

## Chapter 8. Other Major Art Auction Houses

There are numerous auction houses in Australia, many of which deal in art. *The Art Newspaper — Guide to Art Auctions Worldwide* listed only a handful of Australian auction houses in 2002 — in Melbourne, Christie's, Deutscher-Menzies, Leonard Joel and Sotheby's, and in Sydney, Christie's, Deutscher-Menzies, Goodmans, Lawson-Menzies, Sotheby's and Shapiro Auctioneers.<sup>1</sup> The list helps to provide the framework for this chapter, which looks at a number of active and inactive art auction houses; namely, F. R. Strange, Geoff K. Gray, Lawson's/Lawson-Menzies, Leonard Joel, Phillips/Shapiro Auctioneers, Goodmans/ Bonhams & Goodman and Deutscher-Menzies.

Developments in the Australian art auction market in the early 1970s demonstrated that any major new competitor will have a substantial impact on the established firms; that is, changes wrought by one firm will ripple through the others. The immediate response of local Australian firms to the arrival of Christie's in 1969 was decisive. By 1971, competition was fierce and the positioning of the firms which sold art reshuffled.

### F. R. Strange

F. R. Strange was a general Sydney-based auction house founded in 1912. It developed a fine art department for the first time in the wake of Christie's arrival in the hope of exploiting the increasingly lucrative art auction market, partly through its unexpected side specialty in the sale of the furnishings, including the art, of hotels and theatres. Strange held two fine art auctions in 1971 and planned to hold at least four *per annum* thereafter. In July 1974, it auctioned 137 paintings at the Wentworth Hotel, with prices ranging from \$50 to \$8500 and the sale total a respectable \$108,000. Strange also began to place greater emphasis on the presentation of its premises around this time, renovating its salerooms at The Rocks.

Strange, with Lawson's, was one of Australia's oldest auction houses and owing to an amicable rivalry between the two firms, as well as the success of its general business, Strange had not previously moved into the auctioning of art as a serious enterprise. Strange bowed to pressure from associates of its valuations business to make fine art auctions part of its core business, although Ingram noted that 'F. R. Strange is entering a field that is steadily growing more competitive'.<sup>2</sup> The Sydney auction firm of Hamilton & Miller had also been holding auctions of quality fine art. Yet despite more auctioneers moving into the field, art sales were in a trough and many firms were consolidating their business in the early 1970s at the time of the economic recession.

Despite the presence of Christie's, it was Strange who became notable in the early 1970s for introducing a London auction practice to the Australian market. Max Germaine, best known for his dictionary, *Artists and Galleries of Australia*, was one of the directors of Strange (and also a founding Director of Sotheby's). He introduced the use of closed circuit television to Sydney auctions, the practice he had observed while at Sotheby's in London completing a decorative arts course in 1967. Closed circuit television had proved invaluable for the auction of hotels, as in practical terms, it meant that bidders could view all the lots on a large screen in the room designated as the saleroom, instead of moving throughout the hotel premises. This practice was common in fine art auctions in London.

Mason Gray Strange now focuses on conducting industrial auctions for companies, institutions and Government departments. The phasing out of Strange's art auctions could be a result of Lawson's 'more aggressive' initial response to the 'challenge' posed by Christie's, discussed presently.<sup>3</sup>

## **Geoff K. Gray**

Together F. R. Strange and Lawson's shared the majority of the general and art auctioneering business in Sydney. This duopoly was overturned when Geoff K. Gray began to compete with Lawson's for the fine art trade. Gray's usurped the paintings market for works worth less than \$2000 and was still considered to be the dominant player in Sydney in 1971, even with Christie's as a contender.

Geoff K. Gray, which described itself in 1969 as 'the largest industrial and fine art auctioneering organization in Australia', also responded quite aggressively to the advent of international competition, channelling further resources into its art division and appointing a full-time manager.<sup>4</sup> Gray's had actually proposed to enter into a joint venture with Christie's in early 1969 in an attempt to improve facilities for the auction of the fine arts in Australia; however, Christie's refused. This possibly explains the apprehension with which the local firms viewed the arrival of Christie's and apparent desire for a monopoly.

Since 1959, Gray's had held regular sales of furniture, paintings and other fine arts, coins, jewellery and stamps. It also held pledge auctions of items from pawnshops four times a week in its auction rooms in an old warehouse at 196 Castlereagh Street, Sydney. Most of Gray's business — about 95 per cent — was from its general and pawnbroking business, so the decision to place emphasis on the art side of the business in the early 1970s reflects the growing importance and prominence of art auctions.

Gray's style had reflected the more basic style of art auctioneering endemic in Australia. The old rooms lacked professional presentation and practices; collectors were often waylaid *en route* to the upstairs fine art saleroom by workmen moving furniture and other items out of the ground floor. At paintings auctions, Warren

Elstub, Manager of the Fine Arts Division in the early 1970s, auctioned an average of eighty works each hour, engaging the audience through age-old tactics of showmanship and allowing them time to decide whether to bid or increase bids. The shortage of art professionals at paintings auctions made this practice essential.

In 1971, Gray's left its Castlereagh Street warehouse, after eighty-nine years, and moved into a newly renovated carpet warehouse in Riley Street, Surry Hills. The old premises were to be demolished and although the new site 'cannot be compared to a Christie's or Sotheby's of London...it has its own special Australian charm'.<sup>5</sup> The new premises were luxuriously furnished in earthy tones of chocolate and orange, with the gallery featuring carpeted floors, subdued lighting, a good quality hanging system and a tasteful and intimate atmosphere. Gray's was now able to put on a higher quality preview than others at the time. Gray's new premises were the first in Australia to have been purposely designed as auction rooms, all others having adapted existing buildings, thus making Gray's the most sumptuous auction house in Australia. As part of this revamping, Gray's had observed trends and practices used in international auction houses to improve its business and attract a larger clientele. It reigned supreme in the middle market of works valued between \$200 and \$2000 in the Sydney paintings market and hoped to attract a more up-market clientele with its modish premises.

Gray's had actually been influenced by American auctions, rather than London ones, and the distinction between the two approaches is important in understanding the influences that have incrementally pervaded the Australian art auction market since the late 1960s/early 1970s. Most American fine art auction houses were purpose-built, as the majority of their bidding audience were collectors, rather than dealers, and the collectors had to be wooed with an appropriate ambience and setting. The Parke-Bernet, Astor and Plaza Galleries in New York were purpose-built, while Christie's and Sotheby's in London were not, reflecting their respective predominant clientele. The art dealers dominating London auctions were affiliates in the art trade, and did not need to be seduced by an opulent environment.<sup>6</sup>

Gray's had introduced the use of an easel on which to display paintings at its auctions and intended to improve on this technique by having each lot carried into the saleroom and placed on a special velvet picture rest. This had, in fact, been used by the American Art Association in New York in the late nineteenth century and by Lawson's for the sale of the Eedy collection in Sydney in 1921.

