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## Hans Heysen's Bushfire Masterpiece for Auction



Hans Heysen 1877-1968, *Bushfire, Hahndorf, South Australia* (1912) Estimate \$200,000-250,000

A rare and historically important painting by Hans Heysen will be auctioned on 25 November in Sydney by Sotheby's Australia. *Bushfire, Hahndorf, South Australia* (estimate \$200,000-250,000) depicts the terrifying ferocity of the 1-2 February fires of 1912. The only known finished large scale oil painting of this subject by the artist, the work conveys the futile urgency of the day as Hahndorf residents attempt to rescue a cottage and property by setting a firebreak, as another on horseback races along a track while fire looms over One Tree Hill behind.

The February fire extended across almost 200 square miles (322 square km), from Bridgewater in the north to Meadows in the south and from Cherry Gardens in the west to Mount Barker in the east, aided by 'continued very hot weather, becoming sultry and oppressive, with scatter thunderstorms

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[and] northerly winds' as quoted by contemporary meteorological forecasts (see Julie Robinson, *Hans Heysen: The Creative Journey*, 1992, p. 9). The vicinity of Hahndorf was one of the most devastated, with local newspapers reporting 'this was without doubt a Black Thursday for Hahndorf, and never before was such terrible scene witnessed.' (*The Register*, 3 December 1912, p. 16)

While Hans Heysen was yet to acquire his lifelong home of 'The Cedars', he was living in Hahndorf at the time of the 1912 fires. His first-hand experience of the inferno generated a number of works on paper and two oil paintings, the best-known being the oil sketch *Approaching Storm with Bushfire Haze* 1912 in the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia. Retained in the artist's personal collection, the present work was not publicly exhibited until after the 1940s when the artist donated it to the Red Cross who sold it to raise funds for the war effort.

'Tragically bushfires loom as significant events in Australia's past and present,' says Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Sotheby's Australia. 'The subject has been tackled by only a handful of Australia's greatest artists and Hans Heysen's masterpiece conveys the terror and devastation experienced in South Australia during the early twentieth century.'

#### AT A GLANCE

HANS HEYSEN 1877-1968

*Bushfire, Hahndorf, South Australia* (1912)

oil on canvas

101.0 x 132.5 cm

Estimate \$200,000-250,000

Important Australian Art

Auction in Sydney, 25 November 2014, 6.30 pm

InterContinental Sydney, Treasury Room

117 Macquarie Street, Sydney

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