

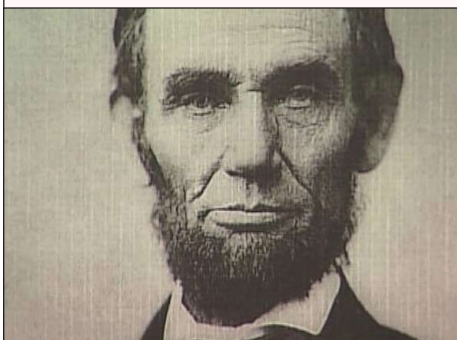


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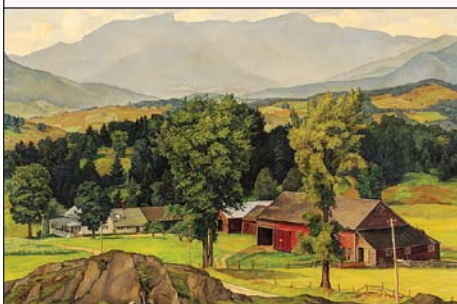
News, Trends, and Analysis from the World of Antiques and Collectibles

ON THE LOOKOUT



HONEST... ABE SETS MARK

An anonymous bidder at Christie's paid \$3.443 million for Abraham Lincoln's handwritten 1864 election victory speech. The price set an auction record for an American document. See p. 3 for photo and details.



A QUIET COUNTRY LIFE

Maybe it's today's hectic pace that has so many of us wishing for a simpler life, or for a quiet country setting. And maybe it was a longing for those qualities that pushed up the bidding on *Vermont Farm*, a wonderful painting by Luigi Lucioni (American, 1900–1988). The 18 1/8 x 27 1/8-inch oil on canvas went into a Skinner sale with an estimate of \$15,000–\$25,000 and sold for \$94,800.

“OH BEAUTIFUL...”

Everyone knows the song: “America the Beautiful.” In March, Heritage Galleries put Katharine Lee Bates' handwritten lyrics to the anthem on the block. The single sheet sold for a hefty \$22,705 (see photo, p. 6).

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SEW CLASSIC... AND PRACTICAL

Sewing tables, sometimes called “women’s workbenches,” are a time-honored and useful furniture form.

By Jane Viator

For hundreds of years, in cultures all over the world, sewing has been an essential task. Traditionally, it was one of the first skills that little girls learned, far more important than reading and writing—accomplishments that few females were expected or even encouraged to master until comparatively recent times.

Making, re-fashioning, and repairing



At Sotheby's in Amsterdam in October 2008, this birch, fruitwood, and mahogany marquetry sewing table fetched \$6,210.

clothing and household textiles occupied countless hours of a woman's time. Excellence in needlework was a source of pride and often of much-needed income. And who knows? We may yet see a revival, because in today's uncertain economic climate, sewing could again become a highly valued skill.

It was only in the mid-1700s that sewing tables, also known as worktables, became popular as a distinct furniture form. Prior to that era, most furniture was multipurpose. Few houses were large enough and few people were wealthy enough to have many pieces of furniture designed for a specific, limited use.

Today, antique sewing tables that have survived the years make appealing pieces and add a vintage touch to a room. Whether used for their original purpose or not, they're versatile as well as convenient.

Cont'd. on p. 14



Note the sewing table in this Fritz von Uhde painting from 1883. It's called *Dutch Seamstresses (Sisters in the Sewing Room)*, and it sold for \$104,500 in a 2004 sale at Sotheby's.

Jane Viator is a California-based writer and proprietor of *Past Perfect*, a decorative arts consulting business. She wrote about Andrew Wyeth last month and the Palm Beach Jewelry, Art, & Antique Show tables this month (p. 5).



Photo courtesy of Skinner

Photos courtesy of Sotheby's



SPLendor IN THE SUNSHINE STATE

Recession or not, the shows must go on... so we checked in on one of the best. Our intrepid senior contributing editor snooped around at a major Florida antiques show for trends and treasures.

