

Smith&Singer

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WHITELEY MASTERPIECE FORMERLY IN THE COLLECTIONS OF DR PETER ELLIOTT AM & DENIS SAVILL, TO BE OFFERED BY PRIVATE AUCTION AT SMITH & SINGER THIS OCTOBER

The Celebrated Canvas is Offered for Sale by Lauded Dealer & Collector Denis Savill, Having Been on Long-term Loan to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney



BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992

The Arrival – A Glimpse in the Botanical Gardens 1984

oil, collage and charcoal on canvas, 106 x 90.6 cm

Estimate \$900,000–1,200,000

© Wendy Whiteley

BRETT WHITELEY

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— | **MASTERPIECE** | —

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MELBOURNE, 22 September 2020 – This October, Smith & Singer will have the honour of offering Brett Whiteley's long-revered *The Arrival – A Glimpse in the Botanical Gardens* 1984 at auction. Presented within the innovative and highly successful 'Masterpiece' private auction series, the painting has been on loan to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, since 2015, from the collection of the respected dealer and collector Denis Savill.

Widely and appropriately celebrated as one of Australia's great cultural identities, Brett Whiteley was both a charismatic artist pop star and a phenomenally gifted draughtsman and painter. Versatile and expansive, his *oeuvre* encompasses a wide range of media and subjects. Indeed, in 1978, six years before the *The Arrival – A Glimpse in the Botanical Gardens* was painted, he became the first and only artist ever to win all three of the Art Gallery of New South Wales' prestigious painting prizes; the Archibald (portraiture), the Wynne (landscape) and the Sulman (subject/genre).

THE ARRIVAL – A GLIMPSE IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS 1984

The resplendent *The Arrival – A Glimpse in the Botanical Gardens* 1984, continues the artist's long-held commitment to, and celebration of, avian iconography within the Australian landscape. Unlike earlier compositions where subjects were placed against an anonymous or generic background, here Whiteley places the plump, white-breasted bird in a Moreton Bay Fig tree in The Royal Botanic Garden Sydney (also referred to on occasions in exhibitions and literature as Centennial Park). As Margot Hilton and Graeme Blundell describe it,

'[Whiteley] loved birds, loved the way they hung overhead, tacking against the breeze, sliding sideways, wheeling and screeching away. He loved their freedom, the mindless glide of them. They were like a blessing on his life, an indication that the hand of God was at work.' (Margot Hilton and Graeme Blundell, *Whiteley: An Unauthorised Life*, Macmillan, Sydney, 1996, p. 215)

The complexity of the composition is further articulated in the calligraphy of the lake (dotted with water lilies and lily pads and their reflections), writhing structure of the tree, dense floral canopy, and delicate placement of the bird nestled on a branch.

Ultimately, the focus of *The Arrival – A Glimpse in the Botanical Gardens* is undoubtedly Whiteley's admiration for the twisting, almost human like form of the aged tree, simultaneously conveying sensuality and beauty with the radiating energy and vitality of the subject. Whiteley delights in the tangled limbs of the Moreton Bay Fig – a tree whose presence in front of his Lavender Bay home provided inspiration for numerous compositions – and emphasises the figurative qualities of the tree roots, boughs and canopy, suggesting the inner-presence of female forms with curvaceous limbs and breasts.

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ROBERT POLMEAR born 1989
Wendy's Secret Garden, Lavender Bay (2017)

A FASCINATING PROVENANCE FROM A GENTLEMAN COLLECTOR & AUSTRALIA'S MOST LAUDED ART DEALER & COLLECTOR – DR PETER ELLIOTT AM & DENIS SAVILL

Along with its energetic composition, intimate subject matter and brilliant palette, *The Arrival – A Glimpse in the Botanical Gardens* is accompanied by a distinguished provenance.

Having left Whiteley's studio, the first chapter of this painting's life was spent in the esteemed collection of Dr Peter M. Elliott AM. Bought in 1984 directly from the artist, it hung in Elliott's home for years to come. Peter Elliott AM (1926-2014) was a renowned gynaecologist, gynaecological oncologist and obstetrician as well as a significant art collector and patron of Australian art at a time when the nation's fledgling Modernists needed it most. Having served in the navy, studied medicine and completed his specialisation in obstetrics in London, in 1960 Elliott returned to Australia with his family and in due course, became head of gynaecological oncology at King George V Hospital. Further accolades include his being president of both the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and also of the Asian and Oceanic Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Throughout his life, Elliott pursued an ardent passion for the collecting and patronage of contemporary art. Accompanying his own generosity, it is said that he would often instruct young surgeons in the arts and collecting, and he is credited with keeping many emerging artists in business through encouraging his friends to buy their works.

