

## Earliest Australian Bird

IMPORTANT AUSTRALIAN & INTERNATIONAL ART  
MELBOURNE 20 NOVEMBER 2012 AUCTION



MOSES GRIFFITH 1747-1819, RAINBOW LORIKEET (*TRICHOGLOSSUS HAEMATODUS MOLUCCANUS*) 1772.  
ESTIMATE \$150,000-200,000

SOTHEBY'S AUSTRALIA will offer for sale the earliest known coloured depiction of an endemic Australian bird painted by a European artist. Painted by Moses Griffith in 1772, this highly-finished and beautifully-preserved presentation drawing will be auctioned on **Tuesday, 20 November, in Melbourne** (Moses Griffith, *Rainbow Lorikeet (Trichoglossus haematodus moluccanus)* 1772, estimate \$150,000-200,000, lot 27, pictured).

The bird of exquisite beauty was discovered by Captain Cook and his party when they first landed at Botany Bay on the east coast of Australia in April – May 1770. It is believed the Lorikeet depicted was drawn from life, and its convincing ‘parrot-perkiness’ would seem to denote a living model. Furthermore the animal is not posed in a scientifically informative, display manner – that is, so as to display its brilliant breast colours, or the distinctive bars on the underside of its wings.

The transiting of this bird makes quite a story, outliving its first owner a Raiatean priest, Tupaia, on the return voyage to England by the Endeavour. Tupaia died of dysentery in Batavia (Jakarta) in 1770. The bird was given by Sir Joseph Banks to Marmaduke Tunstall, who was a wealthy collector and an amateur of science. It is believed the specimen was collected while quite young, possibly as a nestling, as it does not have the characteristic bright red beak and eye ring of a fully mature (18-24 month) bird. The British climate cannot have been too adverse for the bird, which was painted subsequently by Peter Brown in 1794 (complete with its full adult colour).

‘The offering of this masterpiece by Moses Griffith exemplifies Sotheby’s Australia’s commitment to offering exceptional examples from all periods of Australian art’ said Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Sotheby’s Australia. ‘The inclusion of this work follows the extraordinary result we achieved for The Sydney Bird Painter’s *Hook-Billed Shrike (Grey Butcher Bird)* (circa 1792) which was sold by Sotheby’s Australia in August 2012 for \$216,000 against a presale estimate of \$50,000-70,000.’

## AT A GLANCE

### **Moses Griffith 1747-1819**

*Rainbow Lorikeet (Tricholgloussus haematodus moluccanius) 1772*

gouache on vellum, 26.5 X 20CM

ESTIMATE \$150,000-200,000

IMPORTANT AUSTRALIAN & INTERNATIONAL ART, SOTHEBY'S AUSTRALIA  
AUCTION IN MELBOURNE 20 NOVEMBER 2012 | 6.30PM  
926 HIGH STREET, ARMADALE VIC 3143

### EXHIBITION IN SYDNEY

THURSDAY 8 – SUNDAY 11 NOVEMBER, 10AM TO 5PM

118-122 QUEEN STREET WOOLLAHRA

### EXHIBITION IN MELBOURNE

THURSDAY 15 – MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER, 10AM TO 5PM

926 HIGH STREET ARMADALE

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**For a full catalogue, high resolution images, further information or to arrange an interview with  
Geoffrey Smith, Chairman, please contact:**

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\*\*Pre-estimates do not include buyer's premium.