

For Immediate Release

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OUTSTANDING PINTAIL DRAKE DECOY SOARS TO A WORLD RECORD PRICE OF \$801,500 AT CHRISTIE'S

The Russell B. Aitken Collection of Wildfowl Decoys is 100% Sold and Totals \$2.8 Million

New York, NY – An extremely rare pintail drake decoy by the renowned master carver Elmer Crowell (1864–1954) of East Harwich, Massachusetts, realized a world record price for any American waterfowl decoy today in Christie's Rockefeller Center saleroom. The staggering price of \$801,500 far eclipses the previous record price of \$684,500 paid for a sleeping Canada goose by the same carver at a January 2000 auction. The drake decoy was the highlight of the magnificent Russell B. Aitken Collection of Wildfowl Decoys, which was 100% sold and realized a total of \$2,833,568. Christie's conducted the auction in association with the top decoy auction firm of Guyette & Schmidt, Inc. of Farmington, Maine.

With its elegant turned head, crossed-wing carving and superb paint; this beautiful drake is arguably the finest piece that Crowell ever created. For ten years, Crowell managed a hunting camp on Wenham Lake in Beverly, Massachusetts for Dr. John Phillips for whom he made this decoy. After an intense bidding war, this important decoy sold to Boston dealer Stephen B. O'Brien, Jr. in the room on behalf of a client. When Christie's auctioneer and Deputy Chairman John Hays brought the hammer down, the room burst into loud applause. When this pintail last appeared at auction in 1986, it fetched a then-record price of \$319,000—a mark that stood for eleven years.

“The outstanding results of this sale are a testament to Russell Aitken's extraordinary eye and connoisseurship for American waterfowl decoys,” said Mr. Hays. “The establishment of a world record price for the preening pintail drake demonstrates the tremendous passion of collectors in this field. Many thanks to Gary Guyette and Frank Schmidt for their strong contribution to this Christie's

sale.”

“This outstanding auction was the result not only of Russell Aitken’s discerning eye but also a great relationship between two marketing forces—Christie’s in the fine art world and Guyette & Schmidt, Inc. in the decoy world,” added Frank Schmidt of Guyette & Schmidt, Inc. “This relationship sent the prices of these highly collectible objects to record levels. Records were established today for both contemporary decorative carvings as well as early antique working decoys.”

“It was gratifying to see the strong turnout today from both established decoy collectors and many new buyers who were active at all price levels,” said Gary Guyette of Guyette & Schmidt, Inc. “It was a pleasure and a great learning experience to work with a top auction house such as Christie’s on this exciting sale.”

Further highlights from the sale included a truly exceptional red-breasted merganser hen and drake by Lothrop Holmes of Kingston, Massachusetts, circa 1860-1870 that sold to an anonymous collector for \$394,500, the second highest price for the carver at auction. Holmes was a ship’s carpenter who made decoys in his spare time, and while he produced outstanding ducks and shorebirds, it is his mergansers that are generally recognized as the best of their type anywhere.

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*Images available on request
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