

# Hammered Down

All prices are inclusive of Buyer's Premium

## Rick Russack has a conversation with Michael and Lucy Grogan

After ten years with Sotheby's in New York, Michael Grogan and his wife moved to Massachusetts and started Grogan and Company in 1987. It's been a family business since the start. Michael's wife, Nancy, also worked at Sotheby's and is involved with all aspects of the business.

In the beginning, the company sold whatever came along but today it specializes in fine art and jewelry auctions, conducting about four major sales annually. Originally working out of Dedham, the sales are now conducted from street-level galleries on Boston's Charles Street, just a block from the Boston Common, in the Beacon Hill neighborhood. Not that many years ago, Charles Street was the hub of the antiques business in Boston, home to some of New England's best known dealers. Grogan said that moving to Charles Street, and buying the property, caused the family to re-think their way of doing business. The decision was made to concentrate their efforts at the higher end of the market, with an emphasis on



fine art and jewelry.

Lucy Grogan, Michael and Nancy's daughter, joined the family firm in 2013. My first question, when sitting down with an auctioneer, is usually something like, "How did you get started in the business?" Lucy's answer was one I hadn't heard before. She said: "I grew up in the auction business and it was great. There were so many things for a kid to climb on in the old gallery."



She's not climbing on stuff today. She now runs the jewelry department and conducts the jewelry portion of the auctions. She's 28 years old (how many young women auctioneers are there today?), single, a graduate of Trinity College in Connecticut with a degree in art history and she's currently taking courses at the Geological Institute of America. After graduating college, she spent a year at the Brooklyn Museum's

American painting department. Prior to joining the family firm, for three years she was the coordinator of the annual Jackson Hole Art auction in Wyoming, one of the major events in the world of Western art. Each of those auctions grossed \$7-10 million. When asked, she said that she had decided she wanted to be in the auction business by the end of her high school years. Michael said it had always been a hope of his that his daughter would join the business.

Both father and daughter agreed that a major advantage for buyers and sellers dealing with their company is that it's a small company. Clients will deal directly with a person with an ownership interest in the business. Both are very accessible. Both agree that they don't attempt to be all things to all people and both agree that they're comfortable with the size of their business. And both agree that, "We're easy to work with and we're having fun doing it." They also both believe in using conservative estimates, feeling strongly that

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Figure of  
Jupiter, MEA,  
Boston, Kiyi  
and Edward  
M. Pflueger  
Collection

**Additions:** escargot set \$39, dress form \$85, Brown Jordan cocktail table \$149, bird cage on stand \$85, patio set \$249, 3 pc. plant stand \$49, lg. cement planter \$99, park bench \$99, marble top \$95, picnic table set \$85, logs brass holder \$445, electric grill \$45, lg. wooden fence gate \$450, drill press \$110, bench grinder \$85, bench vises \$29 & \$39, tool tote \$39, weight lifting lg. set \$385 . . . .

**Recent Sales:** Griswold griddle \$59, Sabatier knives set \$35, Onatru Farm qt. \$31, wine bottle cork remover \$20, copper pot \$35, golfers bookends \$31, lg. picture frame \$29, marble chess set \$59, lg. trunk \$39, pr. wooden folding chairs \$35, milk can \$58, lawn table w/4 chairs \$178, croquet set \$57, hand truck \$36, wheel barrel \$44, fire pit \$88, many kitchen items & carpenter tools, windmill \$145 . . . .



