$10,200. The top Joseph Lincoln miniature lot was a hooded merganser pair which swam to \$4,500.

Demand for Robert Morse carvings remained strong with a miniature great blue heron bringing \$2,337. Miniatures by Eastern Shore or Virginia carvers were also in high demand with a rare miniature loon by Brig. Gen. Chester deGavre reaching \$1,046, and a McNair miniature owl turning heads at \$2,520.

Fish decoys and collectables

The collectable fishing tackle market was on fire, with the Stan Bogdan Salmon Reel #300 selling for \$11,685, believed to be a new world record for the maker and tying the Chet Reneson painting for the top unestimated lot of the sale.

Harry Seymour's rare 14-inch fish decoy drew active bidding on its way to \$11,070. A brook trout from Lake Chautauqua, NY, was an astute buy at \$7,200. A brown trout carving by Ellen McCaleb leapt to \$5,100, while a rainbow trout carving bested its fresh water brethren to reach \$5,228, establishing two new world records for the artist. The top fish decoy of the sale was the Albino Brook Trout, which sold for \$9,600, more than three times its low estimate.

Americana

Folk art canes again saw considerable action, with a dog motif cane selling for \$2,400.

The gunpowder collection of a descendant of Thomas Coleman du Pont ignited a flurry of bidding with the 68 lots of powder tins selling for a total of over \$75,000. A Hazard Smokeless Rifle Powder Tin shot to \$5,535. Moments later, another Hazard tin reached \$4,920. A du Pont Summer Shooting Powder Can hammered down at \$3,690, narrowly outstripping a powder keg from the same illustrious explosives company which flew to \$3,383.

In this sale Copley provided the convenience of phone, absentee, app, and online bidding. A full list of prices realized from Copley's Sporting Sale 2022 is available at www.copleyart.com. All prices include a 20% buyer's premium and an additional 3% for online purchases. All record prices cite AskArt.com or *Decoy Magazine*.

Copley Fine Art Auctions, LLC is currently accepting consignments for The Winter Sale 2023, set to take place February 24–25. 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.

For hi-res images or more information, email chelsie@copleyart.com or call 617.536.0030.