

(page 12.)

ARTS

Elton's muscling in

STORY | Terry Ingram

Sir Elton John appears to have joined Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber in setting new price horizons for Australian art. Two years ago Webber gave nearly \$2 million for a sunset boulevard (a painting of a horse and cart with Geelong against a setting sun in the background) by the colonial artist Eugene Von Guerard.

On Monday this week at an antiques auction in Joel's rooms in Melbourne's South Yarra, dealer Scott Livesey gave \$66,000 for a large marble statue of a near-naked (not quite the full monty) sculpture catalogued as a (male) slave

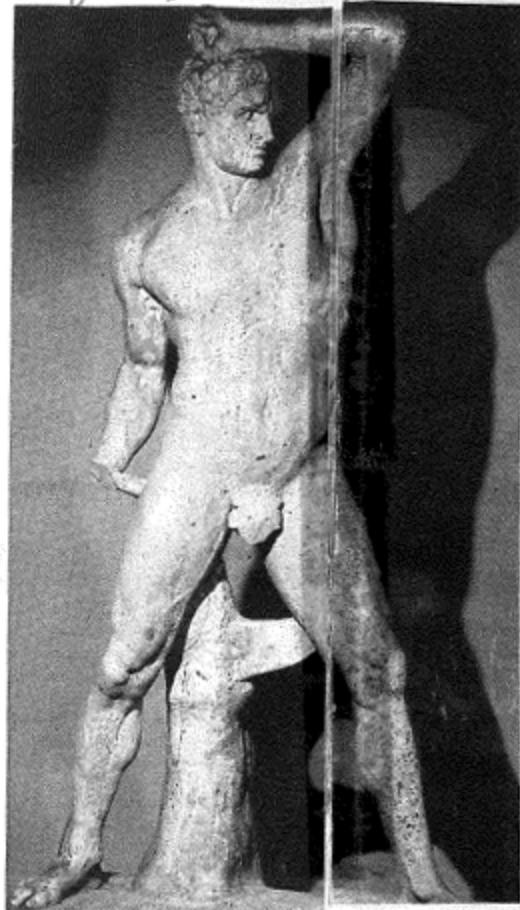
sculpted by the Australian colonial artist Charles Frederick Summers in 1884.

Livesey was buying for Sydney dealer Martyn Cook who, coincidentally, was on a buying spree for Sir Elton. Cook this week declined to comment on Sir Elton's purchases.

Known John purchases on his latest trip, however, include photographs by Max Dupain and Tracey Moffatt, which join portfolios of work by another Australian, Bill Henson, in the pop star's collection. The underbidder on the slave was Cook's near-neighbour in Sydney's Queen Street, Frank Howell, and while it made three times its estimate, there was a big show of ready hands still raised in Joel's rooms at around the \$50,000 mark.

Howell said it was a breathtaking piece – a copy of a famous work by the Italian sculptor Canova (1757–1822) – and he was very sorry to miss out on it. Livesey said that it was not a slave but a boxer – what appeared to be chains at the base were pieces of leather.

Since the purchase, a photograph had turned up that shows the sculpture present at the opening of



It's not quite the full monty but this sculpture by Charles Frederick Summers sold for \$66,000 last week.

Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building, he added.

Son of the Somerset-born sculptor Charles Summers, who emigrated to Victoria in 1852, Charles Frederick was an eminent member of the Yarra Sculpture Society. But he became disheartened by the limited interest in sculpture in Australia and sold all the sculptures in his possession in 1933 and became a librarian.

This week's sale suggests he made the wrong move. ■

Sir Elton John has become a significant buyer of Australian art.

