

actual amount paid would have included the traditional 10 per cent "buyer's premium," which is now charged by all auction houses. Thus, the work cost a little more than \$300,000.

Another landmark of the Frasers auction was the performance of a pair of paintings by Cornelius Krieghoff, Canada's most beloved 19th century artist. Krieghoff specialized in painting the *habitants* of old Quebec as well as Indians. His paintings are immensely popular with Canadian collectors but also have a market in Britain and the U.S. Prices for Krieghoff's usually small canvases started to escalate in the 1960s and '70s when Ken Thomson, Lord Thomson of Fleet, set out to build the most complete collection of the artist's work. At Frasers, paintings by Krieghoff fetched \$215,000 and \$210,000. The normal price range for his work was \$70,000 to \$80,000.

"The timing was perfect and the work was there," said Tom Masterman, Auction Master of Fraser Brothers. The fact the auction took place in Montreal was also highly significant; it has been 13 years since that city was the site of a major auction of historical Canadian art. After Christie's closed up its Montreal shop in 1974, Toronto became the undisputed centre of the market.

But Fraser Brothers' night of glory didn't end with the Gagnon and the Krieghoffs. Among the artists whose works went for their highest-ever prices were James Wilson Morrice's *Port St. Servan* (\$255,000); Tom Thomson's *The Woodland Stream* (\$250,000); Robert Wakeham Pilot's *View of Quebec from Levis* (\$46,000); Frederisk Simpson Coburn's *Loggers Attaching Chain, Eastern Townships* (\$38,000); and Edwin Holgate's *Lazy Snow* (\$32,000).

Many lots went over their estimates and by the end of the three-hour sale, buyers had spent a very healthy \$3.8 million (\$4.2 million including buyers premium). Again, the amount set a record; the most ever spent at a single auction of Canadian art.

Several weeks later on November 18, all eyes were on Toronto's Four Seasons Hotel where Sotheby's was holding its semi-annual auction of "Important Canadian Art." The big number of the night was Lawren

Harris' monumental Arctic landscape, *Mountains in Snow: Rocky Mountain Paintings, No. VII*. It was estimated at \$300,000 to \$400,000 and generally considered the finest Harris to come to auction in a decade. When the painting finally reached the block, a hush settled over the crowd of 600. Bidding started at \$100,000 and went up \$10,000 each time a paddle was raised. Within seconds only two bidders were left; one a private collector from Calgary bidding by phone, the other, Hans Abromeit, a Toronto-based businessman who was the eventual winner. The price he paid to possess the Harris was \$450,000, more than anyone has ever paid for a Canadian painting at auction. In addition to the hammer price, Abromeit also paid the 10 per cent premium and seven per cent Ontario sales tax. The final amount was in excess of \$500,000.

According to Christina Orobetz, Managing Director of Sotheby's Canada, the sale was crucial because it represented the breaking of the "half-million dollar psychological barrier." In that rarified world where big art and big money meet, the ante had been increased. It was an indication of a new-found confidence in Canadian art, and by extension, Canadian culture in general. Collectors talk with their cheque books and they spoke loud. Their message was simple; if quality is high, price will follow. It is worth noting that Morris Eber, the Toronto collector who sold *Mountains in Snow*, paid \$50,000 for it in 1974. Even taking inflation into account, the value of the painting has skyrocketed in the 13 years.

"I'm happy for the market," says Geoffrey Joyner, who quit as the president of Sotheby's Canada in 1984 to start his own auction house in Toronto. "Every time the auctions get better; better quality works, better price and better total sales."

Joyner Fine Arts held its last Canadian art auction in November, 1986, in Toronto's historic St. Lawrence Hall. Nothing offered could match Sotheby's Harris, but the sale

A.J. Casson, last living member of the legendary Group of Seven is one of Canada's most sought-after artists. This canvas, *First Snow*, St. George, Ontario, is expected to bring between \$30,000 and \$40,000 at Joyner's spring auction.

