

# High prices expected for New York sapphires

Following a record sale in May, all eyes will be on auction of two Kashmir sapphire brooches



**Sylvia Thompson**

**P**rovenance and rarity are two of the elements that add value to antique jewellery. And, in the forthcoming jewellery auction at Adam's on September 9th, these will come together, with the sale of two Kashmir sapphires, each set in early 20th-century brooches.

Readers of this column may remember how, in May, a rare Kashmir sapphire was sold under the hammer at Adam's for €550,000 (€660,000 including all fees).

At that time the sale made front-page news as it was the highest price paid in Ireland for a gem of its kind.

"It was a record-breaking price for a piece of jewellery sold at auction in Ireland and one of the highest prices per carat fetched at auction worldwide in recent years," says Claire-Laurence Mestrallet, head of jewellery and watches at Adam's.

Kashmir sapphires from the rugged Zaskar range of the Himalayan mountains in Kashmir in northwest India are the rarest and most sought after sapphires in the world. This is partly because the mine in which they originated was completely depleted of the gemstones less than a decade after their discovery in 1881.

## Interesting provenance

The rarity of these two brooches now for sale – one with a cushion-shaped sapphire with a double frame of old European single-cut diamonds (estimate €150,000-€250,000), and the other an oval sapphire within a frame of old-cut diamonds (€200,000-€300,000), has been confirmed by two prominent laboratories in Switzerland – the Swiss Gemmological Institute and the Gübelin laboratory.

However, it is their provenance that is ar-

guably more interesting. The brooches were gifted to May Emily Sands by her New Yorker parents, Benjamin Aymar Sands and Amy Kirby Akin, upon her marriage to Hugh Melville Howard in September 1908. Howard was the younger son of Fanny Catherine Wingfield and her husband, the sixth earl of Wicklow, whose ancestral seat was Shelton Abbey in Co Wicklow.

"The marriage of the daughter of Benjamin Aymar Sands, himself the son of a well-known New York banker, brought together a bond of American society and European aristocracy," says Mestrallet.

The Sands family was one of the original settlers on Long Island and gave their name to Sands Point. The opulence of old-money families and the scenic coastal views in the area are believed to have inspired the fictional East Egg location in F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

If aristocratic lineage, or indeed privileged New Yorkers at the turn of the 20th century, isn't your thing, how the brooches have ended up in a Dublin auction might be.

"Hugh died of pneumonia at a young age and May developed psychological problems and was institutionalised. Their two children, Katharine and Cecil, went to live with their uncle, the seventh earl of Wicklow, at Shelton Abbey," says Mestrallet.

And while Cecil Howard returned to live in Manhattan, Katharine Howard remained in Ireland and bought Ounavarra House and farm in Co Wexford. Throughout her life, she contributed to many worthy causes, and the Katharine Howard Foundation was later set up in her memory. She was godmother to the current owner of

the brooches, whose name Mestrallet won't reveal.

Meanwhile, Adam's Blackrock is also hosting an online jewellery auction, which ends on Wednesday, September 10th. An 18-carat gold bracelet made by the Italian brand Marco Bicego is among the exquisite pieces. It is composed of no fewer than 20 delicate fine-link strands of 18-carat gold, each of which is set with "pebbles" of gold (€3,000-€4,000).

And, Morgan O'Driscoll is hosting his first online jewellery auction, which ends on Monday, September 8th. The sale, which has been curated by gemmologist Colin Weldon, has lots of luxurious earrings, necklaces, bracelets, including the "tutti-frutti" gem-set bracelet (€40,000-€60,000), with a mix of diamonds and carved and smooth-domed gemstones.

The sale also includes a 17th-century enamel diamond and emerald stomacher pendant (€30,000-€40,000). A stomacher is a piece of jewellery that was worn at the centre of the panel in the bodice of a dress. In the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, stomachers became large eye-catching pieces of jewellery worn for formal occasions.

#### Book sale

Finally, provenance and rarity also come to the fore in the book sale of the entire library

of the late Tommy Smith at Purcell's Auctioneers in Birr, Co Offaly, on September 3rd and 4th. Smith co-owned Grogan's pub on South William Street, Dublin, very popular with artists and writers.

"Tommy befriended many of Ireland's leading writers and poets and their publications – many of which are signed and dedicated to Tommy – make up a very large proportion of this sale," says Conor Purcell.

He points to Patrick Kavanagh's Tarry Flynn (Devin Adair, New York, 1949) as one of the most intriguing items for sale, as it is the actual copy used in the infamous libel court case involving Patrick Kavanagh in the 1950s.

"During cross-examination, Kavanagh denied that he and Brendan were friends – upon which a copy of Kavanagh's book Tarry Flynn was given in evidence, with attention drawn to his inside cover inscription: "For Brendan, poet and painter, on the day he decorated my flat, Sunday, 12th, 1950" says Purcell. The book has an estimate of €3,000-€6,000.

adams.ie; adamsblackrock.com;  
morganodriscoll.com;  
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