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Sixteen years after Elliott acquired *The Arrival – A Glimpse in the Botanical Gardens*, his son, Jim, married Arkie Whiteley, Brett's beloved daughter. Tragically, the marriage took place shortly before Arkie died from adrenal cancer on 19 December, at age 37. Her ashes were scattered in Wendy's Secret Garden, Lavender Bay, home to the Moreton Bay Fig tree that inspired the present work.

In 2015, after 31 years in the collection of Dr Elliot, *The Arrival – A Glimpse in the Botanical Gardens* was sold at auction to the renowned dealer, tastemaker and collector, Denis Savill. The name Savill is inextricably linked with the history of traditional, modern and contemporary Australian art. For 35 years, Savill Galleries specialised in buying and selling major Australian paintings. Denis Savill's extensive knowledge of, and expertise in, the art market has made him one of the most respected and well-known art dealers and collectors in the country and during his career, Savill Galleries hosted over 100 catalogued exhibitions, including a variety of solo and survey exhibitions, as well as numerous mixed artist shows and events.

During the five years since its purchase, the present work has been on long-term loan to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Smith & Singer commented: 'Extensively reproduced and exhibited, The Arrival – A Glimpse in the Botanical Gardens, remains one of the most arresting, striking and intimate of Brett Whiteley's beloved Sydney subjects, and a major composition within the history and development of twentieth-century Australian art. Along with the inescapable magic of the painting itself, the present work is accompanied by a truly exceptional provenance. First being held within the collection of Dr Elliott and latterly within that of Denis Savill, a towering figure and dominant market force who during his career facilitated the broadest appreciation of Australian art at a national and international level. Smith & Singer in honoured to have been entrusted with the sale of this masterpiece, and we welcome visitors to our Sydney galleries during its forthcoming exhibition.'

BRETT WHITELEY & THE MARKET

Whiteley has been at the forefront of the Australian art market for decades – from high-profile gallery openings during his career, to the prices realised on the secondary market following his death – and his work continues to draw increasing demand from buyers across Australia and the world. To this day, he remains the most valued Australian artist on the auction market, with a reported \$155.6 million of total sales from just over 2,300 works (1971-2020, data courtesy of the Australian Art Sales Digest). This figure is \$35.8 million greater than the next most-traded artist, Arthur Boyd. Perhaps testament to Whiteley's approach – and the fierce competition his works garner – this total was realised by far fewer individual results than those of his competitors, indeed his average price is well over double that of Boyd's. To date, Whiteley's works have realised more individual auction sales in excess of \$1 million than any other Australian artist, with 30 works surpassing the hallowed benchmark.

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EXCEPTIONAL PRICES FOR BRETT WHITELEY AT SMITH & SINGER



BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992

The Orange Table 1977-1978

synthetic polymer paint, oil, tempera, charcoal
and oyster shells on plywood, 124 x 205 cm

Estimate \$1,000,000–1,400,000

Sold Sotheby's Australia (now trading as
Smith & Singer),

20 November 2019 for \$1,586,000

© Wendy Whiteley

BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992

The Meeting 1981

oil and collage on composition board,
183 x 120 cm

Estimate \$1,200,000–1,400,000

Sold Sotheby's Australia (now trading as Smith
& Singer), 16 May 2018 for \$1,464,000

© Wendy Whiteley



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BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992

Shao 1979

oil and collage on board, 100.6 x 78.4 cm

Estimate \$850,000–950,000

Sold Sotheby's Australia (now trading as Smith & Singer), 21 November 2017 for

\$1,159,000

© Wendy Whiteley



BRETT WHITELEY 1939-1992

The Robin and the Moon 1981

oil on canvas, 86.5 x 86.5 cm

Estimate \$600,000–800,000

Sold Sotheby's Australia (now trading as Smith & Singer), 31 August 2016 for

\$1,098,000

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AT A GLANCE

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Estimate \$900,000–1,200,000

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MASTERPIECE: Brett Whiteley, *The Arrival – A Glimpse in the Botanical Gardens* 1984

Estimate: \$900,000–1,200,000

Private Auction, 13 October 2020, 6.30 pm

Viewings in Sydney by Appointment only from 7-13 October 2020

30 Queen Street, Woollahra

To arrange a viewing in Sydney please call + 61 (0)2 9302 2402

or email Sydney@smithandsinger.com.au

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.

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