

Judge’s not-so-sober art collection finds buyers

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When the art collection of former Family Court judge and Olympic rower Paul Guest was offered at auction this week, its contents may well have raised some eyebrows.

Sedate images and orthodox subject matter might seem fitting to the near monastic habits a judge of the courts is meant to observe. But such works were nowhere to be seen as 140 gutsy, psychologically charged artworks from the Guest collection raced through Gibson’s Auctions of Melbourne.



The late Olympic rower and Family Court judge, Paul Guest KC.

And successfully they went, too, with sales for the Guest works totalling \$136,227 (including buyer’s premium, as will all sold figures in this report) against combined low estimates of \$78,190. It’s worth remembering that estimates do not take buyer’s premium into account.

Guest, who died in March, had mingled with artists since the 1960s, forming lifelong friendships within the blokey coterie of leading Melbourne painters that included major personalities such as **Gareth Sansom** and the late **Jan Senbergs**.

Senbergs' widow, Helen Beresford, sister of film director Bruce Beresford, told Saleroom that Guest was "a real bloke's bloke".

Gregarious and confident, Guest nevertheless deferred to his artist mates when it came to what was good and what to buy.

"He didn't go for pretty pictures," Beresford said. "He was probably guided by Jan, **Les Kossatz** and **Andrew Sibley**."



The Mirror, 1972, by Andrew Sibley fetched \$9375 (including buyer's premium) in Gibson's auction of the Paul Guest collection on September 14.

Other mates included artists **George Baldessin**, **Paul Partos**, **Robert Jacks**, **Denise Green**, **Gordon Bennett** and **Justin Andrews**.

These friends leant towards the tough end of the painting spectrum, as the auction demonstrated.

The prices fetched weren't high, but the works that were sent to auction were presumably the smaller, less valuable items left after Guest gave 200 artworks valued at about \$2 million to Bendigo Art Gallery in 2019.

The top price of \$9375 was achieved by **Andrew Sibley**'s painting *The Mirror*, 1972, which was estimated at \$2000 to \$4000. The oil on canvas appears to depict a startled person with one arm chopped off at the elbow.

