

Smith&Singer

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IAN FAIRWEATHER'S 'DRUNKEN BUDDHA' MASTERWORK TO BE AUCTIONED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HALF A CENTURY AT SMITH & SINGER

First Exhibited in Fairweather's Historic Macquarie Galleries Exhibition in 1965, then at TarraWarra Museum of Art in 2014

Painted in Fairweather's Primitive Thatched Hut During the Reclusive Artist's Self-Imposed Isolation on Bribie Island



IAN FAIRWEATHER 1891-1974

On the Lake (1964)

synthetic polymer paint and gouache on cardboard on
hardboard, 69 x 93 cm

Estimate \$200,000–300,000

© The Estate of Ian Fairweather. Licensed by Viscopy Ltd, Australia

MELBOURNE, 25 February 2021 – The life of Ian Fairweather was anything but typical. A POW during World War One; a POW guard during World War Two; a two-decade nomad in revolutionary China; a shipwreck survivor off the coast of Indonesia; a twenty-year hermit on a remote Queensland island; and considered by some as Australia's most significant and innovative artist of the twentieth century.

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Smith & Singer is delighted to present an important composition by this revered artist for sale in our April auction of *Important Australian & International Art*.

‘Painting to me is something of a tightrope act; it is between representation and the other thing – whatever that is. It is difficult to keep one’s balance.’ (Ian Fairweather, interview with Hazel de Berg, 1 April 1963, National Library of Australia, Canberra)

A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

Fairweather learnt to draw in a German POW camp in World War One, after which he returned to England to study in London. After perhaps the final grounded period of his life, Fairweather left the United Kingdom and spent much of the 1930s and 1940s as a nomad, travelling across Canada, China, Indonesia, and Australia.

Following service in World War Two in India, a seismic moment in Fairweather’s life took place in 1952 – the artist undertook a 16-day voyage by raft from Darwin to Roti, Indonesia. The perilous passage almost proved fatal, and he was held by Indonesian authorities for three months following, before being deported to Singapore and then England, where he would have to dig ditches to raise enough money to return to Australia, finally settling on Bribie Island off the coast of Queensland.

Fairweather built a thatched hut on the island and, while living as a hermit, continued to paint until his death in 1974. During this time he created some of the most important works of his life. His iconography would blend figuration with abstraction and reflect their European, Asian, and Aboriginal influences.

ART BORNE OF ISOLATION, TRANSLATION & MEDITATION

While living in his island refuge, Fairweather completed the complex and laborious translation of *The Drunken Buddha*, the well-known Chinese novel from the thirteenth century, from Classical Chinese to English. The present work – *On the Lake* (1964) – forms part of the widely celebrated series on the theme of *The Drunken Buddha*.

The text was based on the life of a Buddhist saint, Tao-chi (1148-1209), who gained renown for his unorthodox and eccentric behaviour. Although considered a saint, his drunkenness and apparent irreverence continually scandalised his fellow monks, whilst affording him widespread endearment. It is possible that Fairweather saw similarities between the remarkably idiosyncratic lives that both he and the monk chose to live.

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ROBERT WALKER 1922-2007
**Ian Fairweather on Bribie Island,
Queensland (1966)**
© Estate of Robert Walker

from Bribie Island, formed the basis of his remarkable solo exhibition of twenty-one paintings the following year, headlined by *The Drunken Buddha* series. Almost 50 years later, the series was reunited and celebrated once more, when TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville, presented these astonishing works to a new generation in 2014.

*Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Smith & Singer commented: 'Ian Fairweather's academic methodology, enigmatic character and utterly distinct style, positions him as one of Australia's truly unique practitioners. We are honoured to have been entrusted with *On the Lake* – a highly significant composition within his oeuvre – which emerges here for public sale for the first time in more than half a century.'*

Aided by a dictionary and the light provided by a hurricane lamp, Fairweather laboured over his translation. His task completed, from January 1964 the artist worked on the painted compositions to accompany his text, selecting imagery that related to the key passages. Fairweather's translation and accompanying illustrations were published by the Queensland University Press in 1965.

In the finest of Fairweather's artistic practice, *On the Lake* describes the seen and the unseen, what is descriptive and known, and that which remains mysterious and ambiguous. Qualities that exist throughout the surface of the composition allude to those that lie beneath the screen of sight.

As Fairweather commented on *The Drunken Buddha*, which was equally applicable to text or image, 'There is no exact translation ... It seems a pity really to put it into words at all – which makes it all very close to art.' (Ian Fairweather, *The Drunken Buddha* (rev. ed.), University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2015, p. 141)

By the end of May 1964, Fairweather had completed thirteen compositions that together with further paintings subsequently dispatched

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EXCEPTIONAL RESULTS FOR IAN FAIRWEATHER AT SMITH & SINGER



IAN FAIRWEATHER 1891-1974

Beach at Manicahan

oil and pencil on cardboard on
hardboard, 93 x 104 cm

Sold Sotheby's Australia (now
trading as Smith & Singer),
22 April 2008 for \$960,000

SECOND HIGHEST PRICE ACHIEVED
FOR THE ARTIST AT AUCTION

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IAN FAIRWEATHER 1891-1974

Chinatown (1962)

synthetic polymer paint and
gouache on cardboard on
composition board, 74.5 x 97.5 cm

Sold Sotheby's Australia (now
trading as Smith & Singer),
3 May 2017 for \$378,200

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AT A GLANCE

IAN FAIRWEATHER 1891-1974

On the Lake (1964)

synthetic polymer paint and gouache on cardboard on hardboard

69 x 93 cm

Estimate \$200,000–300,000

Important Australian & International Art

Auction, Sydney, April 2021, 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 sanitising, and a maximum number of clients in each exhibition at any time. Full details are available upon request.

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