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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**The Sporting Sale Vaults Copley to Its Best Year Ever
with \$9.3 Million in Auction Sales in 2021**

PLYMOUTH, MA - Copley Fine Art Auctions, LLC (copleyart.com), the nation's premier decoy and sporting art auction house, just completed its 16th annual Sporting Sale, realizing **\$4.44 million in total sales**. The auction results pushed the company's auction sales total for 2021 to over \$9.3 million, surpassing the company's previous annual high-water mark and extending Copley's unrivaled track record in the industry. The two-day, 507-lot auction, live-streamed on July 9 and 10, was **92% sold** by lot and averaged over **\$9,500 per lot** sold. 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 entire Copley ethos evolves from a celebration of wildlife. Folks are moving out to the country and spending more time at the beach, in the woods, and hunting and fishing. New collectors have joined the ranks of the old guard, pushing many artist and carver records to new heights. Our clients' choices in art reflect these passions."

Bidders participated via phone, absentee bids, the Copley Live app, and two online platforms, Bidsquare and Live Auctioneers. Every category, from antique and contemporary decoys to decorative carvings, paintings, prints, folk art, and Americana, saw lively bidding with **six lots achieving six-figure prices**.

This sale contributed four more birds to *Decoy Magazine's* "Top 100" decoys at auction list. Since 2009 Copley has placed thirty-one lots on this tally, more than the rest of the field combined. The recent Sporting Sale set new world records for both decoy makers and sporting artists. Copley's owner, Stephen O'Brien Jr., explains, "We do not sell the most decoys; we focus on quality. In any given auction cycle, we will turn down more lots than we end up selling. Our clients are pretty sophisticated; whether we are selling a hundred-dollar decoy or a million-dollar carving, they want to know that the quality is there. Our fine art specialist Leah Tarpe and our decoy specialists Chelsie Olney and Colin McNair do a great job on quality control. I think this is one of our team's great strengths."

Important single-owner collections and estates once again led the way. Day one kicked off with **The Johnson Collection Of American Bird Decoys**, which brought **\$1.8 million**. The historic collection of predominantly shorebirds received a dedicated 140-page catalog. The **thirty-seven shorebird lots sold averaged over \$41,000**, making it one of the most successful decoy offerings ever. All seven of Copley's single-owner catalogs have now eclipsed the \$19,000 average price per lot, a benchmark set at the sale of the Distinguished Collection of Dr. James M. McCleery, a bellwether auction held in New York in 2000. "Everyone at Copley feels a great deal of responsibility to present these collections in the proper light. They are often decades in the making, and the collectors that put them together deserve a great deal of recognition," notes O'Brien.

Copley's Decoy specialist Colin S. McNair reflects, "We lead the industry when it comes to due diligence. The Johnson catalog was the seventh 100%-X-rayed catalog we've produced. We started doing this back in 2009, when I first came onboard, with the sale of The Harry V. Long Collection. Dr. McCleery's 1981 prediction, that X-rays and UV light would become an auction standard, is now a reality at Copley and bidders have responded clearly and with confidence to this science-based approach."

The Johnson Collection began with a bang with the Nichols feeding yellowlegs hitting the \$96,000 mark. **The "Dust-Jacket" Black-Bellied Plover Trio** by "Father of American Bird Carving" Elmer Crowell followed suit, bringing an impressive **combined \$984,000 total** for the three on estimates of \$3/500,000 each. The skyward-gazing plover led the trio in order and price at \$372,000. It was followed by the turned-head model at \$324,000, and the third to cross the block was the feeder at \$288,000.

The Harwich master's bird carvings were highly sought after throughout the sale, with a decorative woodcock elevating to \$92,250, more than doubling its low estimate and establishing a new auction record for carvings of the species. The Sherer Snipe created competitive bidding, rising above its high estimate of \$24,000 to reach \$37,200. The top Crowell gunning waterfowl decoy of the sale was a swimming red-breasted merganser drake, which proved to be an astute pick-up at \$24,000.

“Nantucket decoys have been on the rise since co-author Chelsie Olney announced the call for information and material on a forthcoming book due out in 2023,” relays McNair. Indeed, Nantucket shorebird decoys from the Johnson Collection were in high demand, with all but the Webster raised-wing golden plover going above their high estimates. The Webster sold within estimate at \$84,000, the second strongest price ever for this important island maker.

Other Massachusetts shorebirds of note performed well, including a dovetailed dowitcher, which hit \$46,125 nearly triple its \$16,000 high estimate, and an exceptional pair of greater yellowlegs, which shot to \$39,975 above its \$28,000 high. Among top performers from Long Island were two rare willet decoys, with the John Dilley example selling within estimate for \$ 27,600 and the rare Obediah Verity example selling just under the low for \$40,200.