It was possibly Gray's who was responsible for the introduction of lavishly illustrated art auction catalogues to Australia, as well as specific and well-planned newspaper advertisements.<sup>7</sup> Gray's art auction catalogues in the 1960s were usually encased in glossy covers and had a number of colour illustrations, making them atypical. Gray's held, according to Charles Nodrum's recollections, the

first important art auction in Australia in memory in about 1960; he was perhaps thinking of the Voss Smith collection auctioned on 14–15 November 1962.<sup>8</sup>

On 13 February 1974, Gray's auctioned the outstanding Darrell Lea collection of fourteen Dobell paintings in the ballroom of the Chevron Hotel, Potts Point, having won the right to auction the collection over other firms by offering very competitive terms. Darrell Lea was a Sydney businessman with interests in the footwear industry in America and Europe, as well as being a leading Australian confectionary manufacturer. The catalogue — familiarly — described the Dobell paintings as 'possibly the finest single collection to appear on the market for many years...'<sup>9</sup>

The resounding success of the Dobell Foundation sale conducted by Sotheby's at the Opera House the preceding year led to hopes that the collection would sell well, even though the works had been collected very recently — over a period of three years — and many had been obtained publicly at auction. Of the collection's star works, *The Charlady* realized \$37,000 at the Darrell Lea auction, *The Tattooed Lady* \$31,000 and *The Cockney Mother* \$27,000. However, the sale of *Wangi Boy* (c.1951) for \$70,000 to car salesman, Ron Hodgson, was 'the highest price at which any painting has gone under the auctioneer's hammer in an Australian saleroom'.<sup>10</sup>

The foreword for the auction catalogue noted that 'Among the offering, making its first appearance at public sale, is Sir William Dobell's "Wangi Boy", the version held in the collection of the artist and purchased privately from the Dobell Foundation after his death. This fine work has been named as at least the equal of its famous predecessor...'<sup>11</sup> Hodgson was offered, and rejected, \$85,000 for the painting a few days after the sale. This monumental price prompted other collectors to pay more than \$100,000 for Australian paintings in subsequent sales.<sup>12</sup> This version of *Wangi Boy* later sold at Geoff K. Gray's Darrell Lea auction in February 1974 for \$70,000 and then at Christie's in August 1998 for \$450,000, against an estimate of \$400,000–\$600,000.

Ingram noted that 'a more settled and discriminate art market [had been] established over the past two years...[that is, from 1969–71],' since the arrival of Christie's.<sup>13</sup> By the time of Christie's re-establishment and revamp in the mid-late 1980s, the business of Gray's had suffered. In the 1980s, Gray's was perceived to be akin to Lawson's, the 'people's auction rooms', but Gray's art sales decreased and by about 1989 had virtually ceased.<sup>14</sup> Gray's, currently Grays Auctions, no longer conducts specialist art auctions and focuses on auctioning commercial, industrial and consumer goods. However, the firm founded GraysOnline in 2000 and in 2006 appointed Amanda Benson, the biggest vendor of original art works on eBay in Australia, as its art specialist, and now holds regular online art auctions.

## Lawson's/Lawson-Menzies

Bill Ellenden, a senior employee of Lawson's, compared the different auctioneering styles of Lawson's and Christie's at the latter's Dobell sale in 1971, describing Lawson's as an 'auctioneer' and Christie's as only a 'bid-taker'.<sup>15</sup> Ellenden noted that Christie's London auctioneer did not make special mention of the artist, as he considered all the works to be mere lots, rather than works of importance or interest, and that Australian auctioneers were enthusiastic as opposed to 'clinical'.<sup>16</sup> However, the more objective approach to auctions employed by Christie's, as well as Sotheby's, was to be more effective than the low-key Australian paradigm.

When Christie's arrived on the scene in 1969, Lawson's was actually the 'biggest auction house in the Southern Hemisphere' according to a news report.<sup>17</sup> Lawson's initial response to the arrival of Christie's was immediate and fundamental. The Australian market was changing in the late 1960s and early 1970s and Lawson's recognized that it had remained static. A number of changes occurred at Lawson's from the early 1970s, including the employment of new, key staff and the reorganization of the firm. Max Lawson's health worsened and, after Bill Ellenden resigned in 1973 to found his own auctioneering firm (William S. Ellenden), Peter Groth, an experienced businessman, was employed in July of that year to reinvigorate the organization. Henry Badgery, whose family had been involved in the auctioneering firm of Pitt, Son & Badgery, joined in October 1973 and became a member of Lawson's Board in August 1977. The Badgery family was linked with Lawson's until late 2002, when James Badgery resigned.

The engagement of personnel, such as Groth and Badgery, in the early to mid-1970s was part of a conscious attempt to modernize the firm and equip it to meet the new challenges of the era. Groth decided both to diversify and specialize, establishing, for example, a jewellery department in 1974, as well as an industrial division. Lawson's realized that it was no longer practicable to rely on its fine art sales now that the list of dedicated competitors had increased and accepted the option of diversification.

In 1981, Lawson's premises were deemed inadequate for the size of the crowds and it was decided to centralize its premises, moving to Cumberland Street in December 1981. Lawson's embraced the 'trend towards specialisation' and paid particular attention to the saleroom, organizing the gallery spaces in its new building so as to enable auctions to be held concurrently in three individual salerooms.<sup>18</sup> Groth and Badgery bought controlling interests in Lawson's and the Board was restructured at this time. It was decided to expand and from early 1983, Lawson's embarked on a programme of horizontal integration, with the acquisition of the venerable firm of James R. Newall Auctions (founded in about

1914) and, in April 1984, of Robert L. Godfrey Auctions, a firm of industrial auctioneers.

