



Tom Lowenstein is surrounded by works of art in his South Melbourne office.
Photo: Peter Haskin

For the love OF ART

Leading tax accountant and financial adviser Tom Lowenstein has been collecting art and working with leading artists for decades. Next week a major part of his collection goes under the hammer. **Zelda Cawthorne** reports.

ACCLAIMED Sydney artist Garry Shead and his wife, Judith, were apprehensive the first time they met Melbourne accountant Tom Lowenstein.

That was in 1991, when Shead was getting famous, but far from rich. Would Lowenstein – the best in the business when it came to looking after the financial interests of artists – take him on as a client?

“Delighted,” said Lowenstein, who had recently seen Shead’s *D H Lawrence* series and been captivated. Indeed, he’d been interested in acquiring a work.

Judith Shead couldn’t contain herself. Recalls Lowenstein: “She jumped up, threw her arms around me and said, ‘You are such a lifesaver!’”

On March 7, Shead’s *Thirroul Morning*, a splendidly enigmatic oil on board painting from the *D H Lawrence* series, should prove a strong performer when the Lowenstein Collection of Australian Modern and Contemporary Art goes under the hammer at Melbourne auction house, Mossgreen. The work is listed to sell for \$90,000-\$120,000.

The 255 offerings – paintings, sculpture and works on paper – represent about a quarter of the

collection. It began in the 1970s and has grown into a virtual who’s who of Australian art, from icons John Olsen, Charles Blackman, Arthur Boyd and Margaret Olley, to a richly diverse contemporary line-up including Tim Storrier, Ben Quilty, Akio Makigawa and Freddie Timms.

At the South Melbourne headquarters of Lowenstein’s Arts Management – there is also an office in Sydney – you can barely see the walls for the art. It’s an eye-popping mix of business and creativity, albeit much smaller than its predecessor in St Kilda Rd.

That’s one reason for downsizing: not enough space for the Lowenstein Collection since the move in June last year. But the main object of the sale is to realise the funds to foster the next generation of artists through purchasing works and sponsoring awards for emerging talents at the Victorian College of the Arts, Monash University and Sydney University.

The auction will also mark a fresh phase for the founder of the firm whose large clientele is drawn from the visual and performing arts, as well as other creative areas, including the film industry and literary world.

Now 80 and sharp as ever, Tom



Acclaimed artist Judy Cassab’s *Portrait of Sylvia Lowenstein*.

Lowenstein OAM is handing over day-to-day management responsibilities to his son, Evan, and Adam Micmacher – both are directors of Lowenstein’s – so he can play a larger role as an arts lobbyist, while continuing his work at the firm as a director and consultant.

Heading his activist list are the federal government’s changes to the regulations affecting self-managed superannuation funds – essentially, those who have invested in art are no longer permitted to display it, but must store it.

Those changes have had a devastating financial effect on both buyers and artists, though there are deeper problems, says Lowenstein.

“We haven’t had a leader who has taken a genuine interest in the arts since Paul Keating. Turnbull claimed to be a supporter, but the reality is that the arts have become a sideline for the current government,” he says.

“We’ve tried to arrange meetings with [Minister for Communications and the Arts] Mitch Fifield, but have been referred to an adviser.

“It’s tough, but if I didn’t think there was a chance of success, I wouldn’t be lobbying. A recognition that the arts add enormously to our culture as a nation, and that not everything has to be taken at its dollar value, is vital.”

How Lowenstein evolved from a footy-mad philistine who, early in his marriage, opted for a Richmond-Carlton final instead of attending a performance by ballet greats, Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev, is no mystery. As he readily admits, his wife, Sylvia, has been the prime mover and shaker.

She was born in Paris, raised by cultured parents and attended art school. He was born into a Czech family that hailed from a village near



Lin Onus' *Frog* (1995) is expected to sell for \$50,000-\$60,000 at the Mossgreen auction.

Bratislava. Both Jewish families survived the Holocaust – miraculously, in the case of the Lowensteins – and found sanctuary in Australia.

The couple, who married in 1960, may have seemed like chalk and cheese, but encouraged and guided by his wife, the young accountant soon developed a passion for the arts. There was another powerful catalyst.

