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# Whiteley Masterpiece Mesmerises Following Surprise Rediscovery

IMPORTANT AUSTRALIAN ART | AUCTION IN SYDNEY 16 MAY 2018

*Bathroom and Figure* 1963 last seen in public in London fifty-four years ago

One of the earliest paintings from Whiteley's internationally renowned series depicting the artist's wife and muse, Wendy, bathing



BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992, *Bathroom and Figure* 1963. Estimate \$350,000-450,000 © Wendy Whiteley

A masterpiece by celebrated Australian artist Brett Whiteley has been rediscovered in a private collection in Melbourne and will be offered for auction by Sotheby's Australia on Wednesday 16 May in Sydney. *Bathroom and Figure* 1963 (estimate \$350,000-450,000, pictured) was acquired by a Melbourne collector from Blue Boy Art Gallery in Melbourne more than 30 years ago and has remained hidden from public view for over half a century since it was last publicly exhibited at Marlborough Fine Art, London. The painting was created whilst Whiteley lived in London and at a time when his precocious talent was first recognised and celebrated by international critics, public institutions and collectors.

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*Bathroom and Figure* is one of the earliest paintings in an extended sequence of charcoals and oils in the highly acclaimed *Bathroom Series* depicting the artist's wife, Wendy, bathing, and merged abstract and figurative forms. When initially exhibited, the series caused a sensation and *Woman in a Bath 2* 1963 was promptly acquired by the Tate, London. Sotheby's Australia sold *Woman in a Bath 1* 1963 for \$976,000 in May 2013 (estimate \$200,000-300,000) to an international collector.

Whiteley's artistic maturity excelled following his initial travels to Europe in 1960. His paintings of the early 1960s – the red abstractions, the Sigean landscapes, the bathroom, zoo and Christie series – were the work of an artist in his early twenties and he soon became regarded as one of the most audacious and compelling artists of his generation.

*Bathroom and Figure* is composed of an almost abstract white womb-bath-bubble suspended from the picture's top edge, where Whiteley traces the fleshy curvature of a naked back in richly-impastoed and carefully-shaded naturalism. Formally, the smooth curve of Wendy's spine echoes that of the rounded end of the claw-foot bath, while her breast is doubly reflected in the sensuous lines of the adjacent soap dish and bath itself.

Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Sotheby's Australia commented: 'Sotheby's Australia is thrilled to have identified this major work of art that has been lost to art historians and curators for more than half a century. The painting is an exceptional example of Whiteley's singular vision and we anticipate great excitement from collectors in Australia and internationally.'

Brett Whiteley remains one of Australia's most collectable artists, and has been the subject of a recent biography and film. Strong demand for works by the artist continues with Sotheby's Australia selling 17 works of art by Whiteley in 2017, all exceeding their lower estimates and 5 achieving in excess of \$500,000.



BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992, *Woman in a Bath 1* 1963.  
Sold for \$976,000 May 2013.  
© Wendy Whiteley



BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992, *Woman in a Bath 2* 1963.  
Collection Tate, London  
© Wendy Whiteley

## AT A GLANCE

BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992

*Bathroom and Figure* 1963

oil and tempera on composition board

96.5 x 92 cm

Estimate \$350,000-450,000

Important Australian Art

Auction in Sydney, 16 May 2018, 6.30 pm

InterContinental Sydney, 117 Macquarie Street, Sydney

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