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Bonhams Fine Books and Manuscripts sale on March 9 in New York will cover a variety of materials with thirty-three lots spanning from a book by Augustinus published in 1468 through materials from the twentieth century. “Every lot in this sale is spectacular,” said Ian Lihning, director of the Bonhams Fine Books and Manuscripts department. “The sale comprises exceptional items, like an early Ptolemy atlas, important Newton manuscripts, a prism that was used by Benjamin Franklin for his scientific experiments, Gardner’s photographs of the Civil War, and a violin given to Albert Einstein shortly after he moved to the United States, in 1933. I leave it at that, you see, it is a sale of absolutely unique and important pieces.”

Two important lots are consigned by a descendant of Alexander Wheelock Thayer, a nineteenth-century American journalist whose five-volume biography of Ludwig van Beethoven is still considered a go-to resource for historians today. “Thayer was enamored by Beethoven and did a tremendous amount of research with people who actually knew the composer,” Lihning said. One of the lots for sale is an autograph manuscript sketch leaf that contains part of the score of the Scottish Songs “Sunset” Op. 108 no. 2, once owned by Thayer and estimated at $80,000-120,000. This was part of a series of Scottish, Irish, and Welsh folk songs composed by Beethoven and commissioned by George Thomson, a friend of Robert Burns. Thayer actually gave the leaf to Auguste Grimm, the daughter of Wilhelm Grimm of the Grimm Brothers. The leaf contains numerous corrections in Beethoven’s own hand. “To find a Beethoven manuscript on the market is already very difficult, so buyers interested in music will be delighted to be able to have a go on this one, especially with this provenance,” Lihning said. “This leaf shows a very simple piece of music, and you witness Beethoven’s genius at work. Composing a piece like this was not an easy process for him, and he revised and edited the piece several times.” Thayer was appointed to be a consul of the United States to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Trieste by Abraham Lincoln. Also included in this sale is Thayer’s appointment of Thayer to this post, with the president’s signature. It is estimated at $4,000-6,000. “The Lincoln appointment is interesting to anyone who collects Americana and anyone who is interested in music and Thayer and wants to connect to him through that document,” Lihning said. “A collector of presidential signatures could also have an interesting piece, as well as collectors of American history.”

Both the Beethoven manuscript and Lincoln’s appointment of Thayer are rare pieces up for auction for the first time. “These documents are both consigned by a descendant of the Thayer family and have never been offered before,” Lihning says. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to acquire something that was in the family possession for such a long time.”

The Bonhams Book department in New York has nine sales scheduled this year and also expects a strong season in London. During the March preview, the department will also exhibit highlights from a private Dutch collection of natural history books to be offered at Bonhams in London on May 30, 2018.
In Search of Historic Ireland

Forum Auctions’ March sale highlights the Emerald Isle.

On March 22, Forum Auctions will hold its second book sale of the year. Though the house is less than two years old, it is already holding sales for fine books and works on paper every other month. The March sale includes a wide variety of material, such as travel books, English and Continental literature, and history, manuscripts, with values ranging from about $400-10,000. The sale will also include unique sections, such as books owned by or inscribed “to” or “from” Edward Jenner, whose vaccination to prevent smallpox paved the way for immunology. A group of playbills from plays in which Charles Dickens acted will also be included in the sale. “These are playbills of British provincial theaters where Dickens would be appearing,” said Rupert Powell, deputy chairman and head of books at Forum. “It is really quite rare to have the playbills coming up for sale. There’s a big group of those, including one that’s actually annotated by Dickens himself, so that’s a one-off that’s very nice.”

Nearly one hundred lots in the sale will contain Irish material, including imprints, books on Irish topography, literature, and religion, atlases, plate books, and fine bindings by Irish binders.

A first edition of The History of the Town and Country of the Town of Galway by George Hardiman in a Mullen of Dublin green morocco gilt binding will be auctioned and is estimated at £1,000–1,500 ($1,500-2,000). “This is in spectacularly lovely condition,” Powell said. “It’s green morocco, as many Irish bindings are, and it’s signed in gilt by Mullen along the fore-edge of each cover.”

Jonathan Fisher’s Sonery of Ireland illustrated in a series of Prints of Selected Views, Castles, and Abbeys will also be up for sale. Worth an estimated £6,000–8,000 ($8,500-11,000), this book is one of the earliest collected views of Ireland and was so successful when it was published that it inspired a new wave of tourism to the Irish countryside. The book also contains a list of subscribers showing that fewer than one-hundred copies would have been printed. “It’s a rare book, and not many copies have survived intact,” Powell said. “I imagine some of these plate books are rare because they were so attractive. Over the years they were broken up, and the individual plates were hung on walls, so to find a complete book is quite unusual. There are a few plates that have been trimmed and mounted, but generally, they are in nice condition.”

Whether buying or considering Forum Auctions offers a wide variety of material and a friendly, experienced team. “All of us here have a lot of experience in the auction world, so we’re happy to help anybody who wants to either buy or sell rare books or works on paper at auction,” Powell said.

Peggy Caruthers lives in North Carolina and edits a daily blog of custom content at Journalistic Inc.

Fine Books and Works on Paper

Thursday 22nd March 2018 | The Westbury Hotel, London W1S 2YF
The sale will include Travel, English and Continental Literature, Manuscripts, Modern Firsts and wide-ranging Irish material covering Topography, Literature, Religion and bindings.

Full auction calendar and further details: www.forumauctions.co.uk
Contact: Rupert Powell | r.powell@forumauctions.co.uk | 020 7871 2640

Forum

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Forum
Freeman’s offers clients more than two centuries of book expertise.

Founded in 1805, Freeman’s is the oldest continuously running auction house in the United States. The house’s first significant auction was a book sale, and it now uses more than two hundred years of experience and tradition to aid buyers and consigners alike. Freeman’s new partners with Lyon & Turnbull in Scotland to foster an international connection and create focused auctions.

Benjamin Truesdale, a specialist in the Books, Maps, and Manuscripts department, explained what sets Freeman’s apart.

What makes the Freeman’s Books, Maps, and Manuscripts department unique?

We have a relatively small department; between the three of us, we have diverse knowledge and considerable experience. One of my favorite parts of the job is going anywhere at anytime to look at people’s books gratis. We talk with clients about what has auction potential and what doesn’t. We offer as much personal contact as possible. We’re also selective in what we take, and we have a competitive price point.

What types of items does your department like to offer?

I like to offer things that are challenging and topical and that relate to the current cultural climate. Anything with social historical value in printed books does very well, such as women’s literature, post-colonial literature, African-American, and Historical ephemera that is reflective of today’s events. A classic example for me is that a Sylvia Plath book would have sold for $200 in the 90s, but we sold a comparable proof copy of her first book, and it brought in $6,000. It shows where the market’s at, and it’s fun to offer items that will generate interest.

What are some of the highlights of the department?

The big autographs will always be big, like Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Einstein. We offer those items, but we also offer schoolgirl’s notebooks, kids’ Latin exercises from the eighteenth century, and economic legens that tell stories about that time. As a team, we focus on these types of items, and I personally believe in them. I think we’re more forward around these types of items because we don’t just offer them as secondary.

What can buyers look forward to in upcoming sales?

We’ve been fortunate to offer early architectural folios from a single collection. A lot are from the early nineteenth century up to some of the great archaeological digs of the early twentieth century.
An Unsung History
Swann Galleries’ sale highlights 300 years of African Americana.
Spend Every Day with Fine Books

The Fine Books website is updated daily with current news from the world of book collecting. Read original stories and learn about upcoming events and auctions.

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