Lawson's 1973 Sim Rubensohn sale, 'one of the largest private art collection sales on record in Australia', also demonstrated the attempted modernization of the firm in the face of growing opposition.<sup>19</sup> Rubensohn was Chairman of Hansen Rubensohn-McCann Erickson, an advertising firm responsible for the successful 'It's Time' advertising campaign for the Australian Labor Party at the 1972 election. His home and garden were famous and were auctioned on 17 May 1973 by Raine and Horne Pty Ltd, presumably because Rubensohn's first job in Australia was as an office clerk at Raine and Horne. The Rubensohn sale of paintings, antique furniture, silver and porcelain that followed on 26–29 June 1973 used a closed-circuit colour television system for the first time in the history of the firm. However, Ellenden, the auctioneer, was concerned that the television would slow the pace of the proceedings and distort the size of the objects so that people who had not attended the viewings may have had an unreal perception.

The auction was held at the vendor's home, Kelvin Park at Dural, with the numerous onlookers seated outside in a 600-seat marquee. An average of 500 people was present each day of the sale, many from interstate. Rubensohn said that many buyers were also from America, Hong Kong, Singapore and New Zealand, possibly because the sale included Oriental art.<sup>20</sup>

This sale contributed to the professionalization of the Australian market through the quality of pieces auctioned, the standard of the catalogue and the use of closed-circuit television. Ellenden said that the Rubensohn sale had a similar impact on the Australian art market to Lawson's 1962 Schureck sale.<sup>21</sup> The sale realized over \$500,000, almost \$300,000 of which came from the third day's sale of the paintings, where the top price was \$28,000 for Drysdale's *Black's Camp at the Outstation* (1965). The work of Norman Lindsay witnessed a dramatic increase in market value, with Lindsay etchings of comparable excellent quality selling for around \$100 prior to the Rubensohn sale and up to \$1500 afterwards. Rubensohn commented after the sale that 'I have never hoarded anything, and I have never bought anything with profit in mind, only the pleasure we could derive from it. It's just a matter of good fortune that our collection has proved an excellent investment.'<sup>22</sup> It would be interesting to substantiate this statement and to discover how long Rubensohn had been collecting for and whether the success of a particular sale inspired him, for example.

Lawson's still had a high profile in the early 1980s, winning prestigious art and estate sales. It also continued to hold regular weekly general auctions, monthly Fine Art auctions, small, specialized auctions and the large Fine Art auctions. For example, at Lawson's centenary sale in June 1984, the Charles Wymark house sale, Norman Lindsay's *Out of the Dawn* sold for \$31,000. This was

apparently regarded by Lindsay himself as his finest watercolour and was at the time the highest price for one of his watercolours sold in Australia.<sup>23</sup>

The Margolin estate sale at 'Barford', Bellevue Hill in August 1980 and the auction of the Charles Lloyd Jones collection at 'Rosemont', Woollahra in April 1981, were two noteworthy auctions conducted by Lawson's, which attracted thousands of viewers and bids were placed by collectors from major international cities. The Margolin collection was offered in conjunction with Leonard Joel, as Graham Joel had had many dealings with the Margolins in the past and they had also made purchases, for example, at the Ruwolt sale. Ruhen claims that auction firms at an international level had tried to win the Lloyd Jones sale, but that Lawson's had been the successful contender.<sup>24</sup> It was a hugely popular and prestigious sale of four days' duration; 7000 people attended the viewings and it realized over \$1 million.

Ruhen's book on Lawson's, which was published in 1984 and thus appeared too soon after the establishment of Sotheby's and the re-establishment of Christie's to incorporate an analysis of the impact of these firms, emphasized that Lawson's was a quality auctioneer, focusing on quality art. However, Lawson's was state-based and arguably did not have a national reputation for excellence in the 1980s. The same might be said of Leonard Joel, the premier art auction house in Victoria until the supremacy of Sotheby's, Christie's and, more recently, the arrival of Deutscher-Menzies.

The multinationals gradually began to infiltrate the Sydney marketplace from 1993, after restrictions on charging the buyer's premium were lifted, with a dampening effect on the business of firms such as Lawson's. Lawson's was forced to compete with a number of auction houses in the late 1990s, including Goodmans, which had been becoming more aggressive in approach, as well as Christie's and Sotheby's. Lawson's also suffered because of its historical focus on more traditional works of art, with the increasing interest in contemporary works by collectors and other auction houses. Perhaps as part of a belated attempt to strengthen its position through international affiliations, Lawson's became the Australian representative of the International Association of Auctioneers in 1996. This association was reportedly 'capable of effective competition to the two world leaders, Christie's and Sotheby's'.<sup>25</sup> It enabled major auction firms of an independent nature, such as Butterfields (San Francisco, Chicago and Los Angeles), to be marketed internationally. However, Lawson's business had suffered to such an extent that the firm was ripe for a take-over by the Menzies Group of Auction Companies in 2001.

Henry and Peta Badgery retired in 2001 and sold their share of Lawson's to Rod Menzies, who had wanted to move into the field of general sales in order to compete fully with the national and international firms. Rod Menzies is an Australian by birth and was based in America for a number of years, returning

to Australia in 1989. He owns a successful contract cleaning services and security company. James Badgery and his sister, Sally Hardy, initially stayed on with Lawson-Menzies, but both have subsequently left and are now involved in Badgery's Auctioneers and Appraisers in Chatswood, Sydney. In fact, most of Lawson's specialists left the firm after it was taken over by Menzies. The new management was in place as of 1 September 2001, with a commentator hoping that 'the pleasures of Lawsons [sic] don't disappear into a corporate slick'.<sup>26</sup>

Lawson's revival as Lawson-Menzies and its upmarket overhaul placed it in direct competition with the multinationals, as well as its sibling company, Deutscher-Menzies. The original plan had been for Deutscher-Menzies to deal in the top end of the market and for Lawson-Menzies to deal in the lower end, or 'everything else'.<sup>27</sup> However, after due consideration, it was decided that there was no reason why Lawson-Menzies could not confront the top end of the art market. Initially, there was much staff sharing between Deutscher-Menzies and Lawson-Menzies, which could have caused some confusion. A management board of Paul Sumner, Rod Menzies, Chris Deutscher and Mark Helps (Menzies' Chief Operating Officer) was formed with the purpose of avoiding conflicts of interest.

Most Australian auctioneers are not required to state at the time each lot falls whether it was actually sold or passed-in, although it is now a requirement of international firms, such as Christie's and Sotheby's. Rod Menzies encouraged the adoption of many international auctioneering practices and the auctioneer at Lawson-Menzies' July 2002 auction did clearly state the fate of each lot. Menzies' appreciation of these international practices may have been one of the reasons Paul Sumner was a desirable choice for Chief Executive Officer of Lawson-Menzies, with his vast experience and knowledge of both the London and Australian art auction markets.

