

Chapter 5. Christie's Australia

The commercialization and global expansion of Christie's and Sotheby's post-World War II laid the foundation for many methods and practices adopted in art auctions in Australia, particularly after the arrival of Christie's in 1969.

The key figure in establishing an Australian branch of Christie's was the Australian-born William Spowers, who essentially co-founded it with Len Voss Smith in April 1969. Spowers had been educated at Geelong Grammar in Victoria and joined the Army in 1942, transferring to the British Army the following year. While serving in the army overseas, he subsidized his pay by buying books and manuscripts and selling them in London. This is how he first encountered Christie's, which he joined after leaving the Grenadier Guards in 1960. In 1970, he was Director of the Department of Books and Manuscripts at Christie's in London, as well as a Director of Christie's Australian branch. Herbert described Spowers as 'Immaculately dressed in his black suit, stiff collar and exciting striped shirts and with a diamond-mounted pin keeping his tie in place, he did not appear suited to the world of antiquarian books. Although somewhat small of stature he looked far more of a dashing blade'.¹ Spowers was an extraordinarily colourful figure — while cataloguing the Northwick Park library, Spowers had brought his mono-ski with him tied to the top of his Rolls Royce and proceeded to water-ski on the lake at Northwick Park.

Spowers had close family ties with Australia and his relationship with his godfather the then Governor-General, Lord Casey, was instrumental in the appointment of Christie's initial Australian representatives; Sue Hewitt and Joan McClelland, were approached on the recommendation of Casey's wife after Spowers consulted her.

Spowers believed that a Sydney branch of Christie's could provide a service to Australian collectors by securing Australiana (Australian art, books and manuscripts) in Europe and auctioning them directly in an Australian saleroom. Half the books and manuscripts in Christie's March 1970 auction, for example, were obtained from Britain. Christie's aimed to provide the means for these Australian items to return to Australia at minimal cost to the buyer, bypassing the involvement of art dealers, who had built up a lucrative business in sourcing items at auctions in England for sale in Australia at often double their auction price.² This was an innovation for the Australian art auction market and placed Christie's in competition with some dealers and the existing regime, despite the fact that many dealers had reportedly initially welcomed the firm's arrival.

Len Voss Smith, Spowers's co-founder of Christie's in Australia, was a Melbourne businessman, dealer, publisher and collector of Australian and European art. According to Ingram, 'Monocled, blazered and with a moderately intimidating

air, Len Voss Smith was very much the image of a Christie's gentleman, except that this very thin man tended to hold his trousers up with string even in the office'.³ Christie's London Directors — Spowers, Jo Floyd (Chairman) and Guy Hannen (Deputy Chairman) — approached Voss Smith to gauge his interest as soon as they decided to open an Australian saleroom. Joan McClelland was chosen as Christie's first Melbourne representative and Sue Hewitt as the Sydney representative.

McClelland had taken over the running of the Joshua McClelland Print Room in 1956, following the death of her husband. She left Christie's at the end of 1972 to concentrate on running the Print Room, partly owing to the increasing difficulty in separating sourcing stock for the Print Room and for Christie's.⁴ McClelland's and Hewitt's work involved garnering paintings for auction and liaising with Voss Smith, who was the overall Australian representative and who established the main office in Sydney.

Voss Smith also had strong ties with England where he had gone to live in the early 1960s, returning to Australia in 1969, when he established Christie's. Voss Smith had been the Australian representative for Hutchinson publishers and in this capacity was instrumental in convincing his London office to publish Alan McCulloch's mammoth *Encyclopedia of Australian Art* in 1968. (He was also involved in commissioning one of the most famous Australian paintings, Russell Drysdale's *The Cricketers*, which was commissioned in 1948 for Sir Walter Hutchinson. Sir Walter was reportedly dissatisfied with the work.)

Voss Smith only managed Christie's until about 1970, when he returned to live in London, operating as Christie's consultant on Australian art until about 1979; he then returned once more to live in Sydney. John Henshaw then became the Australian representative of Christie's, running the picture department both in Melbourne and Sydney. Prior to this, Henshaw was the editor of art books at Lansdowne Press, art critic for *The Australian* and an art teacher at East Sydney Technical College.

As an aside, some of the Voss Smith collection was sold by Sotheby's and not by Christie's as one might have expected, in November 1988. The \$5.7 million estate sale included, as its star attraction, Arthur Boyd's *The Little Train* (1950) which sold for \$250,000, its upper estimate. *The Little Train* is named as the greatest of Boyd's work during the period and has been hung in numerous exhibitions including in The Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1962, the Boyd Retrospective at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 1964 and at an exhibition of Australian paintings and tapestries at New South Wales House in The Strand in London in 1972. It was also later sold at Sotheby's in Melbourne in 1998 for \$200,500 (estimate \$180,000–\$220,000) and was passed-in at Deutscher-Menzies in Sydney in 2004 (estimate \$340,000–\$380,000). Approximately 100 other works from the Voss Smith Collection were later sold by Sotheby's in August 1997.

Although the items offered in 1988 were predominantly European, Sotheby's decided to auction them in Australia, hopeful that their celebrated provenance would convince Australian collectors to purchase international art, as Voss Smith himself had attempted to cultivate a taste in Australia for such works at an earlier date.⁵

Sue Hewitt was approached by Christie's Directors Jo Floyd and Guy Hannen who were visiting Australia in early 1969 while she was working at Government House, Canberra. She agreed to join Christie's when she finished her job in September 1969, prior to the inaugural auction. Her initial role was as Office Manager of the Sydney operation, assisting first Voss Smith and then Henshaw. She held various high positions at Christie's over the years, appointed as the Manager of Christie, Manson & Woods (Australia) Ltd in 1975 and a Director in 1977. She left Christie's in 1991 and is currently a Sydney-based art consultant.

Sue Hewitt was Christie's first female auctioneer worldwide. She was thrust into taking her first sale unexpectedly at a specialist print auction at the Hilton Hotel in Sydney probably in September 1976.⁶ Up until that time, Hewitt had clerked at the sales, maintaining the auctioneer's books and noting the reserves and bids. On this occasion, Spowers had conducted a book auction in the afternoon and, on their return for the evening session at 8pm, informed Hewitt that she would be taking the sale. Evelyn Barlow, Montague's sister, had conducted auctions for Sotheby's in the 1920s and was probably the first female auctioneer ever at a major auction house. Hewitt noted in an interview in 1987 that Clara Hewitt (no relation) was the first woman licensed as an auctioneer in Melbourne in 1899.⁷

Christie's Autonomy

In the early 1970s, Christie's obtained a new rostrum, a replica of that made for James Christie by Chippendale, the English carver and cabinet-maker, for use in its Australian sales. The replica reinforced not only the pedigree of Christie's, but also the fact that it was part of a multinational company with an English provenance. Christie's Australian office retained a reasonable amount of autonomy in terms of its day-to-day affairs, although the London office was naturally very interested in its progress, demanding regular reporting on accounting and sales figures, which had to be transmitted manually by telex. It took some time before the new Christie's was able to report a profit though, as with most businesses, this was expected and allowed for in the set-up costs.⁸

