

# Which woman artist will make an impact this time?



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Is there still merit in sales dedicated solely to [women's art](#), or has the ground shifted sufficiently that we can move on?

A rudimentary measure might involve looking at the top ten prices achieved at auction so far this year – only one of the artworks is by a woman, Ethel Carrick Fox. Another measure might be to look at the top ten most-traded artists this year – Emily Kame Kngwarreye and Cressida Campbell sneak in at positions nine and ten respectively. The rest are male.

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Margaret Preston, Hibiscus, 1925, estimate \$20,000 to \$25,000, being sold at Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction next Tuesday in Melbourne.

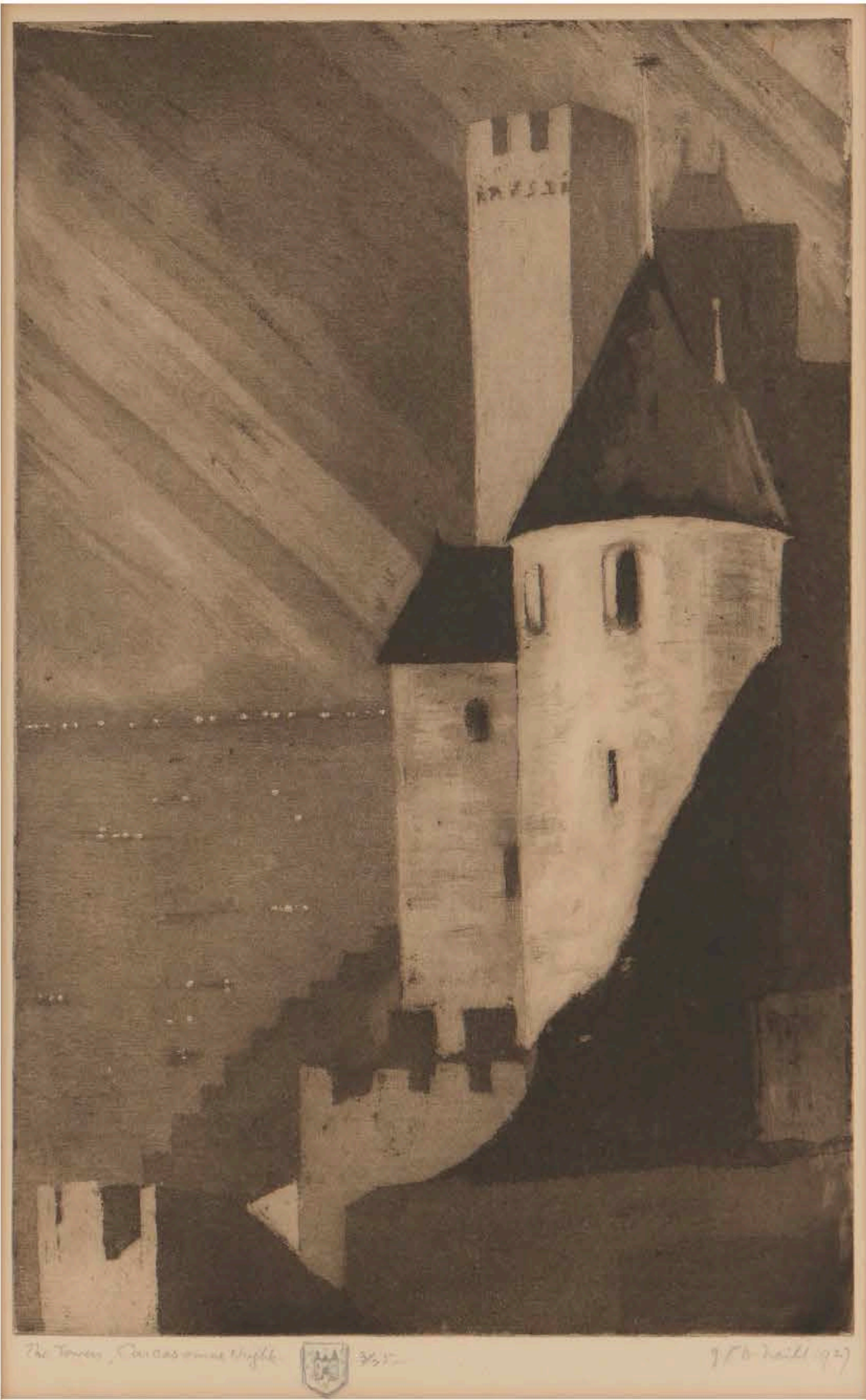
Of the 64 new auction records set so far, Rita Angus and Margaret Preston top the list, in first and second position respectively. However, men far outnumber women among those records, 45 to 19.

While change is afoot, thanks to public galleries that are consciously redressing historic imbalances, with a flow-on effect notable in the art market, there's still work to be done, says Leonard Joel's head of art, Olivia Fuller. Next Tuesday, Leonard Joel presents its sixth annual [Women Artists sale](#), a concept the company launched in 2017, and that has plenty of life in it yet.