By Jane Viator

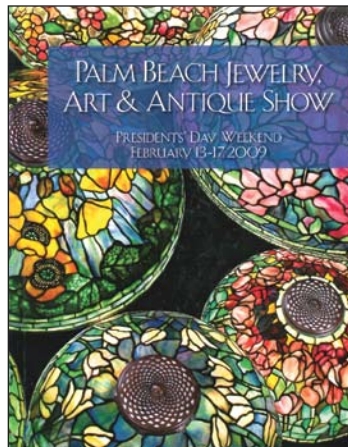
Southern Florida is renowned for its sun, sand, and social scene—and for the eclectic Palm Beach Jewelry, Art, & Antique Show. The five-day event is huge, offering quality items in more than 200 booths stocked by dealers from around the world.

The latest Palm Beach show closed on Feb. 17, putting the lid on its sixth annual event. As always, there was no shortage of spectacular pieces on display. This show, though, had the challenge of being scheduled amid a struggling U.S. economy.

MONEY MATTERS...

...In fact, money matters a lot. Right now, there's much less of it being spent on art and antiques. The Palm Beach, Fla., area has been especially hard hit, since it was ground zero to the recent financial disaster involving longtime Wall Street investor Bernard Madoff. (Madoff was charged in December 2008 with carrying out possibly the biggest swindle ever perpetrated by one man, according to reports. His investment firm, he told authorities, "cheated investors of \$50 billion," according to *The Wall Street Journal*.)

Not surprisingly, dealers at the Palm Beach Jewelry, Art, & Antique Show acknowledged that business was slow. But they added that high-end events like this are about much more than making big sales. Multiple exhibitors approached by *Insider* expressed a similar philosophy: Big shows are an opportunity to network, to meet new clients and old colleagues, and to take the pulse of the market and find out what's hot and what's not.



The entrance to the show. And yes, all those roses are real.

Furthermore, in a business where image matters a great deal, it's important to see and be seen in the right places by the right people.

What are the economics of doing a prestigious show like this one in Palm Beach? One dealer was willing to share some hard figures. His cost for the five-day event would be around \$18,000, including booth rent (his was average size), travel, and hotel. By the fourth day, he'd sold three of his less expensive paintings, but he didn't expect to cover his expenses before the show closed.

It's easy to see why most of the items offered at such shows are in the four-figure range and up—way up. This is the high end of a luxury trade. But for the price of admission (\$15 for a one-day pass, \$25 for a four-day pass), you got not only a full-color hardbound catalog (see cover at left) and access to an excellent series of lectures,

but you got to see the best of the best, "up close and personal."

MAKING THE ROUNDS

As the name suggests, the Palm Beach Jewelry, Art, & Antique Show really is three events in one. The order in which the categories are listed accurately represents the mix in this event, as we discovered in perusing the offerings.

The jewelry was head-turning. There was lots of it, the quality was superb; and the prices are generally in line with the dazzle factor (although we did see some great pieces that wouldn't break even a struggling bank).

The show offered a premier opportunity to all kinds of estate jewelry: previously owned pieces ranging from 18th-century "paste" (early imitation-stone jewelry) to recent designer items from great names like Tiffany, David Webb, Yurman, Lalounis... the list goes on.

Jane Viator is a California-based writer and proprietor of Past Perfect, a decorative arts consulting business. She wrote about Andrew Wyeth in last month's issue and about sewing tables this month (see p. 1).



Photo by J. Viator



The priciest piece in the entire show was an 18-carat pink diamond from Australia's Argyle mine. Retail: \$12 million, from Rosenberg Diamonds.

This group of marine-themed jewelry includes: cufflinks, \$1,200 per pair; starfish earrings, \$6,500; 1950s gold starfish, \$1,200; and moonstone and black diamond starfish, \$4,200.



The art, from impressionist oil paintings to masterful drawings to soaring sculptures, represented a wide variety of genres, media, and subjects. Judging from the quantity of art glass, these sparkling light-catchers were particular favorites of both dealers and collectors.

The show's antiques were mainly decorative items of more recent vintage than the 18th-century formal furniture that dominates most major antique shows. Palm Beach is a giant playground, and at the February event, playfulness was a major theme, from furniture incorporating pretty nudes to whimsical Art Deco accent pieces.

Looking at a dazzling array of objects spanning centuries and continents, we wondered if a recurring theme would become evident in all of the show's categories. Indeed it did. Palm Beach is a premier seaside resort, so it wasn't surprising to see so many objects with a marine emphasis: seascapes, nautical decorative items, jewelry, and ceramics that conjured up sea breezes.