The expense of running Christie's Australian operation was fairly high because it was standard practice to fly one of the London directors to conduct the sales in Australia. The absence of an Australian auctioneer in the early years was very much in keeping with a centre and periphery attitude. For the first sale in September 1969 Jo Floyd was the auctioneer. Spowers was the auctioneer at the

second sale in March 1970 and in September 1970 Floyd returned. It would have been much more practical and cost efficient to train local auctioneers, as is the case today, although many of the top auctioneers – including Roger McIlroy – have still undergone London training and grooming. Nonetheless, Christie's London auctioneers were reportedly exceptionally good and brought what has been dubbed the 'London style' or the 'international style' to Australia.⁹

Prior to Christie's presence in Australia, Australian auctioneers had employed a more 'rappy' style, similar to that used at furniture sales in suburban auctions.¹⁰ The London style of auctioneering, which has been described as 'slightly stiff and sparing', had actually evolved into the international style after it was taken to New York by Sotheby's when it took over Parke Bernet in 1964.¹¹ Some have credited Robert Bleakley with introducing the London style to the Antipodes when he established Sotheby's in Australia in 1982, bringing the 'rather urbane manner which has effectively conquered the world...a very important cultural shift'.¹²

Expense and difficulty also took a less expected form. Once again, catalogues feature. By the time that Charles Nodrum was running the Melbourne branch (end of 1975 to 1978), the catalogues were collated in Sydney, but still had to be printed in London.¹³ This practice was the main reason that Christie's lead-time for sales was so long, as the local firm was required to have its works ready two months in advance of an auction to allow for printing in London and delivery to Australia. All Christie's printing was done by the London firm of White Bros, also owned by Christie's, who saw the advantages of vertical integration. Catalogue production was problematic if the Australians could not oversee their own printing. This desire to control Christie's Australian operations from head office resulted not only in lack of autonomy, but also in the inability of Christie's to realise its full potential in Australia, something which Sotheby's was arguably able to achieve. Catalogues these days are often distributed shortly before the auction; changes to printing processes and printing locally have enabled auctions to be organized very quickly, giving the auction houses more flexibility and greater precision in setting reserves and estimates.

Christie's Australian office sent a large volume of goods to London for sale. Although it was 'accredited' with these works, it did not receive money for them.¹⁴ This policy was in keeping with the Australian office's role as a peripheral supplier of lucrative sleepers for the central London salerooms. (A 'sleeper' is a work which is usually a serendipitous discovery and attains a much higher price than expected, as it may be a hitherto unidentified work by a master artist.) The frequency with which sleepers have made it into the saleroom have decreased over time, concurrent with advances in scholarship and access to expert advice, most notably though multinational networks such as that utilized

by Christie's. Most of the sleepers sent were European and would realise their full sales potential in London, where they could be assured of ready buyers.

One of the most important items sent to London by the Australian office was Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Hermine Gallia* (1904), sold by Christie's in London in 1972 for around AUS\$50,000. The portrait was commissioned by Moriz Gallia, Hermine's husband, and had hung in their stylish apartment in Vienna. The Gallias had five rooms in their apartment designed by Josef Hoffmann, the Viennese Secession furniture designer, in 1913 including all the furniture, wallpaper and even beaded evening bags. In 1936, after the death of Hermine (Moriz had died earlier), the contents were divided in half; one half was distributed to the son, Ernst, and the other half was shared by the daughters, Margarete and Kathe. The children fled Vienna for Sydney just prior to World War II. The goods were shipped to Australia separately and it was only the sisters' belongings that arrived, as the brother's shipment was lost. Soon after arriving in Sydney, the sisters sold at auction some items which did not fit into their new abode, including chandeliers and furniture. Christie's Australian office was later instructed to sell the portrait, which was shipped to London in 1971 for sale. It was later purchased by the National Gallery, London in 1976 and is currently on display at the Tate Modern, London. There was no market for the Hoffmann furniture and decorative arts in Australia in the early 1970s. With Margarete and Kathe no longer alive, most of the remaining collection was acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1976. The Gallery held an exhibition in 1984, for which it borrowed the Gallia portrait from the National Gallery in London (Figure 9).

In 1981 another important work was discovered by Christie's in Australia and sent to London for sale. It was a small picture by the sixteenth century German painter, Adam Elsheimer. The vendor had purchased it from Spencer, an antique dealer in Edgecliff, Sydney, who purchased most of his stock from London. Sue Hewitt sent a photograph of the work to London for appraisal. The London office telexed immediately that it thought it was a long-lost Old Master by Elsheimer. Hewitt confirmed that the work was by Elsheimer by ascertaining that it was executed on silvered copper, a medium preferred by the artist.¹⁵ The picture found in Australia belonged to an altarpiece commissioned by the Grand Duke Cosimo II de' Medici. The altarpiece, originally consisting of seven small pictures depicting the Finding and Exaltation of the True Cross, had been dismantled over time and the panels sold separately. Here was the second piece of the tabernacle located on the bottom left, identified as *St Helena Questions the Jew* (Figure 10).



Figure 9: Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Hermine Gallia*, 1904, oil on canvas, 170.5 x 96.5 cm, © The National Gallery, London (on loan to the Tate Modern, London).



Figure 10: Adam Elsheimer, *St Helena Questions the Jew*, c.1603–05, Stadelsches Kunstinstitut (Stadel Museum), Frankfurt. Image courtesy of Stadel Museum - ARTOTHEK.

The London sale of the Australian Elsheimer picture raised the issue of an auction house's role, as well as emphasizing the importance of an international network for sourcing and identifying valuable stock. The *Stadelsches Kunstinstitut* in Frankfurt had all but reassembled the altarpiece, having managed to acquire the other six pictures, and was obviously intent on purchasing the final picture. However, as it is the responsibility of the auction house to protect the interests of the vendor, Christie's was not at liberty to place a low reserve. At the same time, there was a distinct possibility that the *Stadelsches Kunstinstitut* could rig the sale, making their desire to acquire the picture known and advising Old Master dealers to refrain from bidding. The Australian panel did sell to the *Stadelsches Kunstinstitut* for £110,000. These examples not only illustrate Christie's access to buyers and markets all over the world, but also the lack of a market in Australia for European items, in contrast to the preference for European works among colonial collectors.

Christie's made an attempt to stimulate interest in European works. Its first move was Voss Smith's promotion of French Impressionism in the firm's early sales. Secondly, it was hoped that the establishment of the West German branch of Christie's in the early 1970s would generate fresh interest in nineteenth-century German Romantic artists, such as Eugène von Guérard who had worked in Australia from 1852 to 1882. This West German office afforded an opportunity for branches of Christie's around the world, including Australia, to source and send such works to Germany for sale.

