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## Highest-Grossing Sale for Illustration Art at Swann Galleries

### *Manhattan Mary Sets a New Record for Swann's Youngest Department*



**New York**—The grand finale of **Swann Galleries'** 2017 roster was a successful auction of **Illustration Art** on **December 5**. Highlights of the sale ranged from large-scale oil paintings to sentimental children's characters to wry political commentary, with works dating from the middle of the nineteenth century to early 2017. The auction was the department's most successful to date, exceeding its high estimate and twice breaking its own record for the most expensive artwork sold.

The runaway top lot was a spectacular set design for the musical *Manhattan Mary* by the studio of **William Oden Waller**. The highly-detailed gouache with gold highlights, which served as the cover for the fall issue of the house's newsletter, barreled past its high estimate of \$6,000, finally selling amid applause from the floor for \$77,500. It was the highest price achieved by the department since its inception six years ago, an accomplishment made even more impressive by the fact that it had just been reset two hours before, with a watercolor by **Ludwig Bemelmans**, at \$75,000. Featuring Madeline, Miss Clavel, and all the girls at the table, the instantly recognizable image served as the rear cover illustration for *Madeline's Christmas*, 1956.

Another vibrant work by Bemelmans was *Verandah Grill on the Queen Mary*, a painting in gouache, watercolor and oil capturing the glamour of dining on the high seas. Bemelmans included his own hands in the image, drawing the gentleman seen in the center of the composition (\$20,000).

Institutions were particularly active in the sale, winning nearly half of the top twenty lots. Christine von der Linn, Senior Specialist for Illustration Art at Swann Galleries, attributed this trend to "the acknowledgement that works of art intended for publication, whether through advertisements or children's books, have shaped our cultural heritage." Of special note was the University Libraries at Saint Louis University's purchase of Florence Pretz Smalley's archive of material relating to the Billiken, a creature of her invention and the mascot of the university.

The first watercolor to appear at auction from Jerry Pinkney's popular *Further Tales of Uncle Remus*, 1990, was also an auction record for a work by the artist. The painting, appearing as a double spread in the book, shows Brer Rabbit and Brer Bear sitting together. It was purchased by an institution for \$27,500. *A Great Gallumphing Galoot!*, a unique creature by Dr. Seuss, drawn on the front endpaper of *Dr. Seuss's ABC*, 1963, sold to a collector \$21,250, while a pencil sketch and finished watercolor for Maurice Sendak's *Bears Around the World*, 1981, together reached \$28,750.



Georges Lepape's ethereal watercolor portrait of Madame Condé Nast in a Fortuny gown against a dark sky with gold highlights, *Après la Tempête*, served as the cover of *Vogue* at the end of World War One. Lepape inscribed the work to its subject, contributing to its sale price of \$32,000.

Each of the six lots by Edward Gorey offered in the sale performed well, exceeding the high estimate for the run by more than \$10,000. The highlights were a group of ten illustrations for *The Monster Den*, 1966, and *Avoiding Christmas*, a watercolor for a 1987 article in *The New York Times* (\$11,250 and \$10,313, respectively).

Von der Linn said of the sale, "We're seeing the market grow stronger and healthier each year as narrative art is increasingly chosen to reflect our cultural history because of its inherent power to provoke nostalgia and emotion in an emphatic way. Because we saw the most enthusiastic inquiries and bidding on lots displaying iconic characters or imagery, future auctions of Illustration Art at Swann Galleries will include more genre-specific sections and focused categories."

The next auction of **Illustration Art** at Swann Galleries will be on June 5, 2018. The house is currently accepting quality consignments.

**Additional highlights can be found [here](#).**

**Captions:**

[Lot 230](#): William Oden Waller (studio), *Manhattan Mary*, gouache and graphite, 1927. Sold December 14, 2017 for \$77,500. (Pre-sale estimate: \$4,000 to \$6,000)

[Lot 29](#): Ludwig Bemelmans, *And we're back—all twelve no less—Happy New Year and togetherness!*, ink and watercolor, for *Madeline's Christmas*, 1956. Sold December 14, 2017 for \$75,000. (Pre-sale estimate \$30,000 to \$40,000)

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