Sumner, a decorative arts specialist, had commenced his career in the auctioneering business at Lalonde Brothers and Parham Fine Art Auctioneers (now known as Phillips) in Bristol, England in 1981, where he had been obliged to take his first auction at the age of seventeen when the scheduled auctioneer became ill. He then worked as saleroom manager at Michael Newman Fine Art Auctioneer in Plymouth and arrived in Australia in 1988 when he was employed at Rushton's Auctioneers in Sydney. Sumner worked for Christie's Australia from 1990 to 1994, followed by various positions at Sotheby's Australia, including General Manager in 1996 and Managing Director in 1999. In 2001, Sumner became Managing Director of Sotheby's Olympia in London and returned to Australia in 2002, taking up the position of Chief Executive Officer of Lawson-Menzies in September of that year. It was said that Sumner had been 'keen to return [to Australia] because of the more attractive Australian lifestyle

and the freedom to get things done under an entrepreneurial owner rather than the corporate hierarchy at Sotheby's'.<sup>28</sup>

Lawson-Menzies' 'primary objective' under Sumner was to make the firm 'Australia's No. 1 integrated auction house for art, decorative arts, wine and jewellery'.<sup>29</sup> Under the new regime, sales were colour-coded and split into green for Lawson's and red for Lawson-Menzies, with green sales including all the furniture and household contents and industrial sales — which provide the company with consistent cash flow — while the red sales included art, antiques and collectables. This distinction was presumably made in order to attract new, more sophisticated clients to Lawson-Menzies, while attempting not to alienate existing clients of Lawson's. Sumner intended Lawson-Menzies to obtain national consignments and a national brand established on the basis of smaller, high value sales.

Lawson-Menzies held its final large-volume paintings auction in October 2002, featuring the Charles Blackman painting, *Suddenly Everything Happened* (1956), which had been sold after Deutscher-Menzies' auction the previous November for \$336,000. It sold at Lawson-Menzies for \$307,950 (estimate \$260,000–\$300,000) to a telephone bidder and set a record for the company. This sale demonstrated Lawson-Menzies' new emphasis on marketing and signature works, with the most expensive works having been well advertised prior to sale. The issue of transparency also arose after the sale of this work in such a short space of time by the two related firms.

As the movements and fortunes of auction houses have a domino effect, restructuring the existing hierarchy, Christie's and Sotheby's success with art sales effectively forced auctioneers of art, such as Lawson-Menzies, to prioritize their top-end paintings sales by taking an upmarket stance. In mid-2003, Lawson-Menzies entered into a consultative relationship with Martin Gallon, formerly managing director of Sotheby's Australia and a British art specialist, to develop the international paintings market in Australia. Messum's Fine Art also became affiliated with Lawson-Menzies to facilitate an exchange of European art between Australia and London. In November 2003, Lawson-Menzies' art department was merged with Deutscher-Menzies, with both firms to source art, but only the latter to conduct major art auctions. Sumner left Lawson-Menzies in 2004 and established Mossgreen Auctions soon afterwards, specialising in single-owner sales.

## Leonard Joel

Leonard Joel also responded strongly and immediately to competition from Christie's, although Jon Dwyer felt that Sotheby's was Leonard Joel's first 'real' competitor, especially given Christie's intermittent presence in Australia until the late 1980s.<sup>30</sup> Leonard Joel's clearance rates in the late 1980s were higher

than those of Christie's and Sotheby's, 'possibly as a result of the large number of cheap, unreserved lots offered by Joel's during their daytime sessions'.<sup>31</sup>

At this time, Leonard Joel retained the reputation of being the 'scarcely rivalled' experts in traditional Australian paintings.<sup>32</sup> Leonard Joel was also the dominant auction house for a while in the 1980s. It has been suggested that this may have been because traditional and colonial works were favoured by collectors and, as Melbourne was the epicentre of this market — a market controlled by Leonard Joel — it was able to capitalize on its conservative collecting base.<sup>33</sup> This is further substantiated by the fact that Leonard Joel sold the first million dollar Australian painting when it auctioned Rupert Bunny's *Une Nuit De Canicule* to Alan Bond in November 1988 for \$1.25 million.

Leonard Joel is the Melbourne equivalent of the original Lawson's in that it is renowned for having an unpretentious auctioneering style and prides itself on its Australian origins. In 1989, Leonard Joel declared that it had 'no intention of changing...[its] style, which is to 'Christoby's' what Cinderella's ball is to the local hop. It's an advantage for...[us] to retain a bargain basement ambience' and a low-key brand.<sup>34</sup>

The style of Leonard Joel's auctioneers has been described:

The pace at a Joel auction is steady. Graham's gaze flicks across the room skilfully identifying bids, eliminating the early bidders until only two or perhaps, three remain...Father and son trade jibes as one takes the gavel from the other. Warren constantly feigns politeness, invariably addressing his father as 'Mr Joel'.<sup>35</sup>

Leonard Joel has, therefore, usually attracted a different clientele to that of the more upmarket firms which exude finesse. Its art auctions were perhaps even more democratic than those of other firms in so far as a more representative body of the general public attended, from families and curiosity seekers to curators and art dealers. The customary clients of its art auctions in the late 1980s tended to be over sixty years of age and preferred historical, traditional art, because of which contemporary art was rarely offered. According to the — slightly biased — art critic, journalist and artist, Robert Rooney, 'Anything more recent [than the 1970s] is most likely offered for resale at one of the newer dealers' galleries, rather than at auction. As I discovered a few years ago...to the average auction-goer contemporary art is still a source of outrage and ridicule'.<sup>36</sup> This was probably a contributing factor in Leonard Joel relinquishing its dominant position to the multinational auction houses, which began to focus increasingly on contemporary art, in line with a shift in collecting taste.

Leonard Joel's Hans Heysen estate sale in June 1970 was one of its most significant art auctions, as it re-established an appreciation of Australian art not

seen since earlier sales like the Baldwin Spencer auction of 1919 and the Schureck sale of 1962. For:

In scenes not witnessed before or since, the Heysen auction attracted more than 4000 people and caused a panicky Malvern council caretaker to lock the town hall doors to prevent the crowds still outside from forcing their way through. Here, for the first time, was clear evidence that ordinary, middle-class Australians were interested in collecting their own artistic heritage.<sup>37</sup>

The Malvern Town Hall, the site of Leonard Joel's National Art Auctions, was described by Rooney in the late 1980s as almost anachronistic; 'As I pass through the dimly lit Victorian interior, with its heavy wooden panelling and ghostly marble statues, I know from past experience that the multitude of exhibits, on the over-crowded maze of temporary partitions in the main hall, are also relics from the past.'<sup>38</sup> Art auctions at the Malvern Town Hall were legendary, marathon events, with an average offering of a few thousand lots. Graham Joel claimed that 'Paul [Dwyer] started the art department when no one in Australia had ever heard of an auction-room having one and it grew out of nothing'.<sup>39</sup> In the mid-1960s, Leonard Joel had little competition and art sales provided the main avenue for its revenue until the early 1990s. The art department, established about 1962, was almost a distinct business, based separately from the general auction business, for around fifteen years, such was the prominence and importance of the art auctions.