Prices for von Guérard in the decade from 1960 to 1970 show a market reassessment of the artist was taking place, in conjunction with an impending monograph on the artist and a reappraisal of the German Romantic School. In December 1960, Leonard Joel had sold von Guérard's *Cabbage Tree Hill* for 25 guineas and Christie's sold (much larger) works by von Guérard in March 1970 for between \$4000 and \$8500.¹⁶ However, on the whole works by modern artists commanded higher prices at auction with Drysdale and Dobell two of the most popular artists in the saleroom in the early 1970s. The highest price in this period was \$30,000 for Drysdale's *Emus in a Landscape* (1950), bought by the National Gallery of Australia in September 1970. It was noted later, in 1989, that 'through their offices all over the world, Christie's and Sotheby's are bringing batches of Australian art from overseas owners who are steadily becoming aware of the almost avaricious appetite for good Australian art of the colonial, impressionist and modern period'.¹⁷ In the 1980s, a lot of Australian art was repatriated owing to this 'avaricious appetite'.

Christie's early Australian sales highlight the fact that the Australian art auction market was in a state of flux, adjusting to new demands and competitors. Their sales introduced a more sophisticated approach to auctioneering and intensified the competition between local auction houses, dealers and the international firm,

thus irrevocably altering the shape and dynamics of the Australian art auction market. Nonetheless, it is clear that in some respects Christie's in its first incarnation in Australia never really became much more than a representative office.

Christie's Satellite and Telephone Link-up Sales

Prior to the first Australian sale in September 1969, Christie's had attempted to hold a satellite auction in June 1968. When this attempt failed, Spowers succeeded in conducting two sales by telephone on 2 July 1968 and 18 March 1969, with buyers in Melbourne and Sydney linked to the London saleroom. This meant that, strictly speaking, they were London and not Australian sales, although they did contain Australian works and involved Australian bidders.

Sotheby's had held a satellite auction simultaneously in London and New York in about 1965, using the Early Bird satellite system to avoid any delay; previous link-up sales had also been simultaneous, but had only been conducted via the telephone. The reported success of these Sotheby's telephone and satellite sales may have been the inspiration behind Christie's preliminary sales in Australia in the late 1960s.¹⁸ Spowers visited Australia in February 1968 to ascertain whether it was practicable to hold Australiana auctions in Australia rather than in London. However, he decided that it would be easier to conduct the auction via satellite, as Sotheby's did. He then endeavoured to arrange this satellite auction in Australia for June 1968. The sale would have been an opportunity for Australian collectors to purchase valuable works of Australian origin without having to pay the commissions of American and British art dealers.

Despite the fact that Christie's had offered to pay the rental expenses of the satellite (estimated at \$5000), the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) claimed that the auction of Australian paintings would not be of interest to the public and refused to televise it.¹⁹ This demonstrates the relatively low profile of art auctions in Australia in the late 1960s, prior to the establishment of Christie's and Sotheby's. It is a stark contrast to the situation today, where art auctions make headlines and are analyzed in saleroom sections of newspapers and specialist art, business and finance magazines.

Setbacks of a proposed satellite sale notwithstanding, Spowers succeeded in orchestrating a telephone link-up sale a month later. Renting a suite at the Wentworth Hotel, Sydney, with a glass of champagne in one hand and a telephone with an open line to Christie's in London in the other, he relayed Australian bids. An amplifier broadcast the auction throughout the suite. The London-Sydney telephone link-up was open only for the twenty-nine Australian paintings on sale, from approximately 8:30–9:10pm. Buyers in Australia could telephone their bids to the hotel and be transferred directly to Christie's in London. There were also 242 books and related material to be auctioned the

following day, but a telephone link-up was not viable for this sale because of the expected duration of over three hours.

Spowers also had logistical difficulties with this auction. The auction catalogues, valued at £500, were detained by Customs, which insisted that they were liable for duties because they were classed as advertising. Spowers was concerned that not enough people had heard of the auction, partly owing to the Customs hold-up of the catalogue distribution, and feared no-one would attend, commenting that 'The Australian market is very small beer to Christie's, after all, and if Australians want their own paintings and books they'll just have to show a bit more interest'.²⁰ An absence of serious bidders on the night would have resulted in him returning to London and Christie's dropping the idea of establishing a branch in Australia. However, results at the July auction were solid; Sidney Nolan's *Central Australian Landscape* (1950) sold for 2200 guineas, Sali Herman's *The Black House* (1940) sold for 320 guineas and the highest price for an Arthur Boyd work at this sale was 950 guineas for *Figure in a Landscape*. A second link-up sale was apparently held between Christie's London, Sydney and Melbourne.

Christie's telephone link-up sales were successful enough to encourage Christie's to establish offices in both Melbourne and Sydney, with Floyd saying in early 1969 in Sydney that 'Australia is going to become another America. This country, I think, is at that dramatic stage of development similar to the American boom days around 1880 and 1890'.²¹

The physical location of Christie's offices and salerooms had an impact on the firm's success and demonstrated its desire to appear more sophisticated than the local firms. It was Christie's policy that all its representative offices be located in a prestigious and central position. Christie's held two paintings auctions per annum initially, one in Sydney and the other in Melbourne. Its Melbourne offices were firstly located in Collins Street, with auctions held at *The Age Gallery* or in the ballrooms of major hotels. Despite Christie's policy of a city location for representative offices, there was some feeling that the Collins Street location had a negative impact on business; in purely practical terms, parking was extremely difficult.²² The Sydney offices were located in Double Bay, with early auctions held at the Bonython Gallery in Paddington and leading Sydney hotels. This emphasis on the location was important in establishing Christie's pedigree in Australia. The idea of capitalizing on the chic ambience of the major hotels was to be explored to the full by Robert Bleakley of Sotheby's in the 1980s.

Christie's First Auction in Australia

Christie's first 'real' auction in Australia was held at the Bonython Gallery in Paddington, Sydney on 24 September 1969. Voss Smith had begun gathering paintings on his return to Sydney in April, desirous of obtaining a variety of works with a strong historical strain, including Heidelberg and contemporary

works, with modern artists such as Boyd, Nolan, Dobell and Drysdale. Christie's initially sourced stock with facility, as the publicity from each sale resulted in a flurry of inquiries about possible consignments, with Christie's representative, Henshaw, describing it as 'a self-perpetuating phenomenon'.²³ There was also no need to go to tender for major collections, as it was the vendor who approached the auction houses for comparable propositions, attracted by the 'certain glamour' of Christie's, and not the responsibility of the auction houses to approach the vendors and attempt to sway them with competitive offers and counter-offers, as tends to be the case today.²⁴

Two advances most visible at this first auction were the introduction of a seating system and glamour. At major London auctions it was essential to book seats and tickets were issued (as one would expect in the theatre). Only the Big Buyers gained admittance to the inner sanctum of the main saleroom – the system was highly formal and organized, whereas seating at auctions in Australia had traditionally been of an informal nature. Christie's Australian office based the seating system at its inaugural auction on the London one — to instil some order in the process — taking bookings for seats, but not issuing tickets. However, at the first sale people were not *au fait* with seating systems and sat wherever they chose, resulting in pandemonium. Hewitt recalled that it was still a very glamorous social event, with dealers bringing their most important clients clad in fur coats, thus making it an unusually up-market auction.²⁵

The Como Sale

On 11–12 March 1971, Christie's held an auction of Australian paintings at Como, a National Trust property in South Yarra, Melbourne. This was advertised as the 'most valuable auction held in Australia'; a familiar catch-cry, but also showing the constant up-swing of the market.²⁶ Most of the 248 lots on offer were, in fact, imported from London, Switzerland, Rome, Paris and New York, as overseas collectors were beginning to see the benefits of repatriating Australian works. However, a number of the paintings were from the Margaret Carnegie collection (Property of Mr and Mrs Douglas Carnegie, Holbrook), including Drysdale's *Old Larsen*, which obtained the top price at the Como auction when it sold for \$26,000 (estimate \$25,000–\$30,000). Nonetheless, most of the works sold for \$1000 or under.

