

An Eclectic Selection

BY NICK WATERS

Every once in a while, something very special appears on the market. One of those occasions happened in Scotland when Thomas Callan Auctioneers offered a carved Irish bog oak or yew throne chair. It was marked for Arthur J. Jones and Son of Dublin and dated 1850. Established in Dublin in 1820, the firm was multitalented, being auctioneers, valuers, house and land agents, even undertakers, but above all cabinet makers.

This chair was probably part of a large suite of furniture produced for the 1851 Great Exhibition in London. The arched back is carved with a castle turret and stag over a harp, surrounded by oak leaves, flanked on either side with two busts of historical figures, perhaps the ancient High Kings of Ireland and with the original floral upholstered back. The arms are carved with two Irish Wolfhounds, one sitting, the other lying, and the chair stands

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on raised, large, out-swept paw feet. The design and decoration illustrate the history, antiquities, animals and vegetation of Ireland.

It was billed as the star lot of the sale with an estimate of £2,000-3,000, one that was obviously going to be left standing. The online bidding took the bids to £24,000, phones took it to around £30,000, and then two phone bidders – one in London, the other in Ireland battled – it out to a final £44,000, with London winning the day. The price with 20% buyer's premium and VAT was over £53,000.

In Ireland, auctioneers Whytes offered for sale with an estimate of Euros 800-1,000 two bronzes of playful Scottish Terriers by Marguerite Kirmse, both with the artist's stamp and foundry mark. The foundry was the Gorham Manufacturing Company, founded in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1831 by Jabez Gorham, and today is one of the largest American manufacturers of sterling silver and silverplate. It continues to have a foundry for bronze sculpture. The White House has used Gorham silver services during many administrations.

Marguerite Kirmse was born in England in 1864, but left her mark on the canine art world while living in America. She trained as a harpist and became friends with the Harrison sisters, accomplished violinists and cellists who established the famous Sanctuary kennel of Irish Wolfhounds. A versatile artist, Marguerite's reputation has endured

through her etchings, many of which feature her favorite breed, the Scottish Terrier, and the humor she brought to her etchings is mirrored in these bronzes.

As well as her etchings and bronzes, Marguerite also worked in pencil, pastel and oil. Her illustrations were reproduced in a number of books, most notably her "Dog," published by the Derrydale Press (1935) in a limited edition of 750. In the early 1950s, just before she died, Wedgwood produced for the American market, under the title "The American Sporting Dog Plates," a set of twelve cabinet plates from designs by Marguerite. These were followed by "exclusive" editions in full color of 200 plates for different international markets.

There is much Roman pottery that has survived the centuries, and particularly collectable are the small terracotta oil lamps such as the two illustrated with the more unusual canine embellishment. The dogs one associates with the Roman Empire are gladiatorial breeds for fighting, baiting, hunting and bringing down large game – breeds that are behind some of today's molossus breeds such as the Mastiff and Neapolitan Mastiff. The one illustrated shows a large fighting dog, the other a dog bringing down a stag, and they have a price tag of £340 and £480 respectively with the Charles Ede Gallery in London.

Dummy boards are life-size flat wooden figures painted and shaped to resemble figures such as

servants, soldiers, children, tools, plants and animals. During the 18th and 19th centuries these decorative objects were highly fashionable among European elite, especially the English and Dutch, and it is the Netherlands where they most likely originated. They were often placed in corners of rooms and on stairways to surprise visitors.

The quality was often quite high, as many were painted by professional sign painters who also produced hanging street signs up to the late 18th Century. The one here depicting a large dog with cropped ears is oil on canvas laid onto a pine board and was made in Italy, probably in the early years of the 18th Century. It is priced at £7,500 with Matthew Holden European Works of Art in London, and has a provenance to the Galerie Kugel in Paris.

"I am his highness's dog at Kew; Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?" reads an epigram that Alexander Pope wrote and had engraved on the collar of one of his puppies he gave to Frederick, Prince of Wales, in 1736. Over the years, Pope's bitch "Bounce" produced a number of puppies, many which he gave to noblemen.

Such inscriptions became quite commonplace on the brass collars that were popular in the 18th and 19th centuries. "Steal me not but let me jog; For I am Mrs Gwynn's dog" is the engraved epigram on an early 19th-Century brass collar with rolled edges being offered by Bishop and Miller Auctioneers with an estimate of £600-800.

The history of automatons centers very much on Switzerland and France, with France being the possible home of the white fur Spitz with curled tail and prick ears that operates by clockwork and jumps into a standing position. It was sold by Aldridge Auctioneer for £350 against a top estimate of £200. Some automatons are very complex in design, and many were made as much for the amusement of adults as they were for children.



I've featured before so-called "Black Forest" wood carvings, and their quality ranges from cheap tourist mementos to carvings produced by accomplished craftsmen. Many of the better ones originate from Brienz in Switzerland, as did this group of a St. Bernard bitch with her three puppies.

Made toward the end of the 19th Century, the detail of the carving is exceptional, even down to the attached rope, and it is attributed to Walter Mader, who, along with his son Heinrick, were both master carvers at Brienz. Both father and son often carved St. Bernard dog families. Offered by Catherine Southon auctioneers with tempting expectations of between £800-1,200, not surprisingly it went way above, finding a new home for £4,000 hammer.

