

# Great expectations for contemporary stars



Cressida Campbell's *Garden Island*, a woodblock painting from 1990, was sold for \$6000 in 2003. It is conservatively estimated at \$200,000 to \$300,000.

## Australian art

Gabriella Coslovich

As the National Gallery of Australia prepares to celebrate the 40-year career of the remarkable Cressida Campbell next month, savvy art investors are capitalising on her surging profile. No fewer than four works by Campbell are for sale in Smith & Singer's Important Australian Art auction next week.

"It's like what we witnessed with Jeffrey Smart with the exhibition at the NGA," says Smith & Singer chairman Geoffrey Smith, referring to the hugely popular survey show that ended in May. "When an artist's work becomes the topic of more general conversation it encourages and inspires people to

release and acquire and it's that paradigm that brings work forward."

Campbell's meticulous woodblock paintings, from which she makes unique prints, can take up to four months to create, so her output is modest. With 300 people on the waiting list for new work, the auction circuit offers one of the few opportunities to purchase a Campbell without delay.

One of the works in the auction – *Garden Island*, a woodblock painting from 1990 – is privileged with its own catalogue. Measuring 91.5 cm by 148.5 cm, *Garden Island* depicts the artist's native Sydney from an unusual perspective, looking east over the city's naval base and into Sydney Harbour.

The woodblock's sales history speaks volumes of Campbell's rise in the market. The work is valued at more than 30 times its cost in 2003 when it sold at Sotheby's Australia for \$6000 (hammer). When the work went to auction again at Sotheby's Australia in 2019 it failed to sell. Now it's estimated at \$200,000 to \$300,000, which takes into account the prices at Campbell's current commercial exhibition at Philip Bacon Galleries in Brisbane, which sold out weeks before opening.

"With the current prices of \$420,000 for a work of 120 cm diameter, for a circular work, in the current market it represents very, very good value," says Smith.

If it sells within its estimate, that's true. But it may well fly.

The highest priced Campbell work in the auction, *Interior with Cat*, 2010, a woodblock painting, has an estimate of \$300,000 to \$400,000. It last sold in 2019, at Sotheby's Australia, for \$240,000 (hammer) against an estimate of \$100,000 to \$200,000.

While it has taken Campbell 40 years

to become a hot market commodity, another living Australian artist, Jordan Kerwick, has done it in a fraction of that time. Jordan who? You may well ask. Born in Melbourne in 1982 and now living in France, the self-taught Kerwick only started exhibiting in 2016. But his naïve still lifes and stylised scenes featuring mythical creatures are suddenly firing on the secondary market.

Some in the industry are sceptical about Kerwick's meteoric trajectory and are wondering what is at play. Kerwick's work has never been offered on the secondary market until this year. But in just over two months, from early March to mid-May, 12 works by Kerwick have come up on the auction circuit overseas, nine at Phillips, one at Sotheby's, and two at Bonhams. All 12 sold for many times their low estimate. Smith doesn't consider there's anything unusual about this.

"Believe me, I would not be interested in his work if I didn't believe that it didn't have long-term substance," says Smith. "Just in terms of the dealers who represent him globally – Vito Schnabel, Vigo Gallery – these are dealers who are experienced, savvy people."

In Australia, Leonard Joel was the first auction house to offer a Kerwick, selling *Still Life*, 2017, in June. The acrylic painting had an estimate of \$12,000 to \$20,000 and, as we've seen overseas, it sold for \$42,000 (hammer).

Smith & Singer is selling another Kerwick still life, *Rimbaud (Rainbow Flower)*, 2019, with an estimate of \$60,000 to \$80,000.

"This is the most significant work by him to be offered in Australia," says Smith, who will auction the painting last to create the most convenient time for international bidders.

Kerwick's auction record was set in March this year, at Sotheby's New York, where his work *Le Tigre* sold for \$US220,000 hammer (\$313,256), almost nine times its low estimate of \$US25,000.

The cover lot in the Smith & Singer sale is Ethel Carrick's *Sur la Plage/On the Sands*, Dinard, 1911, a cheerful beach scene, measuring 34 cm by 46 cm, with an estimate of \$600,000 to \$800,000. Arthur Streeton is also well represented, with seven works for sale. *Evening Light, Venice*, 1908, the priciest of the lot, with an estimate of \$500,000 to \$700,000. Interestingly, not a single Jeffrey Smart is in the sale, a situation Smith says is "very, very unusual".



Jordan Kerwick's *Rimbaud (Rainbow Flower)*.

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Lot 8. BUNNY, Rupert C W (1864-1947)  
'Rencontre dans le Parc' ('Dans l'Allée') c.1912-13. Oil on Canvas, 72x59cm Est. \$60,000 – 80,000



Lot 9. HART, Pro (1928-2006)  
'The Trials Day' Oil on Board, 44.5x60cm Est. \$8,000 – 12,000



Lot 149. GILL, Samuel Thomas (1818-1880)  
'Portland Bay from Northern Headland,' 1842. W/Cir, 13.5x30cm Est. \$10,000 – 15,000