This sale was a rather inauspicious beginning to Christie's involvement in the Australian art auction market because of a number of mishaps: the art students who had been engaged to assist with the sale decided to demonstrate (having earlier attached a note to the back of an Albert Namatjira painting demanding that the artist be paid a few pounds); the gates to the property were locked prior to the sale; and one of the major buyers rushed off in the middle of the sale, never to be traced.²⁷ Nevertheless, the sale was considered a glamorous and

popular occasion. The auction opened on the Thursday night with a formal affair; 750 guests, most of whom were not bidders, attended the \$3 per person event for love of the spectacle. Spowers commented that 'Melbourne people seem to look upon auctions as more of a social occasion than in Europe or England'.²⁸ His view is consistent with comments by Brodsky mentioned earlier, that auctions were considered to be a great form of entertainment as early as the nineteenth century. Spowers' remark also reflects the fact that European and English bidders were predominantly art dealers, attending auctions in their official capacity, and not private collectors.

The 1971 Dobell Sale

On 5–6 October 1971, Christie's auctioned works from the studio of the late Sir William Dobell in the Grand Ballroom at the Wentworth Hotel in Phillip Street, Sydney. Christie's had been awarded the sale after fierce competition from Geoff K. Gray, Lawson's and Sotheby's. Charles Lloyd Jones, one of the Sir William Dobell Art Foundation's trustees and the subject of a riveting portrait by Dobell now hanging in the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra, had encouraged other auction houses to express an interest in conducting the sale, as he believed that auctioning the works would be 'most suitable' and that the trustees envisaged 'a most spectacular auction'.²⁹ Moreover, it was the responsibility of the trustees to ensure that the paintings achieved the best results possible and this was most likely to be achieved from committing them to auction rather than private treaty sale, reflecting both the positive auction climate and the high prices achieved for Dobell paintings in the early 1970s.

The Dobell Foundation had attempted to 'avoid swamping the market by selling off only a small group at once'.³⁰ Therefore, only six drawings and nine paintings were consigned, mainly studies for renowned works such as *Sketches of Dame Mary Gilmore* (\$1300) and *Sketch for the Street Singer* (\$450). The most important piece was Dobell's late work, *The Night of the Pigs* (1970), which sold to the Art Gallery of New South Wales after the sale for \$10,000 (estimate \$10,000–\$15,000).

The Major Harold De Vahl Rubin Sales

The colourful Queensland collector Major Harold De Vahl Rubin has already made an appearance in these pages, not least as purchaser of a number of works at the Schureck auction in 1962. Rubin's patronage of Australian art was invaluable and his 'old robber baron tactics' buoyed the local market, contributing substantially to the art boom in the early 1960s.³¹ He 'elevated Australian art-collecting to serious status and splashed it all over the front pages of the popular press along with his five wives, his fabulous philanthropies and his appetite for live goldfish'.³² At the time of his death, Rubin had 25 works by Dobell in his collection, reputedly the finest collection of Dobells. These works were sold over two consecutive years so as not to flood the market and

fetched approximately \$86,000 at auction. On 4 October 1972, Christie's auctioned the first half of the Rubin Collection at the Wentworth Hotel in Sydney, with a huge 96 per cent of the paintings selling, including the Dobell portrait of Schureck.

Christie's October 1973 sale also featured another thirty Dobell works, mostly from the Rubin estate, though Dobell's *The Dead Landlord* (1936), consigned by Gerald Leroy-Terquem of Paris, was the star attraction. (Leroy-Terquem is presumably the psychiatrist, photographer and art collector who co-founded Galerie Gérard Leroy-Terquem, Paris in 2003.) *The Dead Landlord* was considered to be 'the most important modern Australian painting to be offered at auction' and was the inspiration for Patrick White's play, *The Ham Funeral*.³³ The painting was originally purchased for less than 25 guineas, but sold at the 1973 auction for the staggering amount of \$60,000, against an estimate of \$30,000–\$40,000. It was also considered to be more important than any of the Dobells on offer at Sotheby's Dobell sale at the Opera House in November 1973. Prices for Dobells had virtually stagnated soon after the Schureck sale in 1962, as it was noted in 1973 that Dobells were selling for similar prices to those attained at that pivotal auction.³⁴ However, collectors were keen to acquire Dobells once more after the death of the artist in 1970.

Art auctions had already gained the appellation of a 'spectator sport' by the early 1970s.³⁵ The popularity of art auctions was demonstrated by the fact that at the 1972 Rubin sale only people who had purchased a catalogue for \$4.50 were given admittance. Fewer than 200 out of the 1000-strong audience actually intended to place bids.

The mainstream appeal and success of the Rubin and other auctions at Christie's in 1972 revived the notion that the Australian art market was over-inflated, a notion mainly promulgated by Robert Hughes, who thought that the Australian art market was unique in its ridiculously high prices at auction.³⁶ Hughes joked in 1974 that he believed Peter Wilson, Sotheby's International Chairman, had strategized to equate art with gold as a solid vehicle for investment in the public imagination.³⁷

The uniqueness of Australia's high prices is something which Henshaw denied, believing this to be the case worldwide, where local artists who were well-known and depicted familiar scenes, for example, would naturally achieve higher prices in their home country than in an overseas market where they were anonymous.³⁸ Moreover, some local Australian art critics argued prices for some of the works, such as Drysdale's *Man in a Landscape (Young Man)* (1953) (sold for \$9000) and Dobell's *Study for the Cypriot (Aegeus Gabriell Ides)* (1934) (sold for \$14,000 to Sydney art dealer, Barry Stern) and *Donkey and Cabbage Cart* (1934) (sold for \$6000 to a buyer called Keswick), were actually below expectations.³⁹

Hughes disagreed, but laid the blame mainly on 'the sham which speculative art dealers in this country have perpetrated on local collectors'.⁴⁰ He said that dealers were responsible for 'the main transmission belt between art and the public in Sydney, and in Melbourne' and that even the Power Bequest and other internationalizing activities had not overcome Australia's parochialism.⁴¹

