This first edition copy of *To Kill A Mockingbird* sold for $16,250 in October 2013.
Swann Galleries
Showing Strength in New Markets
As the auction house investigates new fields, it leaves its own mark on the future of the industry.

Leslie Hindman
The Art of the Book
Soviet propaganda meets the avant-garde aesthetic in Leslie Hindman’s upcoming sale.

Bonhams
Caren Archive Treasures
April 11 can’t come soon enough.

Morton
Glimpses Into a Monumental Past
Illuminating Mesoamerican history, one sale at a time.

I'm early 2012, CNN reported that a coin collection known as the Prospero Collection was going up for sale. A collection of ancient Greek coins, immensely rare, was expected to sell for millions of dollars when auctioned by British auction house A. H. Baldwin in New York.

British architect Richard Seifert, designer of London’s once tallest Centrepoint tower, among others, and the collector of the Prospero Collection, was largely unknown for this pursuit. Ten years after his death in 2001, the news was greeted with a “Who knew?” by many who did know him.

Seifert’s son, John, had picked up where his father had left off, and added to what would become a 642-piece collection when it was finally auctioned in 2012. One piece had an opening bid of $2.5 million.

When this news did finally break, what continued to be lost was that Seifert had also built a book collection on ancient Greek coinage. The book part of his collection did not go up for sale until last year in fixed priced lots.

It is not unusual to find magnificent libraries built around another interest of the collector. Indeed, the Prospero Collection library offered 313 lots, many of which were multi-volume sets. For Seifert and his son—and most other collectors of just about anything—a library is simply a necessity.

This library, though, wasn’t a shabby collection of secondhand afterthoughts. The Prospero Library was a carefully crafted tool, with many books rebound by Sangorski & Sutcliffe, one of the most prestigious binderies in the U.K.

And while many of these books were rare, firsts, and unique, most were not particularly old. In creating his tool for collecting, Seifert instead chose works from the past century, seeking the most up-to-date information available. It is clear, though, that he treasured his books, and I have spent hours reading through the catalogue, gaining an unexpected education.

Of note, only two lots in this collection were priced in the low five-figure pound range, including the twenty-nine-volume catalogue of Greek coins in the British Museum. The rest were priced between two, three, and four digits.

Seifert was a coin collector, not a book collector, but in books, he found a path to one of the great Greek coin collections assembled in the past century. It would be remiss to call Seifert an accidental book collector. Instead, I believe he was a book collector of the purest sort.

Two years ago, the New-York Historical Society offered a show of Audubon’s Birds of America. None turn to the highly collectable and contemporary author and illustrator, Mo Willems. With this and other stories from this year’s Rare Book Week in New York, we are happy to present you with this issue of Fine Books & Collections.

Webb Howell
Publisher
Swann Galleries@Auction

Showing Strength in New Markets

As the auction house investigates new fields, it leaves its own mark on the future of the industry.

Being the oldest continuously operating specialty auction house in New York inevitably comes with the pressure to preserve the integrity of an ancient industry while spearheading leadership in new markets. In the words of Swann Auction Galleries’ president Nicholas D. Lowry, the house’s historical mantle is “no light robe to bear,” though seventy-five years as a family-owned company has kept Swann “small enough to rapidly react to market changes.”

Along with preserving the integrity of auction traditions, Swann works to bring an expanding and diverse demographic of buyers to the auction world by staying at the forefront of emerging markets.

How does Swann stay abreast of the ever-fluctuating market? According to Lowry, it’s a matter of having the right people. “We’ve very much a company of collectors, for collectors. Many of our experts collect, and their experiences as participants in all parts of the market help direct our efforts.” One example of this experiential expertise is Swann Vice President and Director of photographs Emily Byrd Lowry, who brings her experiences as participants in the world of vernacular photography to Swann’s following.


“Swann is the only auction house to specialize in vernacular photography: snapshots, commercial imagery, family photo albums, and photo objects—which, according to Kaplan, “reflect new trends in visual culture, making this a dynamic genre fascinating to private collectors and museum curators alike.”