Auctioning art had become an increasingly lucrative business. Graham Joel said in 1985 that 'In earlier days, you couldn't sell a pound note for 15 shillings at some stage of the auctioneering business and your percentage of goods not sold was astronomical.'<sup>40</sup> Turnover for Leonard Joel increased from approximately \$7 million in the mid-1970s to \$12 million in 1988, but by 1991, turnover was down to \$10 million, probably partly as a result of the economic recession. In the 1980s, when traditional works were in vogue, fuelled by a growing appreciation of Australiana, demand far outweighed supply, increasing auction prices once again.

Leonard Joel's art staff, Paul and Jon Dwyer, made fairly regular interstate trips in order to source stock in the 1970s, but evidently not as early as the 1960s, signifying that the increased competition represented by Christie's sent them further afield. Despite being a state-based firm, Paul Dwyer 'travelled extensively both nationally and overseas from 1970 until about 1986 for Leonard Joel' and Jon Dwyer travelled on stock sweeps from 1982 until 1996, including regular trips to Sydney.<sup>41</sup> On one of these trips, in 1989, Jon Dwyer unearthed some Jessie Traill pictures in a farmhouse, including *The Tea Gardens*, which fetched \$135,000, against an estimate of \$45,000–\$60,000, when Leonard Joel auctioned it in April 1989. However, in the 1990s, Christie's and Sotheby's began to compete

with Leonard Joel's specialist auctions at the top end of the art market and sourcing stock became increasingly difficult.

It was in the 1990s that the business of the multinationals really began to eclipse that of long-standing family-owned auction firms, such as Leonard Joel. Leonard Joel began to modernize its business, as did others; its records were computerized by 1988 and in the mid-1990s a fairly comprehensive website was instituted. After profits began to decrease in the late 1990s, Warren Joel brought in his wife Kate, a management consultant, to restructure the business. Warren Joel started to make improvements to the operational side of the firm and Kate Joel focused on overhauling human resources, including the introduction of annual performance reviews, policies and systems.

In June 1998, both staff members of Leonard Joel's paintings department, Jon Dwyer and his assistant, Alexandra Wilcox, quit. Dwyer left to oversee valuations with Christie's, drawing to a conclusion the three-generation association of the Dwyer family with Leonard Joel, and Alexandra Wilcox defected to manage part two sales at Deutscher-Menzies. Dwyer took to Christie's twenty years' experience with Victorian Public Trustee companies, Leonard Joel's traditional strength and an essential tool for supplying stock. After Dwyer's departure, the art department lost its greatest art expert.

One of the eventual effects of the multinational competition was that Leonard Joel effectively closed its volatile art department in November 2001, although the clinching factor may have been the intensification of competition after the establishment of Deutscher-Menzies. Kate Joel confirmed that Deutscher-Menzies had had a 'significant impact' on Leonard Joel, as well as Christie's and Sotheby's.<sup>42</sup> Six members of staff were dismissed, including Treena Joel, Warren Joel's sister, who had worked with the firm for about two decades. This signified the demise of the three-day, thousand-lot art auctions that had become a veritable Melbourne institution. Fine art was amalgamated with a jewellery and decorative arts department and in July 2002, Leonard Joel introduced the first of its Monthly Art Auctions, offering 300 to 400 lots in the mid-price range; in actuality, withdrawing from the competition for quality paintings. The effective end of Leonard Joel's art sales has arguably contributed to the end of the firm's outstanding profits and success.

Not only was Leonard Joel overtaken by Christie's and Sotheby's, but it relinquished its position as the third biggest player in the paintings market to Deutscher-Menzies. Deutscher-Menzies had replaced Leonard Joel as the most successful Australian-owned auction firm by mid-1999. According to Ingram, even Leonard Joel's old and profitable associations with trustees of estates were slowly being severed, as the other firms were offering highly competitive deals.<sup>43</sup> In early 1998, prior to the take-over of Lawson's, the Menzies Group had offered

to buy Leonard Joel's 'business and goodwill' for a reputed \$3 million, to no avail.<sup>44</sup>

In the aftermath of Christie's withdrawal from the Australian market, Leonard Joel opened Joel Fine Art in Armadale, Melbourne to target once again the top end of the paintings market through both private treaty sales and auctions. It will be worthwhile to track the success of this new venture.

## Phillips/Shapiro Auctioneers

Phillips International Auctioneers and Valuers is the third largest art auction house in the world after Christie's and Sotheby's and was one of the four major Georgian auction houses. Although Christie's and Sotheby's began arriving in Australia from the late 1960s, Phillips took much longer to establish a branch in Australia, possibly owing to its traditionally more docile approach to marketing and the absence of a high profile or brand. Christopher Weston, who owned Phillips for a few decades, retired and sold his 96 per cent holding of the company in 1996. His brother, Bill Weston, the Managing Director of H.E. Foster & Cranfield, 'a niche financial auctioneer dealing in life insurance policies and reversionary interests in trusts', then obtained a 20 per cent share of Phillips. Twenty per cent was bought by Phillips' management and 60 per cent by the Bank of Scotland and 3I, a venture capital group.<sup>45</sup> 3I revamped the organization, renovating the buildings and revising staffing and then sold it almost two years later 'for a very substantial profit' to LVMH (Louis Vuitton, Moët Hennessy).<sup>46</sup> They decided to revamp Phillips, once again, into an auction house that was even 'more boutique than Sotheby's or Christie's' and concentrating on the top end of the market.<sup>47</sup> This was to be a major change for Phillips, which had traditionally been more egalitarian than Christie's and Sotheby's.

Andrew Shapiro began his career in the art auction industry around 1974 in his hometown of Philadelphia, attaining an art history and historical preservation degree before working for Samuel T. Freeman, America's oldest auction house (founded in Philadelphia in 1805). He worked his way up the business ladder before moving to New York and joining Phillips in 1982, where he established its 20<sup>th</sup> Century Design Department. Shapiro worked for Phillips in New York until about 1988, before moving to Australia, where he was approached by the then owner of Phillips, Christopher Weston, and asked whether he would like to co-ordinate the firm's Australian operations.