Christie's Retreat, Re-establishment and Restructure

By 1972–3, Christie's Australian painting sales were deemed to be successful, according to Herbert.⁴² However, Christie's began to decrease its involvement in the Australian art market from the mid-1970s, closing its paintings saleroom around 1978–9. Christie's cited a variety of reasons, including that Spowers had become jaded by the incessant travel involved in the venture by 1974 and that the Australian branch was not making enough money and was costing too much to maintain. Christie's also claimed that it had wound down its Australian operation because it believed that the 'market was drying up', as it suffered a downturn in 1974.⁴³

Christie's final regular sale of paintings appears to have been held in June 1978, after which it was demoted to the status of a representative office, collecting works to send to London for sale. Hewitt remained as Christie's representative in Australia, assisted by a part-time secretary. In 1984, Sue Hewitt was offered the collection of Dr John Raven, a Perth haematologist and art collector, which was valued at more than \$500,000.⁴⁴ At the core of the 145-lot Raven collection was Conrad Martens' paintings of Sydney Harbour which were rich in historical narrative. Raven had been a passionate collector of colonial Australian paintings for two decades and his collection was ranked as 'one of the finest private collections in the country'.⁴⁵ This sale in the ballroom of the Regent Hotel, George Street, Sydney, according to Hewitt, catapulted Christie's back into the Australian market.⁴⁶

In the interim, Sotheby's had entered the local market with its inaugural auction in 1983. While Christie's was decreasing its involvement with the Australian market in the late 1970s, Sotheby's was preparing its Australian presence. Christie's withdrawal worried Sotheby's London directors when Bleakley first approached them about setting up in Australia.⁴⁷

According to some, Sotheby's arrival on the scene in November 1982 propelled Christie's into action.⁴⁸ According to others, when Sotheby's arrived Christie's London management was not interested in fiercely competing with Sotheby's in Australia as it was conducting a programme of expansion in other parts of the world, where it was able to achieve better returns; for example, the Hong Kong branch could turn over £11 million in a single night.⁴⁹ However, Roger McIlroy felt that Christie's needed to 'combat' Sotheby's dominance of the market

and it seems likely that Sotheby's arrival did force Christie's directors to reassess the Australian office.⁵⁰

Christie's Australian operation was reorganized in 1989–90 when McIlroy came out from London as Managing Director. Kathie Sutherland, who made the transition from Sotheby's, replaced Hewitt about 1991 at Christie's when the firm was revamped. As head of Christie's paintings department, Sutherland was attributed with helping Christie's to return to a position where it could rival Sotheby's virtual monopoly of the top end of the paintings market.⁵¹

Christie's felt that Australia represented a 'promising market' in 1989, despite the fact that it provided less than 1 per cent of its sales throughout the world.⁵² Christie's became a fully-fledged subsidiary company, rather than a branch, in May 1990 when it purchased premises at 1 Darling Street South Yarra in Melbourne. In late 1988, McIlroy, Lord Carrington (Chairman of Christie's International) and Christopher Davidge (Christie's International Managing Director) had visited Australia with a view to purchasing property for an Australian operation. Melbourne was chosen because it was the centre of the Australian art market and where it was possible to charge a buyer's premium. These premises were purchased for \$1.9 million and a further \$400,000 was spent on renovations to create Christie's first Australian on-site saleroom. Christie's also expanded its Double Bay storage and office space in Sydney twofold.

It was at this time that Christie's changed from being Christie, Manson & Woods (Aust) Ltd to Christie's Australia Pty Ltd. This was a key change and reflected a shift in perception and priorities. Perhaps as proof of Christie's optimism, the new company was formed under the chairmanship of local Australian, James B. Leslie, A.O., M.C., from Qantas. As previously mentioned, McIlroy was appointed as Managing Director and Hewitt became Deputy Chairman. Christie's announced that it would 'now offer a comprehensive service to clients throughout Australia and New Zealand, similar to our most important locations in Europe and America'.⁵³ This renewed emphasis on its Australian operations was part of a general programme of expansion within the Pacific region.

McIlroy's success as Director and auctioneer at Christie's had a lasting impact on the Australian art auction world. Sydney-born McIlroy returned to Australia in October 1989 and began in his official capacity in March 1990. He had spent more than a decade working for Christie's in London and Scotland and was intending to expand Christie's business in Melbourne. McIlroy gained his entrée to the art auction industry c.1973 while in his teens, when Thelma Attwood, 'one of Australia's first female auctioneers', came to value his family home for probate.⁵⁴ Attwood gave him an introduction at Lawson's, as well as his prized rosewood gavel. McIlroy spent five years at Lawson's learning every facet of

the business from the bottom; he had been, ironically, aggrieved by Christie's 'intrusion' in 1969.⁵⁵

McIlroy went to London in 1977, where he worked at Phillips for six months, after which he was offered a job in Christie's ceramics department in 1978. He ran the ceramics department in King Street, London for around eight years before moving to Scotland, where he was given the temporary position of Managing Director for two years. It was during this period that McIlroy was asked to be the secondary auctioneer for the famous auction of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* in 1987. He then returned to King Street as the assistant to the group Managing Director.

By 1998, Christie's 'new businesslike' image led to McIlroy being invited to join the Presidents Club of fifteen of the country's leading executives.⁵⁶ This demonstrated a major change in the social status of auctioneers. McIlroy's approach has been described as 'a little bit more laid back' than his Sotheby's counterpart, Bleakley.⁵⁷ The forceful personalities of these two men have done much to shape the Australian art auction market as we know it today.

The Trout Sale

Christie's first major auction after its return to the Australian market was of Sir Leon and Lady Trout's collection, conducted by McIlroy and Hewitt in Brisbane on 6–7 June 1989. It fetched over \$7 million (estimate \$6–\$10 million) and was 'the third largest house sale ever conducted by Christie's' worldwide and succeeded in re-establishing Christie's position in the Australian art auction market.⁵⁸ The Trouts began to collect seriously in the 1940s and 1950s and most of their art was collected on annual jaunts to London and Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, often purchased from Christie's and Sotheby's. All 1082 lots sold, with John Peter Russell's *Belle Ile* 1900 selling for \$700,000. This work was later sold as part of The Farrow Collection by Leonard Joel in 1991 for \$242,000 (estimate \$450,000–\$550,000) and again at Sotheby's in 2000 for \$552,500 (estimate \$500,000–\$800,000).