For example, early twentieth-century American mug shots and crime albums have explored more of our way, and this is exactly what happened with African-American Fine Art, which has seen amazing growth and success in the last few years.”

“Swann is the only auction house in the world with a department dedicated to African-American Fine Art, and that specialization paid off when the house landed “The Art Collection of Maya Angelou,” which it auctioned in September 2015. Among the items in that sale was Faith Ringgold’s stunning story quilt, Maya’s Quilt of Life, which realized $461,000 at auction. The success of “The Art Collection of Maya Angelou,” as well as other single-owner sales like the Lawrence M. Solomon Collection, makes “private collections another area that Swann is looking to expand across all its departments,” said Lowry, along with illustration art and American Art.

As a mainstay in the auction world, it’s expected that Swann will play a critical role in articulating the new and the next as they appear, breathing life into the industry while maintaining the house’s core values—authenticity, education, and a little bit of fun.

In the meantime, buyers can still expect Swann Galleries to deliver on art and storytelling in all its forms, from fascinating Americana to the works of Ansel Adams and Edgar Degas.
In 2014, Bonhams auction house broke the million-dollar mark in its sale of items from the Caren Archive. To date, the $1.3 million sale remains the highest amount realized for an auction of historical papers.

Now, Bonhams is preparing for “Treasurers from The Caren Archive II: How History Unfolds on Paper” on April 11. The Archive represents the most significant collection of historical paper outside of an institution in the U.S., with an estimated one million-plus photographs, documents, brochures, and newspapers represented.

Many of the items featured in the upcoming sale relate to past elections and presidential history, which portray quirky parallels with modern politics while providing insight into some of America’s most beloved political figures. One item generating significant buzz is a printing of George Washington’s “A Man of Honour,” which was an important precipitator of the French and Indian War. “One of the most moving things about this printing of the Washington Journal,” said Christina Geiger, Bonhams’ Director of Fine Books and Manuscripts, “is that it contains traces of the original hand that printed the words ‘A Man of Honour’ are inked in after Washington’s death.”

Many of the three hundred-plus items in the sale hearken back to the most prestigious and prominent figures in U.S. history, like George Washington, but there are just as many from lesser-known figures; these show history in the raw, not simply in official documents and books. In fact, Christina Geiger noted a growing fascination among collectors with the presentation of ordinary voices throughout history. In the current election year, “it’s so interesting to see the things that don’t really change, especially viewing the collection in the context of the current election year,” Geiger said. “We have newspapers with personal attacks on Thomas Jefferson, and we have newspapers with personal attacks on Teddy Roosevelt, with the problematic aspects of democracy, complete with the problematic aspects alongside inspiring and heart-warming memorabilia. For instance, there’s a hand-lettered felt banner for Teddy Roosevelt’s campaign with the xenophobic beginning, ‘We have room for but one flag and one language here.’ It’s so interesting to see the things that don’t really change, especially viewing the collection in the context of the current election year.”

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The Art of the Book
Soviet propaganda meets the avant-garde aesthetic in Leslie Hindman’s upcoming sale

Veer ing from its traditional April book sale, Leslie Hindman Auctioneers is blending its art and literary offerings with the May 5’s sale, “The Art of the Book.” The collection centers around works that use the form of the book itself as art, a style famously deployed by Dadaist, Futurist, and Constructivist artists throughout the twentieth century. Some key works feature the art of pioneers such as Picasso and Miro, while others represent intriguing work from contemporary artists of just the past few decades.

The foundation of this particular sale, however, is a collection of Soviet Constructivist children’s books procured from the University of Chicago library. The books—or more accurately, short booklets—were mass-produced after the Russian Revolution in the middle of Stalin’s five-year plan as part of a national publishing project. The works are replete with propaganda pertaining to the making of a new society, a new man, and a new ideology centered around collective efforts, and show with astounding clarity the connection between radical socialism and experimental aesthetics.