Three Phillips ex-employees — presumably Robert Bradlow (Melbourne), Patrick Bowen (Perth) and Alison Harper (Sydney) — who had married Australians and were living in Australia in the 1980s, became Phillips' Australian representatives. Phillips gained its initial presence in Australia in about 1988 with the ambition of sourcing European art to sell in the London salerooms. The representative offices operated for a number of years and Shapiro revamped Phillips' Australian

operations when he was appointed Managing Director in 1995. The firm thus really launched itself in Australia with its pioneer auctions of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Design, Shapiro's specialty, with the inaugural 20<sup>th</sup> Century Design auction held on 6 May 1996.

Phillips' Malcolm Enright sale on 2 May 1999 at Artspace in The Gunnery, Sydney demonstrated the popularity of art auctions and the success of selling contemporary art through this medium; this sale was held a few years after Sotheby's unsuccessful contemporary art sales and a year prior to Christie's establishment of a contemporary art department. Enright, a Brisbane creative director, sold 106 lots at The Gunnery, while 71 works from his study collection were sold by silent auction, with absentee bids only. According to one report, works sold at the public auction obtained more than \$230,000.<sup>48</sup>

Enright was a charismatic collector who had supported contemporary Australian artists, such as Robert Macpherson and Jenny Watson, since the 1970s. The top price at the sale was achieved by Ken Whisson's *Blue Tourer July–August 1975*, which fetched \$36,000, against an estimate of \$20,000–\$30,000. According to Shapiro, 'it was the first sale which affirmed contemporary art as a possibility for the auction industry'.<sup>49</sup>

From 10–12 August 1999, Phillips sold the decorative arts collection of Lord Alistair McAlpine, an English aristocrat who made his fortune in Australia. The sale included Gothic Revival furniture, porcelain, silver and also numerous paintings, most notably those by Sidney Nolan. The Nolan paintings included *Blackboys [Xanthorrhoea australis]* (1945); *Portrait of Lord Thorneycroft* (1979); and *Notes for Oedipus II* (1975). Other Australian artists represented in the collection included Sali Herman, Charles Blackman and Robert Dickerson. The contents had been housed in Bishop's House in Perth, McAlpine's former residence, although the auction was held at the S. H. Ervin Gallery at the National Trust in Sydney.

Phillips' Australian branch evolved into Shapiro Auctioneers in November 2001, when the board of LVMH deaccessioned their auction house interests, offering a management buy-out. Phillips merged with the art dealership, de Pury & Luxembourg, in 2001, who then acquired a controlling share of the firm in 2002 and the remaining interest in 2003. The buy-out of Phillips' Australian branch was announced on 18 November 2001 and Shapiro Auctioneers was launched, trading under their new banner the following day. A contemporary article observed that 'The sale [of Phillips] is part of a long-expected rationalisation of the Australian auction industry which is suffering from an acute competition for stock by too many operators in a very focused market'.<sup>50</sup>

## Goodmans/Bonhams & Goodman

Michael Reid noted in 1997 that 'The mid-level auction houses are the engine room of the art auction market. Because they do not have the same capacity to promote their sales as the big houses, their prices are often a better reflection of the true state of the market'.<sup>51</sup> In spite of its mid-level status, Goodmans, which was established in 1994, held an extremely successful auction of contemporary art in Double Bay, Sydney on 31 March 2003, *The Jack & Isabella Klompé Collection — Australian and International Modern and Contemporary Art*. Tim Goodman thought that this was the biggest single-owner collection of modern and contemporary art to be sold in Australia.<sup>52</sup>

The collection belonged to Isabella Klompé and her late husband Jack and comprised 360 lots, which they had acquired principally from artists' solo exhibitions. The consignment might ordinarily have gone to one of the bigger multinational firms; however, the lower overheads associated with Goodmans would yield a greater profit. The Klompé collection represented the first occasion on which the works of many contemporary artists had entered the auction sphere and records were set for a number of artists, including Keith Looby, whose *Letter to Art Master* (1984) sold for \$24,465. This was three times the auction estimate, as well as an Australian auction record. Overall, the sale prices doubled the estimates and 90 per cent of lots were sold by volume.<sup>53</sup>

Following the success of the Klompé sale, in August 2003, Goodmans, which already had affiliations with Leonard Joel, entered into a joint venture with the illustrious London firm, Bonham's. The Chairman of Bonham's, Robert Brooks, said of the move that 'Together, Bonhams and Goodmans [sic] will be a formidable force, ideally placed to compete for business at the highest level'.<sup>54</sup> Tim Goodman is the controlling shareholder in the new firm; minority holders include New Zealand's Mowbray Collectables, as well as Bonham's, which allows resources to be shared under a licensing agreement.

Early in 2005, Bonhams & Goodman merged with Bruce's of Adelaide, which was founded by Theodore Bruce in 1878, and it was announced in October 2005 that it was also taking over the boutique Sydney firm of Stanley & Co. The latter's founder, Dalia Stanley, remained in the capacity of a senior specialist. Horizontal integration could prove beneficial to Bonhams & Goodman, who had a turnover of \$27 million in 2004. As events unfold there may be further rationalization of the Australian art auction market, with Bonhams & Goodman potentially moving onto a higher level on the art auction rung, having opened an office in South Yarra, Melbourne after Christie's departure.

## Deutscher-Menzies

Deutscher-Menzies was established in 1998 and successfully rivalled the Christie's/Sotheby's duopoly of the Australian art auction market. Its very

establishment is revealing about the extent to which art auction houses dominate the Australian marketplace and the mutability of the hierarchy.

Chris Deustcher, 'the Joseph Brown of his generation', was a highly respected and established art dealer.<sup>55</sup> He began his career as a dealer in 1975 and in the mid-1980s his dealership was turning over more than Christie's, with an annual turnover of at least \$10 million. The recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s resulted in the forced closure of Deustcher's contemporary art gallery in Fitzroy (Deustcher Brunswick Street), as well as his other gallery in Carlton (Deustcher Fine Art) and the loss of his home. Speculation over Deustcher's self-confessed dire financial difficulties was rife, with Deustcher saying that by 1997, although he was still trading, it was a struggle and the business was debt-ridden.<sup>56</sup> By this stage he had already met Rod Menzies, his client, and Menzies proposed that they open a 'third auction house'.<sup>57</sup> Deustcher's initial response was disbelief that the market could support another firm, but after due consideration he agreed to undertake the enterprise.