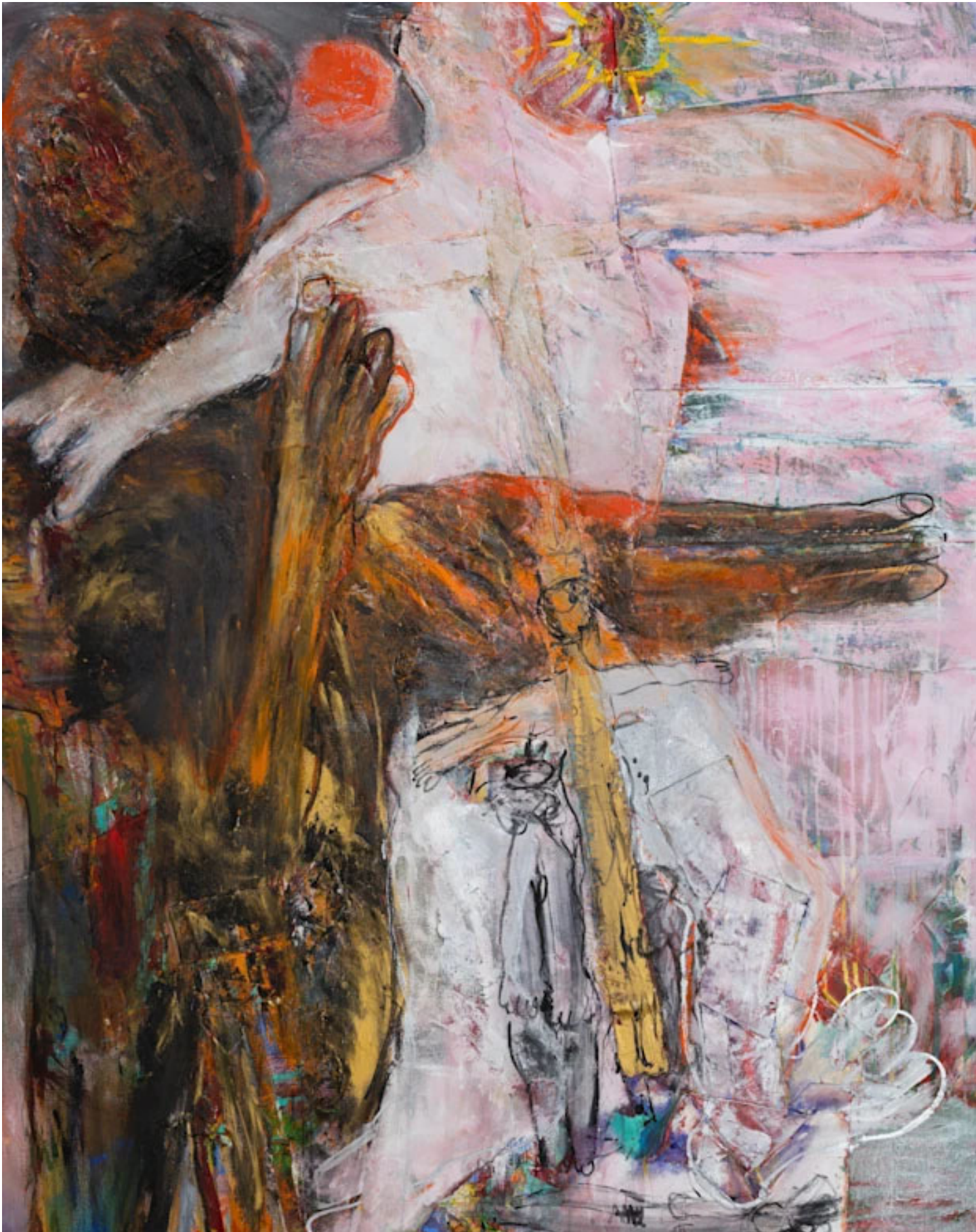




Business as Usual No.1, 2003 by Anthony Breslin fetched \$937.50 (including buyer's premium) at Gibson's sale of the Paul Guest collection.

The second-highest price was \$5750 for **Jordan Spedding's** abstract painting, *Counterbalance #2*, 2012, in jarring reds and blues.

Elsewhere in the sale were paintings by **Patricia (Pat) Harry**, **Richard Crichton**, **Senbergs**, **Sansom**, **Jeremy Kibel** and **Anthony Breslin**.



Subjugation, 1990, by Patricia (Pat) Harry fetched \$3750 (including buyer's premium) at Gibson's.

Breslin's creepy portrait, *Business as Usual No.1*, 2003, fetched \$937.50.

It harks back to some of the disturbing portraits of the serial killer John Christie that **Brett Whiteley** did in London in the 1960s.

Harry's big, muscular painting, *Subjugation*, 1990, fetched \$3750. Kibel's painting on tarpaulin, *Head*, 2012, fetched \$1500. Its mask-like face makes immediate reference to **Picasso's** early breakthrough work, *Les Femmes d'Alger*.



Head, 2012, by Jeremy Kibel fetched \$1500 (including buyer's premium) in Gibson's sale of the Paul Guest collection.

Three works by Senbergs were sold.

An abstract in dour colours called *The Main Body*, 1965, fetched \$2500. An oil painting called *Two Workers* fetched \$2125. And a wonderfully expressive lithograph titled *Port Panorama*, 1980, fetched \$750.



Two Workers, by Jan Senbergs, fetched \$2125 (including buyer's premium) in Gibson's sale of the Paul Guest collection.

No fewer than 15 works by Sansom were offered, with only one passed in.

They included the unsettling and slightly bizarre mixed media work on paper, *Almost Twins*, 1964, where limbs and heads seem to have trouble matching. It fetched \$1750.

Crichton's *Head of Seaman 3*, 1966, is likewise not an image of carefree prosperity. It's more of a strangled howl.



Almost Twins, 1964, by Gareth Sansom fetched \$1750 (including buyer's premium) in Gibson's September 14 sale of the Paul Guest collection.

These works are not easy, and neither is rowing. In that sport, Paul Guest was a triple Olympian (Rome, Tokyo and Mexico City), and five-time King's Cup winner.

As a lawyer, the Guest was appointed a judge of the Family Court of Australia in 1998 where he served until his retirement in 2008. He was admitted to the Victorian Bar in 1969 and was appointed QC in 1983.



Head of Seaman 3, 1966, by Richard Crichton fetched \$2350 (including buyer's premium) in Gibson's September 14 sale of the Paul Guest collection.

Guest lived in Melbourne, so the respected Bendigo Art Gallery was not far away. His gift of artworks to the Bendigo Art Gallery was the largest in its history, the gallery's curator Emma Busowsky told Saleroom.

“It included masterpieces by **Gordon Bennett**, **Roger Kemp** and **John Pule**, among many other significant contemporary and modern artists. He was a wonderful patron and friend to the gallery,” Busowsky said.

The Paul Guest works were sold in Gibson's auction “Interiors | Private Collections”, which also featured 111 lots from the estate of Peter de Campo, the Melbourne property developer and designer who died in June.



