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Early East Indies Maps Top the Charts at Swann Galleries' Final Sale of the Season

New York— “Prices are stronger than they have been in years,” said Caleb Kiffer, Specialist of Maps & Atlases at **Swann Auction Galleries**. The December 8 sale of **Maps & Atlases, Natural History & Color Plate Books** wrapped up the 2016 auction season at Swann with strong numbers, selling 88% of the lots offered.

Early maps of the East Indies headlined this sale from its inception, and they did not disappoint. One quarter of the top 20 lots pertained to early European exploration of the region, including “The Spice Map,” a colloquial term for Petrus Placius’s *Insulae Moluccae Celeberrimae*, 1598, which helped to open the area to Dutch traders. It sold for \$31,200*. The highlight of the sale was *The Complete East-India Pilot, or Oriental Navigator*, 1797, Robert Laurie and James Whittle’s monumental atlas with 113 engraved charts, called the pinnacle of eighteenth-century mapmaking: it sold for \$81,250, above a \$60,000 high estimate. Also in

the sale was one of the first maps ever published of the area, Claudius Ptolemaeus’s *Undecima Asiae Tabula*, circa 1480s, a double-paged engraved map that set the standard for geographical printing (\$6,000). “The East Indies section came primarily from a single collection,” Mr. Kiffer said. “It was fun to see them all together, telling the narrative of the spice trade from the perspective of different countries over the span of several hundred years. They were a hot spot in the sale, as were the New York views.”

All but one of the 22 offered lots related to early maps and scenes of New York City sold. Two panoramic views of the city each went for well above their estimates: one was a first state engraving by Robert Havell Jr., which sold for \$10,000, while the second was an 1856 graphite drawing by Frederick William Billing showing recognizable landmarks (\$8,750). “The Water Map,” as Egbert Viele’s *Sanitary and Topographical Map of the City and Island of New York* is known, is an 1865 survey of Manhattan still in use today to determine building sites; it was purchased by a collector for \$7,250, a record for the work. Ephemera included the 1908-1909 wine list from the Hotel Astor, which offered a magnum bottle of 1877 Château Lafite Rothschild for \$15; in 2016, the menu fetched \$594.

There was a successful run of maps and charts of New England by Joseph Frederick Wallet Des Barres, including *The Coast of New England* (\$25,000); *Buzzards Bay & Vineyard Sound* (\$12,500); and *A Plan of the Town of Newport* (\$11,250). Each is from the first state of Des Barre’s monumental mariner’s atlas *The Atlantic Neptune*, printed in London in 1776.

Rare elephant folio prints from John James Audubon’s *Birds of America*, published in London between 1827 and 1838, saw high prices after competitive attention. The dramatic *Mocking Bird, Plate 21*, one of Audubon’s most famous images, nearly doubled its estimate to sell for \$18,750. Two rare plates, uncut and uncolored, made an appearance in the sale: *Passenger Pigeon, Plate LXII*, and *Three-Toed Woodpecker* both illuminate the publishing process behind the beloved ornithological tome, and were purchased by the Saint Louis Mercantile Library. Eight of the 10 Audubon prints offered were sold.

Botanical prints also held strong interest, including plates from Robert John Thornton’s *Temple of Flora*, 1800-04, all of which sold above their estimates. These were led by *The Blue Egyptian Water-Lily*, 1804, and *The Quadrilateral Passion-Flower*, 1802, each of which sold for \$2,860. One show-stopper was an engraved plate from the first edition of Mark Catesby and Georg Ehret’s *Natural History of Carolina*, 1731-43, titled *Magnolia Grandiflora*, depicting the white flower in dramatic contrast against a black background; it sold for \$10,625. In all, 50 of the 58 offered natural and botanical plates and books found buyers.

A rare deluxe edition of Thomas Shotter Boys’s *Original Views of London As It Is*, 1842, was also in the sale. Considered the finest lithographed plate book on nineteenth-century London, the 26 hand-colored vistas helped to change the prevailing opinion that only natural views could be beautiful. This extremely rare edition, in its original state, garnered \$21,250.

Mr. Kiffer commented, “the sale indicated a confidence in the market for this material, with very solid prices being achieved for lots sold in the middle of the market as well as the high end. Several items sailed past the high estimates, with overall interest from private collectors and the trade alike.”

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