Reid thought that 'Deustcher's move shows prescience. By analysing the overseas art market, one begins to understand the shifting sands of fine art distribution'.<sup>58</sup> The establishment of the new auction house and Deustcher's career change signifies the importance of auction sales as a preferred means of buying and selling art. Reid further claimed that 'The dealer-to-auctioneer move is a product of structural change in the international fine art market [owing to the recession]. The major multinational auction houses have been eating into the dealers' retail market for years'.<sup>59</sup> The auction houses had rallied against the impact of the recession by improving their marketing and client services and adding the retail market to their traditional repertoire of wholesale.

Deustcher-Menzies planned from the outset to hold four sales annually — three in Melbourne and one in Sydney — and to equal the turnover of Christie's and Sotheby's. Although Deustcher-Menzies initially operated from Melbourne, there was a move to hold more auctions in Sydney after the success of its first Sydney sale in March 2002 and concomitant with the gradual shift of the art market from Melbourne to Sydney. Deustcher-Menzies perceived a need to abolish the art auction market's traditional hibernation period of November to May, based on the fact that in London and New York the art market is bustling during that period and that Sydney has increasingly been a strong market. By holding a March auction it avoided buyer fatigue. The March sale in Sydney not only provides Deustcher-Menzies with an early and sizeable amount of revenue but also momentum for its next sale, with pictures continuing to flow in. Moreover, Sumner said that '60 per cent of what Sotheby's was selling when I was there [in the mid-late 1990s] was to New South Wales buyers, even though the auctions were in Melbourne'.<sup>60</sup>

The original focus for the firm was on paintings, with sculpture and print media being embraced at later auctions, but the intention was always to be a fine art specialist. Sue Hewitt was Director of Paintings in New South Wales and its first auctioneer. However, that business relationship was short-lived and Anita Archer became Deutscher-Menzies' auctioneer. When Archer joined Deutscher-Menzies in 1998, she was the only employee to have any auction experience, having completed the one-year course at Sotheby's and having worked at Gregson Flanagan's and Bob Gregson's Auctions. After Deutscher-Menzies' inaugural auction, Archer was asked to work as its business administrator. Six weeks later, after conducting a successful charity auction at the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, she was offered the position of auctioneer permanently. Archer is a rarity amongst the patriarchal confraternity of auctioneers and someone 'who has come to challenge Mr Roger McIlroy of Christie's as the master of the auction bon mot'.<sup>61</sup>

Deutscher-Menzies was a scrupulously planned enterprise. Nevertheless, owing to the staff's inexperience in the auction arena, early sales were reputedly chaotic in comparison with those of the multinationals. The first sale on 20 April 1998, which garnered \$2.5 million, was criticized because of the uncertainty surrounding whether works had actually sold or not, compounded by the fact that successful bidders' numbers were not always confirmed verbally.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, Sasha Grishin said that the inaugural catalogue 'set a new standard in commercial auction catalogues, while the display in the Malvern show rooms [sic] looked more like a museum art exhibition than the usual crowded auction jumble sale'.<sup>63</sup>

Ironically, Deutscher-Menzies mimics practices employed by Sotheby's and Christie's overseas, many of which have not been adopted by their local firms. Menzies, himself an avid art collector and regular attendee of auctions in London and New York, has transferred his observations of international auction practices to his local enterprise; for example, sending Anita Archer and Vivien Anderson, its then Aboriginal art consultant, to America to watch international auction techniques at Christie's and Sotheby's in about 2000.

Deutscher-Menzies attempted, almost from the start, to adopt a more aggressive marketing stance and business approach than that traditionally used. Deutscher confessed that he used Sotheby's as a model for practices including obtaining and selling paintings and the strictly methodical, price-sensitive order of catalogue layouts.<sup>64</sup> Deutscher-Menzies has also been 'very target oriented' and Menzies had always intended to obtain auction results which fell between those of Christie's and Sotheby's.<sup>65</sup>

Deutscher proposed to pay vendors 'faster than the multinationals'; late arrival of cheques and auction catalogues had 'dogged' his dealership enabling dealers like Denis Savill, who has the ability to write a cheque instantly, to remain competitive.<sup>66</sup> This, as well as a reward programme, competitive commissions,

a personalized service, flexible payment options and improved relations with dealers aimed to give Deutscher-Menzies the competitive edge over, not only its fellow auction houses, but also over art dealers. Menzies commented in 1998 that 'Internationally – and increasingly here – auctions have become social occasions...they are also great theatre. We'll be enhancing this...'<sup>67</sup> Archer confirmed that, despite the advent of telephone bidding, attendance figures at Deutscher-Menzies' art auctions are increasing and it is essential to book seats owing to demand.<sup>68</sup>

Auction houses overseas have been providing a wide array of financial services to their clients for some time. Emulating this trend, Deutscher-Menzies has offered guarantees of a minimum sale price and advances in order to secure works. However, this has not become general practice in Australia and it is worth noting that privately-owned companies like Deutscher-Menzies have the flexibility to adopt practices that public companies cannot. Deutscher maintains that guaranteeing has worked 'brilliantly' and that, in the worst-case scenario, Menzies would legally purchase the painting, paying the buyer's premium, so that the auction house still obtains the 'prestige of the sale' and it is this which is its most competitive asset.<sup>69</sup> Deutscher notes further that guarantees are only offered for 'special paintings' and the firm does not purchase paintings to sell at auction, despite accusations of multifarious iniquities and manipulations.<sup>70</sup> The practice of purchasing stock has not been favoured by Christie's and Sotheby's and is generally unpopular for providing the auctioneer with 'too much control over the sale'.<sup>71</sup>

Deutscher-Menzies' autonomy has been advantageous in enabling it to make instantaneous decisions and to have complete control over every facet of the organization. Deutscher said that 'the big difference in our business is we are perceived as being owner-operators...people are actually dealing with the principal in the business, whereas [with] the other [auction houses]...they are dealing...[with] an outpost employee for an international organization'.<sup>72</sup> The international collusion scandal and concomitant negative publicity plaguing Christie's and Sotheby's actually worked in favour of Deutscher-Menzies, reinforcing its local roots in contrast to the uncertainty surrounding the future ownership of the multinationals.

