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West Kimberley Archaeological Mystery

AUCTION IN MELBOURNE 29 OCTOBER 2013



JOSEPH BRADSHAW 1854-1916 & COLLABORATOR, (ILLUSTRATION FROM A COLLECTION OF SEVEN 19TH CENTURY ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATERCOLOURS). ESTIMATE \$15,000-25,000

Sotheby's Australia is pleased to announce the forthcoming auction of **archaeological watercolours by Joseph Bradshaw & Collaborator** in its Fine Asian, Australian & European Arts & Design sale in Melbourne on 29 October 2013 (estimate \$15,000-25,000, lot 255). These watercolours are a visual account of Joseph Bradshaw's expedition up the Prince Regent Gorge in the West Kimberley in 1891.

One of the great mysteries of Australian archaeology is the complex of West Kimberley cave paintings known to local people as Gwion Gwion. Against the established and ongoing imagery of the more familiar Wandjina, Gwion Gwion paintings appear somewhat alien or archaic: tall, thin humanoid figures wearing elaborate tasselled headdresses, skirts and arm-bands. The paintings are more popularly known as Bradshaw Figures. The name recognises their European discoverer Joseph Bradshaw whose expedition account was outlined in a paper given to the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (Victorian Branch) in 1891.

Bradshaw describes how he 'saw numerous caves and recesses in the rocks, the walls of which were adorned with native paintings ... the next morning I visited one of these groups of caves and made a few rough sketches of the drawings.' These 'rough sketches' are preserved in a lithograph which illustrated his published paper, and in four photographs in the State Library of New South Wales.

The present folio of watercolours includes all four of these images, together with three additional subjects: two general views of decorated caves and a detail of a painting in one of them. Given their scale, detail and colouring, it seems likely that they were used as visual aids for a lecture (possibly Bradshaw's Geographical Society presentation) and/or intended for (an unrealised) publication.

While subsequent expeditions (Berndt, 1928; Frobenius Institute, 1938; Crawford, 1969; Vinnicombe, 1980s; and Walsh 1977-2007) have documented thousands of examples of Gwion Gwion figures, Bradshaw's original discoveries do not appear to have since been geographically located or photographed. The present folio constitutes an invaluable record of these lost works, and an important document of the first European encounter with Gwion Gwion art.

'Sotheby's Australia is honoured to be entrusted with the sale of these archaeological watercolours painted by the first European to discover the Gwion Gwion (Bradshaw figures),' said Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Sotheby's Australia. 'Joseph Bradshaw's name is synonymous with Indigenous art and our awareness regarding its importance within Australia's visual history.'



Press Release Melbourne

17 October 2013

For Immediate Release

AT A GLANCE

FINE ASIAN, AUSTRALIAN & EUROPEAN ARTS & DESIGN

AUCTION IN MELBOURNE

29 OCTOBER 2013 | 6 PM

ANZAC HOUSE, LEVEL 1, 4 COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE

EXHIBITION IN MELBOURNE

24-28 OCTOBER 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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**Pre-estimates do not include buyer's premium.