



**"The Run Downstream" by Ogden M. Pleissner (1905–1983), oil on canvas, 24 by 36 inches (\$80/120,000).**



**After John James Audubon (1785–1851), "Virginian Partridge," hand colored etching with aquatint and engraving, sheet size 25-5/8 by 38 1/4 inches (\$10/20,000).**



**Pintail duck by John English (1852–1915), circa 1875 (\$80/120,000).**

## American Sporting Art & Decoys—

# Copley's Sporting Sale Features Donal C. O'Brien Jr Collection

PLYMOUTH, MASS. — Copley Fine Art Auctions will present a two-day sale on July 27 and 28 at Hotel 1620. The Donal C. O'Brien Jr collection of American sporting art and decoys, sessions 1 and 2, will be at auction on July 27, followed by the 12th edition of Copley's annual sporting sale on July 28.

Perennially balanced between fine art and decoys, Copley will offer a wide range of American, folk, sporting and wildlife art. The sporting sale will offer the opportunity to see and take home world-class paintings, fine bird carvings and antique hunting and fishing collectibles.

Highlighting the decoy offerings on day two is the second session of the Grant Nelson collection of shorebird decoys. For two decades, Nelson's focus was on acquiring exemplary works with great form, surface and impeccable provenance. In this session, a pintail drake by Charles H. Perdew (1874–1963) and a plover by Charles Sumner Bunn (1865–1952) or William "Bill" Bowman are set to lead the way.

Fine art highlights include fresh-to-market works by dog painters Percival Rosseau (1859–1937), Gustav Muss-Arnolt (1858–1927) and Edmund Osthaus (1858–1928), and classic sporting scenes by Lynn Bogue Hunt (1878–1960), Robert K. Abbett (1926–2015), Ogden Pleissner (1905–1983), Aiden Lassell Ripley (1896–1969), Chet Reneson (b 1934) and Brett Smith (b 1958), among many others.

The Donal C. O'Brien Jr collection, built and curated over six decades by one of America's great conservationists, is considered by many to be the finest American sporting art and bird decoy collection ever assembled. It totals well more than 500 objects and consti-

tutes a remarkably complete collection of classic sporting art and decoys.

O'Brien was one of the earliest decoy collectors "who usually went to the sources — family members, even the carvers themselves..." according to a 2005 *Forbes* article by Monte Burke. Burke quotes O'Brien: "When I was a young boy, while my friends were playing with electric trains and teddy bears, I was out collecting decoys."

O'Brien acquired many carvings from their original context as utility objects and was among the first to recognize them as a true American art form. O'Brien was very active in the 1950s and 1960s, trading with Adele Ernest, Malcolm Fleming, William J. Mackey Jr and other early collectors. Whereas Mackey collected quantity and Ernest was a dealer, O'Brien was a connoisseur. As a carver himself, he brought his artistic eye to his pursuit, and his influence shaped decoy collecting as it is known today.

O'Brien's connoisseurship led him to collect the very best carvings by individual makers that are also considered pinnacle decoys by region. The John English (1852–1915) pintail drake is the only example known in original paint, and Delaware River decoy authority Bob White calls it "the best Delaware River decoy in existence." Many consider the Charles E. "Shang" Wheeler (1872–1949) Canada goose to be not only the most famous decoy by Wheeler, but also one of the most important Connecticut decoys known to exist.

Of the five top decoys headlining the sale, three have never before been available at auction, while the other two have not crossed the block in more than 40 years.

The ruddy duck by Lee Dudley (1860–1942) of North Car-

olina is considered by many to be the finest North Carolina decoy in private hands and one of the few Dudley carvings that retains its original bill. Thomas Chambers' (1860–1948) wood duck is one of only two known in original paint, and recognized as the best of the two. It is widely considered to be the finest Canadian decoy ever to have surfaced. Additionally, the turned-head "dust jacket" plover by famed Massachusetts carver A. Elmer Crowell (1862–1952) is the exact carving pictured on the cover of the seminal publication *American Bird Decoys* by William J. Mackey Jr.

O'Brien's collection of paintings and prints includes masterworks by Frank W. Benson (1862–1951), Pleissner, Ripley, Roland Clark (1874–1957) and A.B. Frost (1851–1928). The collection also houses some of the finest J.J. Audubon (1785–1851) engravings, including the "Virginian Partridge" and "Canvas-backed Duck," among others.

Highlighting the fine art in the collection is Pleissner's "The Run Downstream," a prized oil by the noted sporting artist. Along with "Blue Boat on the St Anne," an atmospheric oil painting in the collection of the Shelburne Museum in Vermont, "The Run Downstream" is among the artist's most important works. It depicts bright, bold figures on a sunny day, successfully hooked up to a large salmon. O'Brien was good friends with Pleissner, who would stop and see O'Brien on his way to New York galleries, giving the collector the opportunity to acquire some of the artist's best works before they hit the broader market.