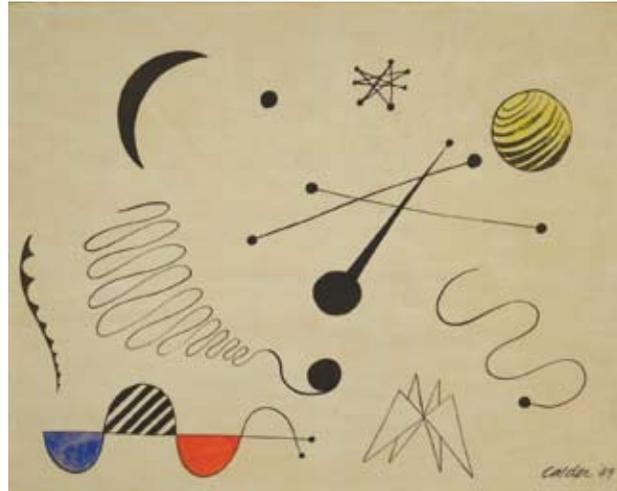
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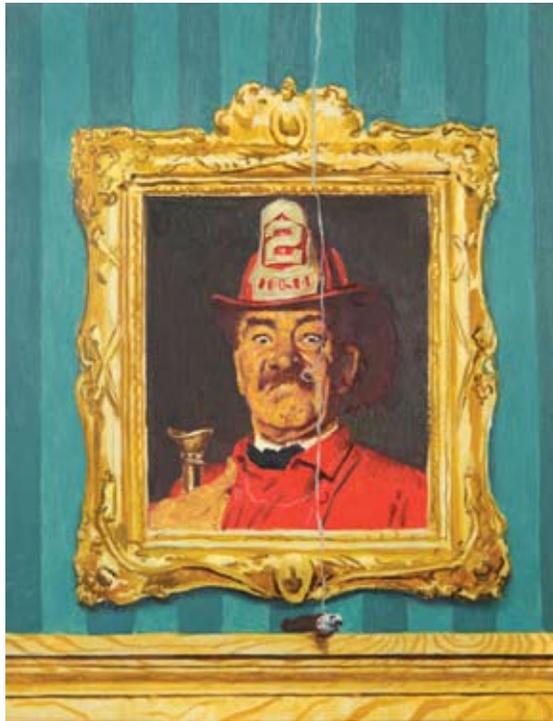
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conservative estimates result in more robust bidding. They're beginning to use Facebook and Instagram to tell some of the fun stories about upcoming things or things they've sold. The company uses Invaluable for online bidding and both Michael and Lucy believe that the internet gets their merchandise in front of a variety of experts. About a third of their lots are sold to internet bidders.

*Photos are courtesy Grogan and Company. For more information, visit [www.groganco.com](http://www.groganco.com) or call 617-720-2020.*



◀ In October 2013, Grogan sold two gouache and inks by Alexander Calder (1898-1976). Both came from the same family, who been given them by Calder. One was inscribed, "To Vicky Chess," and signed and dated "Sandy Calder Eastham 1947." The second one was signed and dated, "Calder '49." Both were untitled and the 1949 one had been included in the *Calder in Connecticut* exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum in 2000. Both exceeded their conservative estimates; the 1947 inscribed one brought \$72,000 and the 1949 one brought \$87,000.



◀ In February of last year the company sold a Norman Rockwell painting, "The Fireman," for \$216,000, well over the estimate of \$100,000. The painting was a study for the cover of the May 27, 1944 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post* and had descended in the sitter's family. As the story goes, Rockwell discovered an antique gilt frame in a junk shop. The frame was carved with axes, hoses, ladders and other firefighting artifacts and Rockwell set out to find the perfect sitter. That turned out to be Howard Lewis of Dodd, Mead and Company. Rockwell invited Lewis to his studio, dressed him in a fireman's uniform, and took a photograph of him. That photograph, inscribed by Rockwell, was sold with the painting. Lucy Grogan said that the owner of the painting, a client from her days at the Jackson Hole auctions, had called and asked for her advice about selling the painting. Lucy felt that she and her father could maximize the client's return on the painting. She discussed that with the owner, who agreed to have Grogan and Co. sell the painting. He was quite glad that she did.



▲ Lucy and her father were at a client's home, discussing the consignment of some paintings. The client said, "You sell jewelry. Let me show you something." The client brought out a particularly fine piece. Lucy said it had everything going for it: It was a platinum necklace with jadeite, pearls, diamonds and sapphires. The Art Deco necklace featured a jadeite tablet depicting two crabs and sea vegetation, measuring 2 3/8" x 1 3/4", suspended by an open rectangle channel-set with single-cut diamonds and sapphires, and suspended from the pearl necklace. It was housed in its original red leather pearl folder marked "Cartier." Although the necklace was not signed, Lucy believed that Cartier had made it and the bidders apparently agreed with her. It sold for \$90,000, far exceeding the \$12,000 estimate.

► Michael Grogan is an expert on oriental rugs. While on a house call in West Hampton, N.Y., to look at three paintings, he noticed a well-worn 4' x 6' rug on the floor. "I knew it was a good rug," said Grogan. It was, in fact, a Salor Ensi rug from Turkestan, perhaps dating from the mid-eighteenth century. Less than a dozen of these rugs are known and this one differed significantly from the other known examples. The outside border and lower alem panel were unique and it contained other design elements not seen in other Ensi rugs. For example, there was a double-rams head, freestanding birds and alternating direction of curled-leaf motifs in the central panel. Knowing where to look for more information has always been important and Grogan knew that there was article on these rugs in the Dec. 1991 issue of *Hali Magazine*, which publishes scholarly articles on rugs. From that article he able to determine that he had a very rare example. Apparently rug buyers agreed. Grogan gave it an estimate of \$20,000 in his catalog. It sold for \$241,000.