Regional favorites performed well with a ‘Shang’ Wheeler wood duck pair from Connecticut jumping well above its \$30,000 high estimate to reach \$58,425. A John Blair black duck pair from Philadelphia hit \$18,000, just shy of its \$20,000 low estimate. Wisconsin master Joseph Sieger’s high-head canvasback reached \$24,600 on its \$20/30,000. The Eastern Shore of Maryland’s Ward Brothers 1936 canvasback pair, with some gunning wear, sold just below its low estimate, making \$18,000. From the Eastern Shore of Virginia, a rare John Henry Downs black duck tallied a world record for the maker at \$22,800; it was also the top unestimated lot of the sale. Also from Virginia’s Eastern Shore a brant with strong provenance by Charles Birch more than doubled its low estimate of \$6,000 to reach \$13,800; though the top Birch of the sale was a rare curlew at \$13,800 on an estimate of \$6/9,000. A flying black duck by Chauncey Wheeler of Upstate New York soared above its \$10/15,000 estimate to \$22,800. A fellow Upstate maker, Harvey Stevens, made a 19th-century mallard that sold for \$13,530, above its \$7,5/9,500 estimate. From Maine, the Rockefeller eider pair by Capt. Pinkham of Seguin Island settled down at \$12,000, comfortably north of the \$6/9,000 estimate.

Bidders also enthusiastically vied for carvings originating from the Midwest. The Kankakee Pintail Drake shot to \$186,000, surpassing its high estimate of \$150,000 and setting a new world record for the maker. The "Masterworks" Elliston Preening Mallard realized \$100,200 and the McCleery Slope-Breast Mallard Hen achieved \$96,000, more than three times what it last sold for in 2000 at the McCleery sale. The "Masterworks" Perdew Wood Duck Pair also saw a

swarm of action, racing past its high estimate to land at \$49,200. The McCleery G.K. Schmidt Rig Mallard Pair reached \$48,000, squarely within estimate. The Parmalee and Loomis Straight-Head Graves Mallard Pair surged to \$22,800.

The miniature carvings saw very competitive bidding for all makers. The sublime group of A.J. King miniatures from a Bourbon County, Kentucky, estate blew past their collective \$33/54,000 pre-auction estimate, and were bid to over \$92,000. The collection was led by a wild turkey pair with poults launching to \$14,400 on a \$4/6,000 estimate. A woodcock pair shot to \$13,530, a ruffed grouse pair leapt to \$15,600, and a quail pair reached \$16,800, all on \$3/4,000 estimates. A mallard pair achieved \$13,530 and a pair of wood ducks buzzed to just shy of \$16,000, both on \$1/2,000 estimates. However, it was the miniature doves that soared above all other Kings, rocketing to \$22,140, more than seven times the lot's high estimate.

Miniatures by Elmer Crowell were in high demand with the scarlet tanager, alighting at \$8,400, ten times its estimate. A Baltimore oriole achieved \$5,700 and a bluebird and a cedar waxwing each landed just shy of \$4,000, with all three far above their \$6/900 estimates. The maker's miniature shorebirds also drew active bidding. A dunlin hopped well over its \$1/1,500 estimate on its way to \$5,230, while a dowitcher bested its beach brethren to reach \$5,540 on the same estimate.

Miniatures by Enoch Reindahl were also in high demand with a quarter-size flying Canada goose reaching \$2,520, a canvasback pair launching to \$6,000, and a flying mallard drake topping both as it blasted to \$8,610.

Once again, unestimated lots proved to be tremendously popular; in total 211 lots sold for over \$350,000, averaging \$1,680, a new highwater mark for the company. According to O'Brien, "The last several years, unestimated lots have proved popular for both buyers and sellers. In this latest sale over 40% of the lots carried no estimate with fourteen selling for over \$5,000."

Contemporary carvers' best works were on display and the market spoke, with a preening wigeon by Mark S. McNair bringing \$9,200, more than three times the high estimate. The maker's kildeer shot to \$5,540 and a turnstone reached \$4,600. A pair of wood ducks by William Gibian achieved a record \$10,500 and a decorative stilt sandpiper by Arnold T. Melbye landed

at \$8,600. World records for Colin S. McNair entertained the live-streamed auctioneer as they were set for three lots in a row, finishing with a circa 2004 merganser at \$6,150.

The Perdew Crow Call shot to \$30,000, believed to be a record for a call by the maker. The Chautauqua Fish Decoy with Jigging Stick captivated fish decoy collectors and landed at \$9,230. The Gun-Stock Checkered Fish Decoy brought \$18,450, setting a new world record for the maker. Two trout by Oscar W. Peterson leapt to \$6,800. An Atlantic Salmon Model from Hardy Brothers of Northumberland, England, surpassed the high estimate of \$3,000 to splash down at \$10,500.