Paul Guest and Raelene Boyle (left) model Olympic uniforms ahead of the Mexico City Games in 1968.

Stylistically eclectic items ranged from a Murano glass chandelier (\$4750 against estimate of \$500 to \$800) to a ceremonial board from the Sawos people of Papua New Guinea (\$4250), and a Tahiti table lamp by **Ettore Sottsass** (\$2000).

Two 18th century Aubusson tapestries fetched the highest prices in the de Campo sale. Lot 165, depicting a romantic, Chinese-inspired landscape with a pagoda and large birds, sold for \$40,000 against its estimate of \$15,000 to \$20,000. Lot 210, similarly alive with exotic birds and romantic pavilions, fetched \$30,000 (estimate \$12,000 to \$15,000).

Elsewhere on the auction scene, Leonard Joel's "Women Artists" sale on Monday night achieved a total result of \$512,750 with a sell-through rate of 81 per cent and 100 per cent by value.

A lovely **Clarice Beckett** oil painting titled *Sherbrooke* fetched \$55,000, the highest price of the night.



Sherbrooke, by Clarice Beckett, sold for \$55,000 on an estimate of \$30,000 to \$40,000 in Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction in Melbourne on September 14.

Marie Anne Tuck's rather sombre painting, *Breton Woman*, c.1910, was estimated at just \$6000 to \$8000 but sold for an astonishing \$27,500 – the second-highest price on the night.



Breton Woman, c 1910, by Marie Anne Tuck, sold for \$27,500 including premium, above an estimate of \$6000 to \$8000 at Leonard Joel's auction of women artists in Melbourne on September 14.

Tuck (1866-1947) was a South Australian artist who realised her dream of studying in Paris at the age of 40, according to the book *Odd Roads to be Walking: 156 Women Who Shaped Australian Art*, by Paul Finucane and Catherine Stuart.

Tuck spent summers in the villages of Brittany, and her portrait presumably dates from this time.

Equal third-highest price of \$18,750 was shared by the **Lill Tschudi** linocut, *Visiting Day*; **Dora Wilson**'s pretty oil painting *The Red Door*, c.1935, and **Mary Cecil Allen**'s painting (*Reflections*), c.1920.



The Red Door, by Dora Wilson c.1935 fetched \$18,750 including buyer's premium, in Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction.

Works by **Roma Thompson** (1919-2020), **Marion Jones** (1897-1977), **Jessie Lavington Evans** (1860-1943) and **June Mackenzie** (1927-2005) all shot out of the starting blocks to achieve much higher prices than the auction house predicted.

For instance, Thompson's beautifully composed picture, *Abstract*, sold for \$11,250 against an estimate of just \$800 to \$1200.

Abstract, by Roma Thompson, fetched \$11,250 including buyer's premium in Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction.

Marion Jones' gorgeous oil on canvas, *Portrait*, 1912, fetched \$10,000 against an estimate of \$800 to \$1200.

Here's an interesting coincidence. Bendigo Art Gallery, eventual recipient of the Paul Guest gift, opened in 1890.

Marion Jones was born in the town seven years later, the daughter of a local barrister. She died in Bendigo in 1977 and would have known the gallery well.

Study of Seated Dancer, c.1980 by Constance Stokes was estimated at \$4000 to \$6000 but remained unsold in Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction.

Oddly, a number of the highest estimated works in Leonard Joel's Women Artists sale were passed in. These included **Nora Heysen's** two floral paintings estimated at \$20,000 to \$25,000, and \$12,000 to \$18,000.

Neither of the **Margaret Olleys** sold. A lovely floral work by **Vida Lahey** was passed in on an estimate of \$5000 to \$7000. A **Constance Stokes** drawing of a dancer failed to sell

(\$4000 to \$6000), and even an **Ethel Carrick Fox** (\$8000 to \$12,000) was not wanted.

Leonard Joel head of art Wiebke Brix expressed surprise, but had a theory.

“Perhaps what we see reflected in the results is the fact that collectors focused on the opportunity to acquire works by undiscovered artists,” Brix said.

Girl Reading, 1963 (also known as Girl Reading at a Table), by Margaret Olley, carries an estimate of \$25,000 to \$35,000 in Leonard Joel’s Women Artists auction.

“Margaret Olley, Nora Heysen and Constance Stokes are the more established names in this context.”

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Elizabeth Fortescue writes the Saleroom column and about the visual arts. She was previously arts editor at The Daily Telegraph and is Australia correspondent for The Art Newspaper.