The collection was offered by Christie's in conjunction with Philip Bacon, the respected Brisbane art dealer, who was also an adviser for the Trout estate. Bacon withheld 47 paintings from the auction, later holding his own exhibition, *Aspects of the Trout Collection*. This exhibition toured Australia, included 15 works by Charles Conder and 13 by John Peter Russell, and earned more than \$3 million. The European works from the Trout collection were also withheld from this sale and auctioned separately at Christie's in London in April 1989. This is a novel example of an auction house and art dealer sharing a collection and was evidently brought about as a result of Bacon's connections with Sir Leon and Lady Trout. It was also apparently a deliberate ploy to maintain high prices and therefore obtain the greatest profits for the Trout estate.⁵⁹

The Trout collection had been carefully constructed over a period of 30 years and the works, apart from having an enviable provenance, were fresh to the market. Little wonder it was heralded as 'the most important auction of traditional Australian' art since the sale of Baldwin Spencer's collection in 1919.⁶⁰ Another factor in the popularity of the Trout sale was that it was a Queensland sale and it was heavily supported by Queenslanders. Sir Leon and Lady Trout had been the largest patrons of art in Queensland in the 1970s and 1980s and enjoyed celebrity status within Brisbane. The sale attracted people who were not ordinarily collectors and resulted in a bidding frenzy, with someone even paying \$150 (estimate \$40–60) for 'A large quantity of Garden Hose'. Joseph Brown was commissioned to act as agent on behalf of the Queensland Art Gallery, with funds of \$2 million at his disposal, although a news report commented that the Queensland Art Gallery spent around \$1 million on works of merely average quality.⁶¹ The gallery had expected to be left the Trout collection in Lady Trout's will.

It was, in Hewitt's experience, the first time that Christie's had to go to tender, to compete with the other auction houses for the rights to auction the collection; this has since become common practice.⁶² This sale, although a coup for Christie's, was a blow for Sotheby's, which had been basking in the glory of consecutive record-breaking sales. Negotiations for the Trout sale were presumably intense; Christie's flew in 'a whole team' including an executive vice-president from its New York office to assist Hewitt with its winning submission. Executives from Christie's in New York and London supervised the auction, highlighting the importance placed on this sale and the need for the Australian arm to succeed, especially considering the heavy investments made by the London headquarters. A whole 'team of people' were also imported from the New York and London salerooms to assist with the sale, which is still remembered by some for the efficiency with which it was conducted.⁶³

Bleakley stated that, although Sotheby's advocated the adoption of an aggressive marketing stance, Christie's had actually 'cut...[their] own throats' and been forced to accept a 'ridiculous' commission in order to obtain the Trout collection.⁶⁴ Bleakley claimed, moreover, that Christie's was 'seeking to buy a market share no matter what the cost'.⁶⁵ McIlroy countered with the claim that Christie's won the sale because its proposal was a comprehensive sixty-four pages, as opposed to Sotheby's one-page proposal. He further claimed that Christie's 'asked for a commission similar to what we would charge in NSW for a single-owner collection'.⁶⁶

Christie's advertised the Trout collection in West Germany, France, Japan and America as well as in Australia, feeling that it was an appropriate vehicle to launch its revamped firm. The sale was also marketed on the international circuit because many of the artists represented in the collection, including John Peter

Russell, had associations with artists who were enjoying stellar performances at auction overseas, such as Vincent van Gogh and Claude Monet.

For the 1988/89 financial year, Christie's Australian sales had risen by 165 per cent to \$13.9 million, primarily as a result of the Trout sale. Prices for traditional paintings peaked at this sale and have not reached the same or similar levels since then.⁶⁷ Ingram stated that the Trout sale represented 'the last hurrah of an art boom based largely on impressionist and colonial paintings' and following the stock market crash.⁶⁸ This auction was the most successful single-vendor sale in Australian history. The paintings fetched 'exceptional' prices, as the recession did not really hit until after that sale, with McIlroy describing the Trout sale as an 'anomaly'.⁶⁹ The art boom in the 1980s coincided with an increasing interest in Australian history in general and Australia's Bicentennial in 1988 coincided with the peak of the boom.⁷⁰

The Dallhold Sale

Christie's auctioned the collection of Dallhold Investments, the private company owned by Alan Bond, on 28 July 1992 and Sotheby's held an auction of Bond items on 23 August 1992. The liquidator, John Lord, had sought submissions from Christie's, Sotheby's, Leonard Joel and Nevill Keating Fine Art (the London firm which acted as Bond's agent). However, Christie's convincing success with its April 1992 sale, as well as the reportedly very low commissions, clinched the deal for the firm.⁷¹ It was even suggested that Christie's would not charge the liquidator any commission and that, apart from the 10 per cent buyer's premium, Christie's only reward would be the national and international attention the auction would certainly engender.

Christie's advised Lord to create hype around the Dallhold sale and to market it at an international level.⁷² Although there was a general expectation that buyers would essentially be limited to Australian collectors, there was great interest from Japan, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom and moderate interest from the United States, possibly owing to Bond's international business connections. Within Australia, the Dallhold collection was toured to Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne prior to sale.

The collection sold for \$5.7 million, despite the fact that nine of the colonial paintings by William Lewin had been withdrawn owing to doubts about their authenticity. The sale total was the best one in Australia for three years. The dealers, Lady Angela Nevill (from Nevill Keating Fine Art), Dr John Buttsworth and Joseph Brown, were major buyers. The top price at the sale was \$715,000 paid by Buttsworth for von Guérard's *Sydney Heads* (1866) (estimate \$450,000-\$600,000). This had originally been purchased at a Sotheby's auction in 1985 for \$700,000, which could indicate that some colonial works had maintained their value into the early 1990s or that the provenance contributed

to the value being retained. The estimate suggests that Christie's felt that interest in colonial works had peaked.

The first major work Bond had bought, just prior to the art boom, was *View of Lake Illawarra* (1860) by Eugène von Guérard for \$100,000 (estimate \$50,000–\$150,000) from a Leonard Joel auction in 1980. This was the first work at an Australian auction to obtain a six-figure sum. When it was sold at the 1992 Dallhold sale it fetched \$352,000 (estimate \$250,000–\$300,000). Frederick McCubbin's iconic *Feeding Time* (1893) had been purchased by Bond — who, along with a number of others had favoured collecting colonial works around the time of the Bicentenary — in 1986 at a Sotheby's auction for \$693,000 (estimate \$380,000–\$450,000). It was sold at the 1992 Dallhold auction for \$462,000 (estimate \$350,000–\$450,000), demonstrating the general downturn in the market and the fact that the inflated prices in the 1980s for Australian colonial works could not be sustained.⁷³

Many potential buyers of Dallhold works were concerned, owing to Bond's bankruptcy for corporate fraud, about the possibility of becoming involved in leasing arrangements or lack of clear title. Nevertheless, Bond's notoriety also acted in favour of the sale and the Dallhold brass business plate actually sold for \$2600. It was owing to the celebrity of Bond that the Christie's and Sotheby's auctions were popular and collectors favoured auctions as the medium for buying rather than the comparative anonymity of the commercial gallery.

The Mertz Sale

The Harold E. Mertz Collection of Australian Art was auctioned by Christie's in Melbourne on 28 June 2000. The sale realized approximately \$16 million (estimate \$5–10 million), an auction record for a single-owner collection in Australia. The 153 lots took four hours to auction, a long time considering the relatively diminutive size of the offering. Numerous record prices were set, some of which — notably for Charles Blackman's oil painting *Patterns of an interior* (1964–65) (sold for \$299,500 against an estimate of \$100,000–\$150,000) and Albert Tucker's *The Last Days of Leichhardt* (1964) (sold for \$662,500 against an estimate of \$120,000–\$160,000) — still stand today.⁷⁴ John Perceval's *Scudding Swans* (1959) set a record for a living Australian artist when it sold for \$552,500 (estimate \$220,000–\$300,000), outperforming Sotheby's record of \$486,500 for Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula's *Water Dreaming at Kalipinyapa* (1972), set two nights previously.

