

Works on Paper Outperform Oil Paintings at Prestigious Western Auction

by John Faubion

Sale prices for a number of works of art on paper surpassed many oil paintings at this year's July 26 Coeur d'Alene art auction in Reno, Nevada. A watercolor bested them all. The Coeur d'Alene has specialized in classical Western and American Art for more than 25 years and has been called "... the nation's biggest and most successful auction of Western Art," by The Wall Street Journal. It is known for presenting a fine selection of quality art. This year, among the 300-plus lots, much of the quality, and historical significance, was concentrated in works on paper that Western Art collectors found especially desirable.

Byron Price, award winning Western scholar, author, and director of the



Charles M. Russell, (1864-1926) "Trail of the Iron Horse," 1924, watercolor on paper, 17.5" x 27.5" Signed and dated lower left
Sold at Auction: \$1,929,000

Charles M. Russell Center for the Study of Art of the American West and the OU Press at the University of Oklahoma, has a bead on the qualities of Western Art that collectors respond to.

"Many find the historical associations and representational style of traditional art appealing. Others are taken with its romance and mythological dimensions. The best of the genre engages the imagination and stimulates the senses."

The best of the genre in Reno this year included oil paintings by seminal Western artists Charles Russell, Thomas Moran, Frederic Remington, and William Leigh. Each sold for more than \$1 million. Of the Leigh painting, Coeur d'Alene co-owner Mike Overby said: "It's one of the most well-executed paintings I've seen him do." But it was outgunned, as were the other pieces at auction, by a Charles Russell watercolor that sold for \$1,929,000.

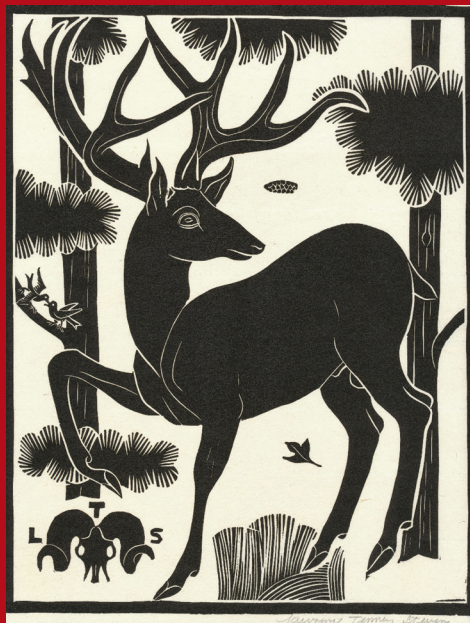
"The strong showing of Charles Russell's *Trail of the Iron Horse* (1924) can be attributed to several factors," said Sarah Burt, chief curator of the C.M. Russell Museum in Great Falls, Montana (home of the most complete collection of Russell art and memorabilia in the world). "In the first place, with measurements of nearly 18 x 28 inches, it is one of Russell's larger works in watercolor.

"Secondly, the subject matter is compelling for many Russell devotees. In a single powerful image, the artist conveys the sweeping changes that the coming of the railroad will soon bring to the indigenous peoples of the Great Plains. In the background, the sun is setting over distant mountains, offering a poignant metaphor for the fate of the old ways that Russell deeply loved. In 1924, the sun was also setting on his personal world, as it had decades before on the world of the Indian, the buffalo, and the land where all once roamed freely.



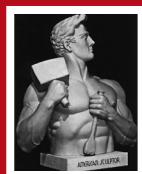
Frederic Remington, (1861-1909)
"A Rearer," 1890
Pen & ink and gouache on paper
12" x 9" Signed lower left
Sold at Auction: \$35,100

LAWRENCE TENNEY STEVENS (1896-1972)



Lawrence Tenney Stevens, "Deer in the Rockies"
Linocut, 1935. Copyright LTS Trust 2014

From a series of rare linocut prints pulled from his own press by American sculptor Lawrence Tenney Stevens in the spring of 1935. These prints, from the Stevens archives, are strongly suspected of having influenced the western and wildlife silhouettes that Edward Grigware created for the great era of Cowboy High Style furniture produced by Thomas Molesworth's Shoshone Furniture Company. They are among the discoveries in the Stevens archives that have compelled scholars to conclude that Stevens was "an undeniable progenitor of Cowboy High Style."



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Henry Farney, (1847-1916)
"Comanche," 1903, Gouache on paper
9.5" x 6.25" Signed and dated lower right
Sold at Auction: \$351,000

"And finally, the watercolor study (6 x 9 inches) for this large painting was sold at the Russell Museum's fundraising auction just months before in March, bringing a price that was more than \$100,000 over the high estimate. The vigorous competition for the much smaller study undoubtedly set the stage for similarly competitive bidding at Coeur d'Alene for the large version of the subject," said Burt.

While the thirty or so works on paper by Russell were an important part of the nearly \$30 million in total auction sales, works on paper by Henry Farney were also strong. A standout was his gouache on paper, *Comanche*, which sold for \$350,000. Mike Overby noted that Russell is an artist whose works on paper command prices close to his oils and added: "At the

end of the day, a great painting will bring a great price in our auction regardless of medium."

John Faubion has researched, written, and lectured about Lawrence Tenney Stevens since 1995. He was award-winning co-curator of a major 1996 Stevens retrospective exhibition at the Tempe Historical Museum in Arizona. His discoveries in the Stevens archives contributed to the preservation efforts of the 1936 Dallas Centennial Fair site, and led to the recreation of three of Stevens's monumental sculptures there.