Paintings were led by *Bob White Quail*, an oil painting by Titian Ramsey Peale that landed at \$90,000, far exceeding its \$20/30,000 estimate. British painter David Shepherd's oil of African elephants, titled *The Quiet Peace of an African Evening*, brought \$57,000, within its \$45/65,000 estimate.

Ogden M. Pleissner's salmon fishing watercolor, *Waiting for the Rise*, brought \$54,000 on a \$50/80,000 estimate. Another work by Pleissner, *June Trout Fishing*, landed at \$36,000. Watercolors of birds by Aiden Lassell Ripley performed well, with *Two Woodcock* selling for \$45,000, above its \$20/30,000 estimate, and *Grouse and Thorn Apple* bringing \$21,600. *Moonrise, Gulf, Little Blue Herons*, an oil by Lynn Bogue Hunt, cruised past its \$9,000 estimate to hammer at \$24,000.

Copley broke several of its own artist world records. A record for David A. Hagerbaumer was set on day one at \$10,200 for a watercolor of bobwhite quail, only to be topped by grouse on day two, settling the record at \$13,530. William Goadby Lawrence's oil, *Leaping Marlin*, which sold over the high estimate for \$10,200, also set an artist record.

A deer painting by renowned wildlife artist Ken Carlson, titled *A Feint Sound*, reached \$36,000, within its \$30/50,000 estimate. An oil painting also depicting deer by John Ford Clymer, titled *Early Morning-White Tails and Tamarack*, brought \$30,000, proving a good buy on its \$30/50,000 estimate. Luke Frazier's *Peek A'Boo*, depicting a family of squirrels, leapt to \$8,400, above its \$4/6,000 estimate. Chet Reneson's acrylic, *Bonefishing*, sold for \$10,200, over its \$5/7,000 estimate.

Richard E. Bishop's *Spread Formation*, an oil painting of six pintails featured in Bishops' iconic book, *The Ways of Waterfowl*, sold for \$14,760, besting its \$5/8,000 estimate. *Ruffed Grouse in a Pine* by noted ornithological artist Louis Agassiz Fuertes sold for \$21,600, more than doubling the low estimate of \$10,000.

The Gunner, an etching by Frank W. Benson, brought \$9,000. Carl Rungius' etching of a grizzly bear, *Silvertip*, brought \$4,920. Other sporting prints by Marguerite Kirmse, Ding Darling, Roland Clark, Richard Bishop, and Percival Rosseau brought strong results.

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."

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 2021 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 2022 next February. 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 high-resolution images, please contact Chelsie Olney at 617.536.0030 or chelsie@copleyart.com.

Top Ten Lots:

Crowell Trio

The Waring Turned-Head "Dust-Jacket" Plover (top), Estimate: \$300/500,000, Sold for \$324,000.

The Waring Skyward-Gazing "Dust-Jacket" Plover (middle), Estimate: \$300/500,000, Sold for \$372,000.

The Waring Feeding "Dust-Jacket" Plover (bottom), Estimate: \$300/500,000, Sold for \$288,000.

All three by A. Elmer Crowell (1862-1952), East Harwich, MA, c. 1910

Kankakee

The Trinosky Family Kankakee Pintail Drake, Herman R. Trinosky rig (1874-1956), Kankakee Marsh, IN, c. 1895, Estimate: \$100/150,000, Sold for \$186,000.

Bibber

The Bibber Long-Tailed Drake, Orlando "Os" Bibber (1882-1970), South Harpswell, ME, c. 1910, Estimate: \$150/250,000, Sold for \$150,000.

Elliston

The "Masterworks" Elliston Preening Mallard, Robert (1847-1925) and Catherine (1858-1953) Elliston, Bureau, IL, c. 1890, Estimate: \$100/150,000, Sold for \$100,200.

Mason

The McCleery Slope-Breast Mallard Hen, Detroit, MI, c. 1895, Estimate: \$20/30,000, Sold for \$96,000.

Nichols

Nichols Feeding Yellowlegs, Fred M. Nichols (1854-1924), Lynn, MA, c. 1890, Estimate: \$80/120,000, Sold for \$96,000.

Crowell Woodcock

Woodcock, A. Elmer Crowell (1862-1952), East Harwich, MA, c. 1910, Estimate: \$40/60,000, Sold for \$92,250.

Peale

Titian Ramsay Peale (1799-1885), *Bob White Quail*, oil on canvas, 19 ½ by 17 ¼ in., Estimate: \$20/30,000, Sold for \$90,000