Hotel 1620 is at 180 Water Street. For further information, [www.copleyart.com](http://www.copleyart.com) or 617-536-0030.

## Arthur Singer's Birds To Fly In Book And RIT Exhibit

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — The University Gallery at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) presents "Arthur Singer: the Wildlife Art of an American Master," on view August 7–October 28, a retrospective of the artist's works created between 1935 and 1988, and coinciding with the RIT Press publication of the book authored by Paul and Alan Singer, sons of the artist.

The exhibition includes more than 50 works, emphasizing Singer's wildlife art and including oil paintings on canvas, gouache and watercolor paintings on paper and board. Singer received the Augustus Saint-Gaudens Medal from the Cooper Union in 1962 after his bird paintings appeared in the book *Birds of the World* and the Hal Borland Award from the National Audubon Society in 1985. Singer (1917–1990) is perhaps best known for his paintings of state birds, which were seen by millions when the US Postal Service issued the State Birds & Flowers commemorative stamps in 1982.

In the new illustrated biography exploring their father's work, Paul and Alan chronicle his journey from a top-secret World War II unit to his work as a renowned bird artist who redefined the concept of the bird guide with his 1966 release, *The Golden Field Guide to Birds of North America*. Millions have seen Singer's work published in books, magazines, prints and commemorative stamps.

The biography, which shares its title with the exhibition, is illustrated profusely with color images. It is published by RIT Press, the scholarly publishing enterprise at Rochester Institute of Technology.

"For years, my father had been in the field drawing and photographing birds, and knowing their behavior; he felt they should be shown naturalistically," said Alan Singer. "He added light and shadow and

developed paintings in his bird guides that show the environment where birds are often seen."

Born in New York City in 1917, Singer began illustrating wildlife as a young teenager after admiring the work of John James Audubon and taking family trips to the Bronx Zoo and the American Museum of Natural History. Singer loved jazz music and in the

1930s, he befriended jazz greats including Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway, earning early commercial success drawing caricatures of the artists that would be published in local newspapers and jazz magazines across the country. After receiving an art degree from the Cooper Union, Singer joined the army following the US entry into World War II.

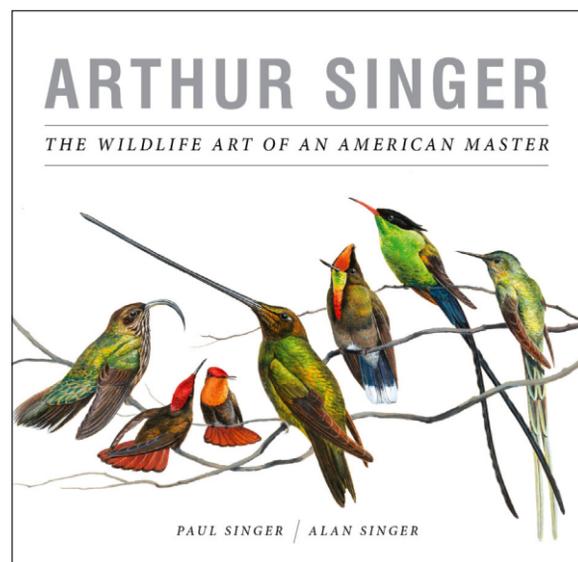
When a general noticed Singer's considerable talent painting a watercolor, Singer was transferred to the top-secret Company C of the 603rd Camouflage Engineers, where he spent three years creating camouflage and other forms of visual deception to mislead German intelligence. The story of this group of artists, dubbed "The Ghost Army," was chronicled in a 2014 PBS documentary by the same name.

Following the war's conclusion and a brief stint in the advertising industry, Singer found his calling as a full-time illustrator and artist depicting wildlife, most notably birds. Singer produced some of his most popular works in the 1950s and 60s, including *Birds of the World*, and his guide to *Birds of North America*, which is still in print after selling millions of copies.

The Singer brothers worked on the book for more than two years to commemorate the 25th anniversary of their father's passing, poring over letters, never-before-seen illustrations and other mementos from the artist's personal collection. "This is first time the public will be able to get a cross section of my father's life work from his childhood to his last years," said Alan Singer.

*Arthur Singer: the Wildlife Art of an American Master* is available to order in hardcover for \$60 at the RIT Press website [www.rit.edu/press](http://www.rit.edu/press) or by calling RIT Press at 585-475-6766.

For exhibition information, [www.rit.edu/fa/gallery](http://www.rit.edu/fa/gallery) or 585-475-2866.



**Paul and Alan Singer's new book, *Arthur Singer: the Wildlife Art of an American Master*, examines the life and work of their father, renowned wildlife artist Arthur Singer. The cover shows Arthur Singer's "Hummingbirds," 1961, gouache on board, 8 by 13 inches, collection of Alan Singer.**