

Smith&Singer

Melbourne | +61 (0)3 9508 9900 | Thomas Austin | Thomas.Austin@smithandsinger.com.au

AVIAN MASTERPIECE FROM HISTORIC BRETT WHITELEY EXHIBITION MAKES AUCTION DEBUT AT SMITH & SINGER

*Featured in 'Brett Whiteley: Birds' Exhibition in 1988, 'White Corella' 1987, is
Among Whiteley's Most Iconic Avian Subjects*



BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992

White Corella 1987

oil on canvas, 106.3 x 91.1 cm

frame: original, Brett Lichtenstein, Sydney

Estimate \$600,000–800,000

© Wendy Whiteley

MELBOURNE, 27 August 2020 – On 2 September, Smith & Singer will have the privilege of offering Brett Whiteley's avian masterpiece, *White Corella* 1987, at auction for the first time. With the insatiable energy of its subject and vibrancy of its palette, *White Corella* is regarded as one of Whiteley's most iconic paintings of a bird, a motif that the artist returned to with ardour throughout his career, culminating with the exhibition in which this work was presented.



Geoff Lung
Brett Whiteley (1988)

© Geoff Lung 2020

WHITE CORELLA 1987: TRIUMPH OF AN AVIAN FASCINATION

Brett Whiteley's *White Corella* 1987 (lot 12, estimate \$600,000–800,000, pictured above) is undoubtedly one of the most exuberant, joyous and irreverent of all of Whiteley's avian subjects. The bird appears cross-eyed, bathing in a waterhole on the top of Uluru, or Ayers Rock as it was known then, with the curve of the massive sandstone monolith offset by the clarity of the expansive blue sky.

Within Whiteley's protean output – landscapes, interiors and still lifes, figure paintings, nudes and animals – there is nevertheless a number of persistent, recurrent motifs and symbols, Birds are a particular favourite, representing for the artist 'the essential symbol of the song of creation.' (1) The poet Robert Gray shared the

artist's enthusiasm, declaring that '... Whiteley's bird paintings ... embodied his finest feeling; they are to me his best work. I like in the bird shapes that clarity; that classical, haptic shapeliness; that calm – those clear, perfect lines of a Chinese vase. The breasts of his birds swell with the most attractive emotion in his work. It is bold, vulnerable and tender.' (2)

When Whiteley returned to the long-loved theme in his 1988 exhibition *Brett Whiteley: Birds*, it represented a celebration of his life and career: 'My new exhibition is the most exacting in terms of beauty. Serenity, peace, order are the most difficult states to aspire to.' (3) Typically for a Whiteley 'event-happening-performance', the exhibition received extensive attention and media coverage, with the Prime Minister of Australia, Bob Hawke and his wife, Hazel, attending the opening amongst others. Pictures of the event taken by Geoff Lung appeared in *Vogue Living* and sales were unprecedented – among which was the exhibition's most lauded work, *White Corella*.

Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Smith & Singer commented: 'Earlier this year, Smith & Singer had the honour of presenting this remarkable painting to the public in our major loan exhibition, *Brett Whiteley: The Line of Beauty*. Held in our Sydney galleries, and with all proceeds from the exhibition and associated events directed to support The Brett Whiteley Studio, *White Corella* was undoubtedly one of the stand-out stars of the show. Now offered at auction for the first time, Smith & Singer is proud to have been entrusted with the sale of this exquisite canvas, and are delighted to invite the public to take this opportunity to view this distinctly Australian painting in our Sydney galleries from 26 August to 2 September, ahead of its sale.'

EXCEPTIONAL RESULTS FOR AVIAN SUBJECTS BY WHITELEY AT SMITH & SINGER



BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992
Shao (1978)
oil and collage on board, 100.6 x 78.4 cm
Private Collection
Sold Sotheby's Australia (now trading as
Smith & Singer), 21 November 2017 for
\$1,159,000



BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992
The Robin and the Moon 1981
oil on canvas, 86.5 x 86.5 cm
Private Collection
Sold Sotheby's Australia (now trading as Smith
& Singer), 31 August 2016 for \$1,098,000

(1) Barry Pearce, *Australian Artists, Australian Birds*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1989, p. 144

(2) Robert Gray, 'A Few Takes on Brett Whiteley', *Art and Australia*, Sydney, Vol. 24, No. 2, Summer 1986, p. 222

(3) Brett Whiteley, quoted in Ashleigh Wilson, *Brett Whiteley: Art, Life and the Other Thing*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2016, p. 373

AT A GLANCE

Lot 12

BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992

White Corella 1987

oil on canvas, 106.3 x 91.1 cm

frame: original, Brett Lichtenstein, Sydney

Estimate \$600,000–800,000

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Important Australian Art

Estimate: \$4,219,000–5,781,000, 55 lots

Auction, Sydney, 2 September 2020, 6.30 pm

National Council of Jewish Women of Australia, 111 Queen Street, Woollahra NSW 2025

The health of our clients, employees and community is of paramount importance. We have implemented stringent protocols within our premises, including social distancing, frequent hand and area disinfecting, and a maximum number of clients in each exhibition at any time. Full details are available upon request.

Viewings in Sydney 27 August – 2 September 2020, 10 am to 5 pm
30 Queen Street, Woollahra

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