Lost Impression Rediscovered by Sotheby’s Australia

A recently rediscovered oil painting by Tom Roberts (1866-1931) is a highlight of works for sale by Australian Impressionist artists at Sotheby’s Australia’s Important Australian & International Art auction on 25 November in Sydney. The delicately painted portrait by Roberts of a doe-eyed wistfully looking girl has through extensive research by Sotheby’s Australia been identified as With Wistful Eyes (1889) that Roberts included in the ground-breaking The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition in Melbourne in 1889.
Most renowned for his pioneering subjects such as *Shearing the Rams* (1890, National Gallery of Victoria) and *A Break Away!* (1891, Art Gallery of South Australia), Roberts other major contribution was portraiture that ensured both his professional survival and contemporary esteemed reputation. Within the unavoidable constraints of the portrait genre the consumer demand for likeness, Roberts was still able to exercise his progressive Naturalist-Whistlerian vision. The composition of *With Wistful Eyes* (1889) (estimate $60,000-80,000, lot 22, pictured previous) has a delicately modulated facial landscape of skin tones, offset by tonal contrast of the sitter’s black dress, hat and veil. The millinery floral arrangement of the hat captures the colour trend of the late 1880s with shell pink to burnt umber, Etruscan red and crush rose.

The cigar box lid traditionally was 9 by 5 inches in size, providing the title for *The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition*. Furthermore, Sotheby’s Australia is delighted to present in the one sale two significant physical manifestations of the catalogue for *The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition*. The first is the very plate and block which the exhibition catalogues were printed. The second is a print taken from that plate (this print was a proof impression and was never used as a catalogue cover). Designed in the Art Nouveau style by Charles Conder (1868-1909) the zinc printing plate was photomechanically produced by Melbourne printers Fergusson & Mitchell (1857-1890s). (Charles Conder, *Block for the Front Cover of The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition Catalogue* 1889, estimate $60,000-90,000, lot 23, pictured and Charles Conder, *Proof Impression of the Front Cover of The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition Catalogue* 1889, estimate $10,000-15,000, lot 24, pictured).

‘With these three rare and remarkable offerings, Sotheby’s Australia provides a unique opportunity to present three vital aspects of the historical *The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition* of 1889 that acted as a catalyst in the history and development of Australian Art’ said Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Sotheby’s Australia.
AT A GLANCE

TOM ROBERTS, 1856-1931
With Wistful Eyes (1889)
Oil on wood panel
30.3 x 17.8 cm
Estimate $60,000-80,000

CHARLES CONDER 1868-1909 (designer)
FERGUSSON & MITCHELL, MELBOURNE (1857-1890s) (printer)
Block for the Front Cover of The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition Catalogue 1889
Zinc plate on wood
14 x 8.6 cm (plate); 14.4 x 8.6 x 2.2 cm (block)
Estimate $60,000-90,000

CHARLES CONDER 1868-1909 (designer)
FERGUSSON & MITCHELL, MELBOURNE (1857-1890s) (printer)
Proof Impression of the Front Cover of The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition Catalogue 1889
Engraving
14 x 8.6 cm (plate)
Estimate $10,000-15,000

Important Australian & International Art
Auction in Sydney, 25 November 2014, 6.30 pm
InterContinental Sydney, Treasury Room
117 Macquarie Street, Sydney

Exhibition in Melbourne
13-15 November, 10 am to 5 pm
Level 9, 41 Exhibition Street, Melbourne

Exhibition in Sydney
20-25 November, 10 am to 5 pm
30 Queen Street, Woollahra

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*Estimates do not include buyer’s premium and prices achieved include the hammer price plus buyer’s premium.

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