These eight- to ten-page booklets were distributed for home use and in-school lessons, and used vivid imagery to depict the power of collective action. For instance, one booklet illustrates children working together as a group to take a tree branch and transform it into a toy for common use. “The subjects reflect the ideals of the New Regime,” said director of consignments, Mary Williams Kohnke. “The artists, who were employed by the Soviet government, are really going along with the ideals of production and labor. But what’s interesting is that it’s the artists’ forms, more than the Soviet ideals they portrayed, that clearly lasted.”

It’s also remarkable that Leslie Hindman was able to obtain copies of the booklets, which were either stapled or sewn together, that had themselves lasted the test of time and survived in good condition. One of the most prominent authors in this remarkably preserved collection is the poet Samuil Marshak, who Maxim Gorky once referred to as “the founder of Russia’s children’s literary tradition.” Despite his employment by the state, Kohnke said Marshak’s ability to bring across his distinct poetic form in an imaginative format is one of the most engaging aspects of the collection. There’s also a striking sense of continuity between these books and the more modern works of the collection.

“Terms of the [children’s books’] forms, I see a lot of reflections in the contemporary artists’ books and the avant garde works,” Kohnke said. “They’re playing with visual poetry, and there’s no sense of narrative space. Instead, that background is replaced with simple forms and bright colors—things that will catch your eye and inspire imagination.”

There are also parallels between the Soviet lit and the contemporary artists’ books in that they have clear, if disparate, agendas. Kohnke said that many of the newer books particularly tout feminist ideology.

Because of the broad subject matter, intensely engaging visuals, and generally modest price point, Kohnke expects this sale to bring in a diverse group of buyers, while bringing art collectors and rare book aficionados into the same room—creating an exciting environment for everyone involved.

Emily Byrd lives in North Carolina and is the editorial coordinator of special publications at Journalistic, Inc.
Morton@Auction

Glimpses Into a Monumental Past

Illuminating Mesoamerican history, one sale at a time

In 1844, British artist and architect Frederick Catherwood indelibly changed the way the Western world imagined ancient life in Mesoamerica through his intricate drawings of lost cities and the awe-inspiring monuments and ruins within.

Catherwood, along with writer John Lloyd Stephens, compiled the accounts of their explorations in the collection Views of Ancient Monuments in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan. After reading a former account of the ruins of Copán written by Juan Galindo, Catherwood and Stephens were inspired to create a more vivid and complete view of Mayan ruins.

By all accounts, Views of Ancient Monuments succeeded in this regard, and the pair managed to shed light on many previously undocu-

mented sculptures.

Morton prides itself on consigning and selling compelling works that provide vital insight into Central and South American culture spanning the ages.

The remarkable growth of the brand in Mexico City has allowed the house to expand to its location in Houston, Texas, and Morton’s professionals conduct monthly auctions on fine books & manuscripts at their Mexico location.

In its history, Morton has facilitated the sale of original documents associated with some of the most significant figures in the history of Mexico, with signed items from names such as Miguel Hidalgo, José María Morelos y Pavón, Antonio López de Santa Anna, Benito Juárez, and many more. The auction house frequently focuses on items illuminating Mexican History and indigenous culture through the lens of its many explorers and biographers.

“Morton has enriched both national and international private collections through the large number of items consigned to its care,” Cruz said.

To date, one of Morton’s most notable sales has been a collection of sketches produced by the nineteenth-century Italian artist Claudio Linati, produced during an exploration of Mexico. Linati is famous for bringing the technology of lithography to Mexico in 1826, when he produced a periodical including lithographic images of fashion and antiquities. Despite the prejudice portrayed in Linati’s accompanying essays, his works remain intriguing pieces for collectors and enthusiasts of Latin American history.

Another fascinating item that has come through Morton’s doors was Bernal Díaz de Castillo’s The True History of the Conquest of New Spain. Castillo was a soldier and first-hand participant in the conquest of Mexico in the sixteenth century.

Castillo’s simplistic but searing style in True History narrates the conquest of Mexico, along with vivid descriptions of the places and people he encountered along the way, making it a highly coveted collectible.

By serving as a dependable source for unique historical documents and works on paper, Morton has made a name for itself that transcends borders.

Emily Byrd lives in North Carolina and is the editorial coordinator of special publications at Morton Subastas.
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