Over the years, the Mertz collection had been mythologized, as it was known to be the superlative collection of Australian art held overseas with works from the collection frequently loaned to Australian galleries. It was thus not necessary to embellish its provenance. The auction catalogue was an art form in itself, a 172-page, full-colour publication, with most illustrations large or full-page and

including short, curatorial-style essays by Patricia McDonald and the Adelaide dealer who had originally assembled most of the collection, Kym Bonython. Showing the collection in Australia's major capital cities attracted more than 12,000 viewers to the works. The Mertz sale was covered extensively on television and by major newspapers and journals. This may have accounted for its popularity with private collectors on the night of the auction and resulted in it being a truly national auction of unprecedented success.

Bonython had gathered the works on behalf of the American millionaire, Harold E. Mertz, the proprietor of a publishing business, who had become enamoured of Australian paintings during a visit to Australia in 1964. The collection was put together from 1964 to 1966 and cost approximately \$500,000. Bonython acquired the works from various quarters, including other dealers, directly from artists, from his own collection and direct commissions. Mertz was, therefore, seen by living Australian artists, during that short period of time, as a great benefactor, with Brett Whiteley apparently coining the slogan, 'Mertz Means Marvellous'.⁷⁵

Mertz had hoped to build a representative collection comprising the best examples of Australian painting by living artists from a specific point in time. The only previous collection of Australian paintings shown in America was the one which was sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation in 1941. *Legends and Landscape in Australian art: a selection of paintings from the Harold E. Mertz collection* was exhibited at the Adelaide Festival in 1966 before it was sent to Washington, opening at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, from 10 March-16 April 1967. It was then exhibited at minor American museums in 11 locations in 1967, sponsored by the American Federation of Arts. Mertz eventually donated his collection to the Jack S. Blanton Museum at the University of Texas in 1972, where it was virtually warehoused until it was deaccessioned in order to finance the acquisition of Baroque works of art. The Mertz auction, a 'failed cultural ambassador', could also be said to exemplify another failed attempt by multinationals to create a market for Australian art overseas.⁷⁶

Mertz's bequest to the University of Texas, while primarily motivated by tax benefits, also stemmed from a genuine philanthropic desire to create a taste for contemporary Australian paintings in America. However, the University lacked the context in which to place the bequest and it was viewed as a 'white elephant'.⁷⁷ Mertz died in 1983 and his ex-wife, LuEsther, died in 1991, so it is unknown what their opinions may have been on the sale of the collection. Barbara Blackman, formerly married to the artist, Charles Blackman, who was represented in the Mertz collection, believed that the collection should have remained intact and not have been dispersed at auction. Blackman thought that it should be sold, as a body, to a public institution in Australia.⁷⁸

The greatest appeal of the Mertz collection was its freshness to the market. Having been cloistered for a period of three decades, it was a 'time capsule'.⁷⁹ It also purported to comprise the best examples of works by some of Australia's most talented artists, rather than works which had necessarily had the most public or commercial appeal. However, Ingram claims that not all the works were the artists' best examples and that it was the celebrity status of the collection which had ensured the astronomical prices, prices which would not have been achieved had the works sold through an avenue other than the saleroom.⁸⁰

The majority of buyers at the Mertz auction were private bidders, many through agents utilizing mobile telephones. Institutional bidders included the Queensland Art Gallery, which was outbid for Jon Molvig's *The Lovers* (1955) by the art dealer, Martin Browne, who paid \$134,500, more than four times its upper estimate (estimate \$20,000-\$30,000) and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, which purchased Brett Whiteley's *Woman in Bath IV* (1964) for \$332,500 (estimate \$350,000-\$550,000). Sydney dealer, Michael Nagy, was the biggest buyer at the Mertz sale, acquiring eight works, including Sidney Nolan's *Death of Constable Scanlon* (1954) for \$1,322,500 (estimate \$800,000-\$1.2 million).

Art historian Tim Bonyhady said that the auction 'was not just a triumph of art marketing. It also involved a striking instance of market failure'.⁸¹ This was in relation to the distinct lack of competition for John Brack's *Self-Portrait* (1955), 'Mertz's one great painting', with only Denis Savill and the National Gallery of Victoria (represented by an anonymous telephone bid) entering the bidding fray. The latter was the successful bidder, paying \$442,500 (estimate \$350,000-\$450,000). This lack of institutional competition was owing to an agreement between major public institutions not to bid against each other at auction. This agreement will be further explored in Chapter Seven.

Christie's obtained a commission of between 10 and 15 per cent on this sale from the buyer's premium and vendor's commission. The University of Texas made a financial contribution towards the sale costs. The collection had been hotly contested by the major Australian auction firms, Deutscher-Menzies, Christie's, Sotheby's, Goodmans, Lawson's and Phillips. The fierce rivalry in the tendering process would have meant that Christie's would have offered a highly competitive vendor's commission, lower than the norm of 5 to 10 per cent. Art dealers reportedly did not offer to purchase works directly from the University prior to auction, equipped with the knowledge that Christie's, with its marketing machine, could obtain the best possible prices at a public auction, rather than a private sale.⁸² However, it is rumoured that Australian dealers had approached the University of Texas in the hope of acquiring the Mertz works in previous years.

The Mertz sale was the last major auction before the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in July 2000. The GST of 10 per cent applies to the sale

of all new paintings and to the sale of works on the secondary market in some circumstances; it can also be applicable to commissions. The exceptional success of the sale prompted many collectors to consider offering their works for auction, in order to capitalize on the high prices and the new benchmarks, some of which were set for artists relatively new to the saleroom.⁸³ These new artists possibly included Kenneth Reinhard, whose *The Séance* (1964) sold for \$9775 and Charles Reddington, whose *Season in Hell* (1964) sold for \$10,925. Reinhard's slightly smaller mixed media pieces sold for less than \$1000 in the late 1990s and Reddington had made no auction sales in the few years prior to the Mertz sale. The sale's success also propelled Christie's to the top position in the Australian art auction market for 2000, as well as boosting the sales figures for the overall market.

In Recent Times

Christie's held a number of successful sales after the Mertz auction until it withdrew from the Australian market in April 2006. Single-owner sales included the Estate of Frederick D. Bladin in 2003 (\$1.6 million); the BHP Billiton Collection in 2003 (\$2.6 million); the Collection of John Schaeffer in 2004 (\$1.8 million); the Coles Myer Collection in 2004 (\$1.3 million); the Bleasel Collection in 2005 (\$1.8 million); the Dr Joseph Brown Collection in 2005 (\$3.2 million); and the hugely successful sale of the W.R. Burge Collection in 2006 (\$4.8 million). However, its Australian paintings sales had peaked in 2000 at \$31 million which represented 40 per cent of the total art auction sales for that year.

