Alex Colville's Harbour painting sells in auction for $1.88M with fees

Painting by renowned Nova Scotia artist sold for more than double estimated price

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Harbour, by Alex Colville, sold in an auction Thursday for $1.88-million. (Supplied by Heffel)

A painting by renowned Canadian artist Alex Colville sold in auction for $1.88 million Thursday, more than double the estimated result.

Harbour, painted in 1975 and still in its original frame, was estimated to sell for between $500,000 and $700,000, said David Heffel, president of Heffel Fine Art Auction House.

This latest sale of $1.88 million — or $1.6 million plus fees — beats the previous record sale of a Colville painting of $1.4 million at the hammer price, he said.

"It's a tremendous honour for our firm," Heffel said Thursday evening from the auction at Park Hyatt Hotel in Toronto.

"Colville was a great artist that was and is collected nationally in Canada and throughout his lifetime internationally collected, recognized and renowned."

This one drew interest for being a self-portrait of Colville, made more poignant by his death in 2013, Heffel said. Colville **died at his home in Wolfville, N.S., at age 92**.

'Eyes confronting you directly'

Harbour depicted Colville with his dog in a vintage 1970 Land Rover. In the background is a freighter in a harbour, "which could have been Vancouver, Halifax, Hamburg, anywhere in the world," Heffel said.

Colville's work often displays moments from his own life. (Fred Phipps/CBC)

"I've always felt that for an artist to create a self-portrait is very challenging. It works particularly when you have the artist's eyes confronting you directly," he said.

"The power of that painting really comes from the composition and the technical ability of Colville, which I think in the 1970s was the peak of his technical craft."

Colville 'had a feeling of intensity'

Colville's work led the post-war and contemporary art fall auction's program two decades ago, and was equally represented at Thursday's anniversary event, Heffel said.

Heffel frequently spent time with Colville and his wife, Rhoda, who is featured in many of Colville's pieces.

"I really felt he had a feeling of intensity when you spoke with Colville, that he spoke with authority," Heffel said.

"He built his paintings over a great deal of thought and time and mastering the composition — and also in his ability to draw from his life experiences."

Colville was a pre-eminent figure on the Canadian art scene since the Second World War, when he was a war artist. (CBC)