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# Nineteenth Century Masterpiece by Australian Jewish Artist for Auction

MELBOURNE 14 MAY 2013



ABY ALTSON 1866-1949, *CHILDREN'S CHILDREN* 1889

In May 2013, Sotheby's Australia will offer for sale a rare nineteenth century painting by one of Australia's most significant Jewish artists. Aby Altson's *Children's Children* 1889 (estimate \$280,000-380,000, lot 36) has been on long-term loan to the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, since 2002, when it was borrowed for the opening of The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Federation Square.

Aby Altson is a significant figure in the history of Australian Art. From a Melbourne Jewish family, he was widely regarded as one of the most prominent artists at the National Gallery School during the 1880s and was awarded the Travelling Scholarship in 1890. This award took Altson to Europe where he developed a successful career and he subsequently settled in New York. Together with Rupert Bunny, E. Phillips Fox and John Longstaff, Altson was a pioneering Australian artist of the late nineteenth century who forged an international career. As a result, few major compositions from his Australian period are extant.



ABY ALTSON 1866-1949, *FLOOD SUFFERINGS* 1890.  
COLLECTION NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA,  
MELBOURNE

*Children's Children* is one of the artist's most important Australian subjects and was first exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria in November 1889. Sharing similarities to the major narrative paintings of John Longstaff, Frederick McCubbin, Tom Roberts, reflective of the Victorian era, Altson's composition focuses on the interaction between grandparents with their grandchildren in a modest domestic interior; a private moment between a chair-ridden grandfather reaching for a child's reserved touch, as the grandmother introduces him to her. Far from a glamorous parlour scene, Altson has carefully composed this painting, showing the perpetual cycle of life, the infant chasing a ball oblivious to the elders. Blankets drying in front of a fireplace reinforce a drudgery of daily life. Fresh flowers in the older child's hand contrast to the deterioration of the wall together with cracked and peeling paint reinforcing the inevitable decline of life.

*Children's Children* has been consigned for auction by the heirs of The Estate of the Late Mrs Marjorie Carr, whose father acquired it at auction in 1907 for 5 pounds. The family retains the original receipt.

'Sotheby's Australia is honoured to be entrusted with the sale of *Children's Children*, a masterpiece of late nineteenth century painting, created at a time when technical skill and the ability to successfully convey a meaningful message were of paramount concern to artists' said Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Sotheby's Australia. 'In the subsequent year Altson created *Flood Sufferings* 1890, one of the most beloved subjects of the period in the NGV's collection. *Children's Children* is the most significant work by the artist to appear at auction in more than half a century.'

## AT A GLANCE

ABY ALTSON

1866-1949

*CHILDREN'S CHILDREN* 1889

OIL ON CANVAS

82.5 X 127.5CM

ESTIMATE \$280,000-380,000

IMPORTANT AUSTRALIAN ART, SOTHEBY'S AUSTRALIA  
AUCTION IN MELBOURNE

ANZAC HOUSE, 4 COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE

14 MAY 2013 | 6.30 PM

EXHIBITION IN SYDNEY

2-5 MAY 2013, 10 AM TO 5 PM

118-122 QUEEN STREET, WOOLLAHRA

EXHIBITION IN MELBOURNE

9-13 MAY 2013, 10 AM TO 5 PM

ANZAC HOUSE, LEVEL 4, 4 COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE

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**For high resolution images, further information or to arrange an interview with Geoffrey Smith, Chairman, please contact John Keats or Yumeko Leung.**

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