

Heffel art auction caters to collectors' cultural values

By Dana Gee, The Province

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Emily Carr's painting Forest Light will be on the block Wednesday at the Heffel Live Auction of Canadian art at the Vancouver Convention Centre. Estimated pre-sale value: \$400,000 - 600,000.

Heffel Spring Live Auction

When: May 27, 4 p.m. & 7 p.m.

Where: Vancouver Convention Centre

Info: heffel.com

This spring's Heffel live auction of Canadian art has drawn works from one of the greatest institutions in the world, and from a garage.

The prestigious Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York has offered up for sale Jean McEwen's Ochre Cell painting — which is being sold to benefit MOMA's acquisitions department and carries a pre-sale value of \$60,000-\$80,000.

While landing a consignment from MOMA is a big relationship-building deal, it is a lot more fun to know that the catalogue for the Heffel sale also holds a B.C. Binning abstract from 1957 that was in a box of paintings that sold at a garage sale in Ontario for under \$200. The Painted Structure in Space painting has a pre sale value \$10,000-\$15,000.

"We have had a few garage sale finds over the years, but not that many," laughed Heffel's Robert Heffel, who along with his brother David have been running their semi-annual live auctions (fall one is in Toronto) since 1995.

While those two paintings make for great conversation pieces, the bottom line of the story is what will pull in the highest price out of the 145 lots on the block at the Vancouver Convention Centre on May 27 (4 p.m., Canadian postwar & contemporary art; 7 p.m., Canadian fine art).

And since this is an auction of Canadian art, it's no surprise that Emily Carr's acclaimed Forest Light holds the largest pre-sale value, between \$400,000-\$600,000. An interesting fact about this mature work of Carr's is that she herself sold it to collector J.S. McLean in 1937 and it has remained in the McLean family since then.

Heffel, it should be noted, holds the record for the highest Carr sale with it's 2013 selling of The Crazy Stair to collector Michael Audain for \$3.39 million. That piece will hang in Audain's new Whistler gallery, which is set to open at the end of November.

Also included in the sale are three pieces from Quebec artist Paul-Emile Borduas, founder of the Automatists group. His piece, Chant d'ete, is pre-saled at \$400,000-\$500,000.

All of the Group of Seven are represented in the sale including four pieces from Lawren Harris, who incidentally is being celebrated in an upcoming exhibition at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.

The sale has an overall conservative pre-sale value of between \$7-\$10 million.

"Certainly the market has really grown. Our auctions in the nineties would be a million dollars in total. Now we sell single paintings for \$1 million plus," said Heffel.

As evidenced by the upcoming Harris show in L.A. and the very successful Emily Carr retrospective at London's Dulwich Picture Gallery, it's clear Canadian art is doing very well on the international scene.

But according to Heffel, it still resonates with Canadian collectors for being, well, Canadian.

"I'd say it is more of a value thing in Canada where people want to own their culture and have a piece of their culture, and the fringe benefit over time is it can be good place to put some money," said Heffel.

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