Christie's final Australian sale was on 10 April 2006 when Fred William's *Upwey Landscape* (1965) sold for \$1.8 million (estimate \$500,000–800,000), a record for a modern Australian painting. Christie's continues to have a representative office in Sydney and Melbourne, as in the past, but discontinued its saleroom as the Australian arm reportedly still provided only 1 per cent of the firm's revenue worldwide — placing the Australian market in perspective — in an environment of increasing competition for diminishing stock of saleable quality.⁸⁴ It intends to concentrate on the burgeoning and wealthy markets in the United Arab Emirates, India and China. The firm's twenty-odd staff were obliged to find other positions after this sale. Most notably, McIlroy joined Lady Angela Nevill to form Nevill Keating McIlroy, an arts consultancy to manage private art sales in Australia and Asia, further emphasizing the current direction of the global market.⁸⁵ The largest inference from Christie's withdrawal from the Australian market — international considerations notwithstanding — is that increased competition for less marketable stock took its toll and that the Australian market has arguably not been fully integrated into the international one. As Christie's arrival had a substantial impact on homegrown firms, so too did Deutscher-Menzies' arrival have a substantial impact on Christie's. Gathering stock became increasingly difficult owing to competition from other firms,

meaning that there was an oversupply of auction houses and, consequently, an undersupply of vendors and stock. This led to firms diversifying, branching out into carving new markets, such as contemporary art and Indigenous art, and to Christie's reverting to a representative office in 2006.

Christie's and Sotheby's 'duopoly' in the British art market in the late 1960s/early 1970s had already begun to spread its tentacles throughout the global environment. In 1967, these firms sold \$105 million worth of art, the majority of Britain's art sales. Furthermore, they had begun to appreciate the potential and importance of overseas locations, such as Australia, for sourcing stock.⁸⁶ This was partly as a result of the interest of London dealers in the Australian market and the concomitant attractiveness of Australia owing to the increase in investment in Australian art in the wake of the Schureck sale in 1962. The increasing globalization and commercialization of the art market in the 1960s were also contributing factors in Christie's decision to found an Australian outpost at that juncture. However, as John Herbert noted, Christie's 'Expansion overseas was done in a circumspect way, only when there was sufficient cash to do it'.⁸⁷ There was a prevailing perception that Christie's and Sotheby's would make Australia an integral part of the international art market. *The Advertiser* observed in February 1968 that Christie's and Sotheby's sending representatives to Australia was a very positive manoeuvre and that 'The links with London's Big Two will put us on the map in the fine art world'.⁸⁸

However, Robert Hughes was vocal about his belief in Australia's parochialism, saying in 1972 that Australia's 'isolation from the world market is almost complete and in this case Australian dealers have managed to drive up prices of the local heroes to quite incredible levels'.⁸⁹ These 'local heroes' included William Dobell, Russell Drysdale and Arthur Boyd and, although some Australian artists were attaining a modicum of success overseas, Australian art was largely unrecognized in the international marketplace. Others, like Kathryn Chiba, believe that 'The establishment of Christie's in Sydney, 1969, effectively brought the international art market to Australia, which in turn became more attuned to overseas trends'.⁹⁰ Chiba's view is something of an exaggeration.

Christie's actually had minimal impact on the Australian market initially. Moreover, some Australians were already participating in the international market and, although some international auctioneering practices may have been adopted in Australia, the establishment of Christie's did not create a taste for Australian art overseas.

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- ⁶⁸ Terry Ingram, 'When AM means "after Mertz"', *Art and Australia*, 38(2) 2000, p.288.
- ⁶⁹ Sue Hewitt, taped interview with the author, Sydney, 2 September 2002 and Roger McIlroy, taped interview with the author, Melbourne, 21 October 2002.
- ⁷⁰ The broader stock market and real estate booms and busts also had an impact on the art market; see works such as Van den Bosch, *The Australian Art World*, for these influences.
- ⁷¹ Terry Ingram, 'Christie's wraps up Alan Bond collection', *Australian Financial Review*, 15 May 1992, p.9.
- ⁷² Ward, 'Christie's v Sotheby's', p.25.
- ⁷³ Geoff Maslen, 'Bond paintings come back on the market', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 November 1995, p.15.

⁷⁴ Blackman's overall auction record for *The Mad Hatter's Tea Party*, which sold at Deutscher-Menzies for \$430,000 (estimate \$380,000–450,000) in May 2001, is listed under the category of 'other media and drawings' in Australian Art Sales Digest. *Patterns of an interior* was still the auction record price for a Blackman oil painting at the time of writing.

⁷⁵ According to Bonython, who was with Whiteley when he made the statement. Kym Bonython, introductory essay, Christie's, *The Harold E. Mertz Collection of Australian Art*, Melbourne, 28 June 2000. David Brearley, 'Raiders of the lost art', *The Australian*, 4 April 2000, p.14, claimed that Whiteley said 'Mertz Means Money'.

⁷⁶ Brearley, 'Raiders of the lost art', p.14. Also according to Christopher Marshall, interview with the author, Melbourne, 22 October 2002.

⁷⁷ The context remark was made by John McDonald, then Head of Australian Art at the National Gallery of Australia, in 2000 and the quotation was from Robert Hughes. Both from Brearley, 'Raiders of the lost art', p.14.

⁷⁸ See Brearley, 'Raiders of the lost art', p.14.

⁷⁹ Roger McIlroy, taped interview with the author, Melbourne, 21 October 2002.

⁸⁰ Terry Ingram, 'Mertz may have done better with Sydney real estate', *Australian Financial Review*, 15 July 2000, p.38.

⁸¹ Tim Bonyhady, 'Buying power under the hammer', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 August 2000, Spectrum, p.9.

⁸² Terry Ingram, 'Mertz may yet fund Old Masters', *Australian Financial Review*, 2 March 2000, p.36.

⁸³ Christie's, 'More Mertz for your money in Melbourne at Christie's August Australian & International Paintings Auction', Christie's, media release, 8 August 2000.

⁸⁴ 'Christie's Australia reverts to representative office', *State of the Arts*, 20 March 2006, <www.stateart.com.au/sota/news/default.asp?fid=4052> [4 April 2006].

⁸⁵ Katrina Strickland, 'Odd Lots', *Australian Financial Review*, 10 August 2006, p.45.

⁸⁶ Terry Ingram, 'Christie's explores new areas', *Australian Financial Review*, 13 January 1972, p.24.

⁸⁷ John Herbert, *Inside Christie's*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1990, p.244.

⁸⁸ Author unknown, Untitled, *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 28 February 1968, p.4.

⁸⁹ See Robert Hughes in Terry Ingram, 'Robert Hughes on local art — The high cost of chauvinism', *Australian Financial Review*, 31 July 1972, p.7.

⁹⁰ Kathryn Chiba, *Dr Joseph Brown: Dealing in Cultural Capital*, MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1999, 2 vols., vol. 1, p.62.