"There are so many artists who still need dedicated sales like this to get recognition," Fuller says. "As long as we feel that it's a sale that has stories to tell we will keep doing it. We will do it until we think it's no longer needed."



The stories that this auction tells include that of the remarkable Jessie Traill, born in Melbourne in 1881, who became one of the most accomplished Australian etchers of the 20th century in a field dominated by men.



Jesse Traill, The Tower Carcassonne Night, 1927, on the secondary market for the first time, with an estimate of \$2000 to \$3000, being sold at Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction next Tuesday in Melbourne.

Leonard Joel art specialist Hannah Ryan has unearthed an etching by Traill from 1927, of the medieval walled city of Carcassonne in the south of France, inspired by the artist's travels. Measuring 35 cm by 27 cm, *The Tower Carcassonne Night*, 1927, edition three of 25, has an estimate of \$2000 to \$3000.

Traill's biographer, Jo Oliver, helped Ryan catalogue the etching and tracked down an image of the work in a 1932 copy of the *West Australian* newspaper announcing the opening of Traill's exhibition at the Atlas Building in Perth.

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Jesse Traill, Ex Libris C. W. H. Barnes, c.1934, estimate \$600 to \$900, being sold at Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction next Tuesday..

“It’s wonderful to see another of Jessie’s etchings coming up for sale because they are spread far and wide,” Oliver tells Saleroom. “She gave a lot away, so they are not in the general art market; they appear here, there and everywhere.”

Oliver’s book, *Jessie Traill: a biography*, was published in 2020 by Australian Scholarly Publishing.

“She was very much a trailblazer,” says Oliver. “For a woman, etching was unusual because it’s quite a physical and messy process.” An etched bookplate by Traill from around 1934 is also for sale, with an estimate of \$600 to \$900.

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Inge King, Voodoo, 1987, estimate \$25,000 to \$35,000, being sold at Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction next Tuesday in Melbourne.

Traill is best known for her etchings documenting the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, many of which are in the Art Gallery of New South Wales collection. An early environmentalist, Traill's other great subject matter was nature. Although celebrated in a retrospective at the National Gallery of Australia in 2013, Traill is hardly a household name.

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Margaret Olley, *Pomegranates*, 1965, estimate \$30,000 to \$35,000, being sold at Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction next Tuesday in Melbourne.

“One by one it seems that women artists are coming more to light,” says Oliver, who is working on her next biography, on another Australian female printmaker, Adelaide Perry.

Other works to watch in the Leonard Joel sale include the Inge King sculpture, *Voodoo*, 1987, with an estimate of \$25,000 to \$35,000; Margaret Olley's *Pomegranates*, 1965, on the secondary market for the first time, and estimated at \$30,000 to \$35,000, the most expensive work in the sale; and Margaret Preston's hand-coloured woodcut, *Hibiscus*, 1925, that was once in the collection of Dame Nellie Melba. The woodcut is estimated at \$20,000 to \$25,000. Nora Heysen's *Spring Flowers*, 1950, hasn't been on the market since 1980, when it sold for \$900 (hammer). It's now valued \$25,000 to \$35,000.



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Nora Heysen, Spring Flowers, 1950, estimate \$25,000 to \$35,000.

Works from the National Australia Bank collection continue to crop up in Leonard Joel auctions, and this sale features three, including a ripper of an abstract painting by Helen Eager, *A Sudden Lightness*, 1994, with an estimate of \$700 to \$1000 for the 90 cm by 70 cm oil. The sale is on view at Leonard Joel in Melbourne from Friday to Sunday ahead of next week's auction.

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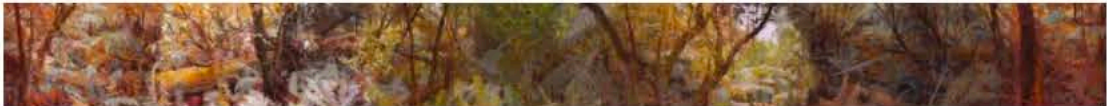
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Helen Eager, A Sudden Lightness, 1994, from the National Australia Bank collection, estimate \$700 to \$1000.

Still on the subject of women artists, one of the major sales at the recent Sydney Contemporary art fair was that of Mary Tonkin's 21-panel, almost 19-metre-long work, *Ramble, Kalorama*, 2017-2019, painted *en plein air* over the course of 18 months in Melbourne's Dandenong Ranges.



Mary Tonkin, Ramble, Kalorama, 2017-2019, sold for \$675,000 at Sydney Contemporary.

The extraordinary work is the result of almost ten years of drawing and painting to resolve how to render the Australian bush in all of its immersive power and episodic beauty. Australian Galleries owner Stuart Purves tells Saleroom that he asked Sydney Contemporary for the largest stand possible so that Tonkin's work could be shown in its entirety.



Detail of Mary Tonkin's Ramble, Kalorama, 2017-2019.

“It proved to be a destination,” Purves says.

The painting sold for \$675,000 to an Australian private collector with a lot of wall space.



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