BLING! FOR JEWELRY JUNKIES

Fittingly, jewelry is a major highlight of the Palm Beach show. This is a town, after all, noted for socialites who like

to make a splash, so there's always a "need" (relatively speaking, of course) for another bracelet or necklace or ring to wear to the next charity gala.

Among the most eye-catching jewelry we spotted was at the Owl's Roost Antiques booth: a group of one-of-a-kind contemporary pieces featuring sea creatures. Especially appealing were a set of octopus cufflinks and a pair of starfish earrings, all mainly made of coral. They were modestly priced, relatively speaking, at between \$1,200 and \$6,500 (see photo caption above), making them all the more fun because the person wearing them wouldn't require a bodyguard.

The earrings came with a great story. As dealer Sandy Steinberg's daughter was placing them in the display case, she noticed that one of the diamonds in the center was missing. Bad! A few moments later, she found the missing stone, embedded in the carpet of the booth. Good! In fact, it was nearly miraculous; talk about a needle in a haystack...

THE FINEST IN FINE ART

Paintings and art on display at the Palm Beach show included museum-quality examples and well-known names, from a Matisse drawing (\$285,000) to a Grandma Moses winter scene (\$385,000). One large booth featured Russian art, mainly icons—an indication of what major buyers (both of new Palm Beach real estate and traditional Czarist-era art) the Russian oligarchs have become.

A standout painting that underlined the marine emphasis of the show was a large Andrew Wyeth watercolor of a Maine lighthouse (see our March 2009

issue, p. 1, for a tribute to Wyeth). The work was priced at \$625,000.

A nostalgic portrayal of a moonlit Venetian lagoon by American impressionist Oliver Dennett Grover continued the theme of sea and sky. That one was tagged \$32,500 at David Brooker Fine Art.

There were paintings by Florida artists too. Art Link International offered a spectacular sunset of palm trees at the water's edge entitled *Winter Firesky*. It was painted in 1980 by Harold Newton, one of a group of African-American landscape painters known as The Highwaymen because they sold their work mainly at roadside galleries along Florida's major tourist routes. This example was priced at \$13,500; eight or 10 years ago, paintings by The Highwaymen could be bought for \$1,000 or less.

ANTIQUES: VARIATIONS...

Mention "antiques" and most people think of dignified furniture, fragile porcelain, massive sterling silver. Plenty of those types of pieces highlighted the Palm Beach show, but the most memorable items were unusual objects featured by dealers whose clients have a special

Photo by J. Viator



Left: This set of salon table and chairs by French Art Nouveau cabinetmaker Louis Majorelle had a price tag of \$68,000 at Antique D'zynes. Right: Spencer Marks in Southampton, Mass., offered this large and rare French silver Ancien Regime coffee pot by Jean-Ange Joseph Loque.



Photos by J. Viator

Photo courtesy of Palm Beach Jewelry, Art. & Antique Show



A Dutch dealer, Iris Antique Globes, displayed this handsome c. 1860 English Newton globe.

liking for the offbeat and beautiful. One such item was most certainly the oldest at the show: a 6-foot-high limestone fossil panel of pre-historic fish and plant life. The piece could be a collage of undersea life found in the waters off modern-day Palm Beach. All of the 50-million-year-old fossils are from a private quarry in Wyoming. A small table with remarkably life-like fossil fish seemed a bargain at \$1,700. Very antique, very durable, and one of a kind.

In keeping with the nautical theme, there were lots of globes and maps from the days before GPS systems. One dealer displayed a pair of small mid-19th century tabletop globes, celestial and terrestrial, for \$25,000. A large standing library globe with elaborate paw feet and a compass mounted in the base was offered in another booth for \$100,000.



This set of five Carlton lobster service luncheon plates had a price tag of \$195.

Walking through a football-sized exhibit space can work up a powerful appetite. Perhaps that's why we were especially struck by three sets of tableware from Circa of Newburyport, Mass.

Why so appetizing? Because each set featured bright red, edible-looking lobsters. One was Royal Bayreuth from around 1900; another was mid-20th-century English Carlton ware; and the third was 1930s–40s Brad Keeler pottery from California. Each is colorful and fun, and their prices were modest enough that there'd be enough money left to buy a real lobster to put on the plates. 🌟

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