In August 1998, Deutscher-Menzies made its 'first published attempt to introduce sophisticated international incentives to the Australian market' when it gave John Schaeffer advances based on reserves for three works he had consigned to the firm.<sup>73</sup> However, two of the works did not sell and this meant that Deutscher-Menzies had to try and find buyers for them or take back the difference from Schaeffer. Works that are guaranteed are meant to be designated as such in the catalogues and Deutscher-Menzies has disclosed in catalogues whether the firm has a vested interest in any of the works. This practice of the

auction house or auction house principals has characterized the firm since its inception, with claims in the popular press that Menzies frequently both buys and sells at Deutscher-Menzies auctions.<sup>74</sup> This could account for high clearance rates at some Deutscher-Menzies and Lawson-Menzies sales and may occasionally be a result of providing guarantees on works.

Catalogues were initially organized in chronological order, but this practice has been replaced with structuring the catalogue to control the rhythm of the auction. This is a departure from a curatorial sequence to a more business-oriented one, as modelled by Sotheby's in its catalogues, and which ensures that the more popular modern and contemporary works are not relegated to the end of the sale. Deutscher-Menzies announced on 17 April 2001 that it was intending to include in its catalogues works by artists who were not well known in order to 'promote Australasian artists commensurate with their art historical significance'.<sup>75</sup> This is very much the act of a dealer or curator, rather than a traditional auctioneer.

Deutscher-Menzies did not initially come into direct opposition with the extant duopoly as it started to carve out a new market and build a clientele of new buyers, rather than poaching from the existing clientele of the other auction houses. Deutscher introduced a number of clients, mainly buyers, from his extensive list of contacts from his art dealing days and Menzies expanded the client base substantially through his contacts in the horse racing industry, as Menzies is himself a horse breeder. These new clients were principally responsible for making numerous purchases at Deutscher-Menzies sales from the very beginning, benefiting the industry by increasing the overall number of buyers frequenting auctions. Nevertheless, the major auction houses were in direct competition for stock.

The Menzies Group made a second failed attempt, through private negotiations, to buy Leonard Joel from the Joel family in mid-1998 for a reputed \$3 million.<sup>76</sup> This signalled from an early stage that Menzies was interested in cornering the market, particularly the high end thereof. The acquisition of Leonard Joel would have been particularly beneficial for the Menzies Group, providing access to its existing infrastructure and networks. However, Deutscher-Menzies has demonstrated that it could compete successfully without Leonard Joel's goodwill and business.

Roger McIlroy said in 1998 that the establishment of a new auction house would result in a diminution of stock and that Christie's would take the new competition 'very seriously indeed'.<sup>77</sup> However, he continued with the comment that a small, locally-owned firm would flounder in the face of the multinational domination of the art market, saying that 'It's an adventuresome move and I don't really see how they're going to compete with companies like us who have offices in 120 countries.'<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, Deutscher-Menzies has succeeded in

rivalling the strong hold that the multinationals have had on the Australian market. Its third auction (in 1998) totalled \$3 million, putting it on par with Christie's and Sotheby's and at the end of this first operational year, Deutscher-Menzies had already attained what Reid refers to as 'first-rung status', along with Christie's and Sotheby's.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, in May 2000, Deutscher-Menzies obtained the highest amount ever at a single auction by a locally-owned auction house, with the sale realizing \$5.35 million. Deutscher-Menzies superseded Christie's and Sotheby's for the first time in November 2000, claiming higher turnovers than its competitors.

Sotheby's Chairman, Justin Miller, said that, although the introduction of a 'high profile competitor' always has a negative effect on a firm's ability to gather quality stock — citing the example of the Lowenstein Sharp sale of November 2002, for which Deutscher-Menzies successfully outbid Sotheby's — Sotheby's business had been sustaining a period of growth from 2000–2002.<sup>80</sup>

Anita Archer believes that Christie's and Sotheby's had become too complacent and passive and that it took Deutscher-Menzies to raise standards through competition.<sup>81</sup> Deutscher-Menzies has been heavily influenced by New York practices, while Christie's and Sotheby's have always relied on 'brand identification'.<sup>82</sup> However, because Christie's Australian performance had been inconsistent, Christie's had begun to 'smarten up its act', adopting a more 'proactive' approach, prior to the disclosure that a new auction house was being established.<sup>83</sup> Ingram noted at the time that Christie's highly-marketed August 1998 sale 'must consolidate the hold of multinationals on the Australian auction market and the art resale trade as a whole'.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, since then, Deutscher-Menzies, through an aggressive pursuit of the marketplace, has successfully challenged this multinational domination.

The establishment of Deutscher-Menzies in 1998 could be viewed as a response to the dominance of auction houses in the Australian art market and its establishment has pre-empted responses in the market of its own. Deutscher-Menzies achieved art auction sales of \$22 million in 2005, positioning it in second place behind Sotheby's on \$33 million. The Australian art auction market was worth \$93 million that year, with Deutscher-Menzies selling 24 per cent of the market by value. The end of Deutscher's involvement in Deutscher-Menzies and the subsequent founding of Deutscher and Hackett in 2006 will have further ramifications for the art auction market in Australia.

In this study we have observed the waxing and waning fortunes of art auction houses, with a particular focus on Christie's and Sotheby's. There is a common expression in the art market that Sotheby's are dealers trying to be gentlemen and that Christie's are gentlemen trying to be dealers. While maintaining a long-standing rivalry and different styles, the firms also share some commonalities, hence the 'Christobys' tag. They have both cast off the pejorative

connotations of being a plebeian means to dispose of second-hand goods and imbued themselves with prestige by refining the art of paintings auctions and adding panache to what is essentially the business of salesmanship. Despite Christie's recent withdrawal, the multinationals have become entrenched in the psyche of the Australian art market. They displayed the establishment dates of their parent bodies with reverence and pride, relying on their pedigree, which they re-established in Australia through assiduous marketing. The fate of current art auction houses in Australia will warrant monitoring, particularly that of Sotheby's. Since Christie's departure, there has been speculation that Sotheby's may follow suit.

Another intriguing — and recurring — trend is the sale of contemporary art at auction. According to Eugene Thaw:

...the 'hottest' of all art market commodities today, as always in the past, are the big names of contemporary art. Common sense must warn us, therefore, that soon others will become the big names, with only a small fraction of today's high-fliers surviving at all, and only a fraction of that fraction surviving with increased value.<sup>85</sup>

Collecting tastes are constantly evolving, as is technology. Future studies might well focus on the auction of new media, such as digital video, perhaps via internet auctions, which are demonstrating good results, even for the sale of relatively expensive art. Observing how the market restructure and collecting trends unfold will provide exciting opportunities for analysis and future studies. I hope that this book paves the way, as there are many avenues worthy of pursuit.

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