"If I had to name the one artist who was most influential in changing my way of looking at both life and art, it would be John Olsen," reveals Lowenstein in the Mossgreen auction catalogue's preface.

He has had many other enduring friendships with his artist clients, including Rick Amor, Lewis Miller and Brian Dunlop who have immortalised him in fine portraits.

But it's a wicked 1999 gouache and pencil on paper work by Olsen, titled *Lowenstein in Search of the Artist's Missing Statements*, that perfectly captures the relationship between the brilliant numbers man and all those creative types who put their tax returns on the backburner, often for years.

There's the artist, brush in hand. And there's Lowenstein, totally oblivious to the lushly naked female life model reclining on a couch as he fossicks around in a box crammed with papers. The work is not for sale.

The Lowenstein Collection will be auctioned on March 7 at Mossgreen, 926 High St, Armadale, Melbourne. Enquiries: www.mossgreen.com.au.



Garry Shead's *Thirroul Morning* (1994) from the *D H Lawrence* series.



John Olsen's *Rabbit Warren - Rydal* (1997) is expected to sell for \$120,000-\$150,000.

ARTS BEAT

DANNY GOCS

Art and soul of Melbourne on display

ARTIST Victor Rubin is one of 27 photographers and artists whose works are featured in the *Marvellous Melbourne – Its Art and Soul* exhibition which opens at the Hilton Melbourne South Wharf on March 6.

The exhibition features paintings, drawings, prints and photos and puts Melbourne and its attractions in the spotlight, ranging from fashion and festivals to architecture and cafe life.

Photographer Judi Schiff has four works on display, including a montage of 12 photos of doors and entrances that she photographed in 1994 in Melbourne.

Marvellous Melbourne – Its Art and Soul exhibition is at the Hilton Melbourne South Wharf, 2 Convention Centre Place, South Wharf from March 6 to May 25. Free admission.

Sculpture art on show at Red Hill winery

ARTIST Sonia Payes was among 24 finalists in the annual Montalto Sculpture Prize exhibition, which opened at Red Hill last Sunday and continues until October 29. The prize went to sculptor Ben Carroll.

The exhibition is in the grounds of

the Montalto winery, which has a strong focus on wine, food and the arts.

The Montalto Sculpture Prize is an acquisitive award which has been running since 2003. It is valued at \$30,000 and the winning entry becomes part of the permanent collection.

The exhibition is at Montalto vineyard, 33 Shoreham Rd, Red Hill South. Enquiries: www.montalto.com.au.

Derryn Tal's Layers

ARTIST Derryn Tal taps into a variety of mediums in her latest exhibition, *Layers*, which opened this week at Tacit Contemporary Art in Abbotsford.

"I endeavour to create a powerful recipe with an atypical choice of ingredients – a combination of out-of-the-ordinary, unconventional mediums, exploring layers, textures and colours," explains the South African-born, Sydney-based abstract contemporary artist.

"My artwork navigates the 'traveller' through paths and passages, light and dark, place and time, and, ultimately, my personal journey becomes yours."

Tal has held many exhibitions in Melbourne and Sydney in recent years.

Layers is at Tacit Contemporary Art, 312 Johnston St, Abbotsford until March 12. Enquiries: www.tacitart.com.au.

Hurwitz song scores

AMERICAN composer Justin Hurwitz has won two Academy Awards for best original song for his work, *City of Stars*, in the popular musical film *La La Land*, and best original score for the film.

Hurwitz was jointly awarded the Oscar for *City of Stars* with collaborators on the song Benj Pasek and Justin Paul at the February 26 awards ceremony in Los Angeles.

Pasek, who is Jewish, and Paul wrote the song's lyrics. Pasek, in his acceptance speech, thanked his mother, who he said "let me quit the JCC soccer league to be in a school musical".

La La Land also won Oscars for best actress (Emma Stone), best director (Damien Chazelle), best cinematography, and best production design. For several minutes, it was believed the film had also won for best picture, until the now notorious mix-up of awards envelopes was discovered.

Meanwhile, Kenneth Lonergan, whose mother and stepfather are Jewish, took home an Oscar for best original screenplay for *Manchester By the Sea*. He had also been nominated for best director.

Ezra Edelman – who with Caroline Waterlow won for best documentary feature for *O.J.: Made in America* – is the son of Marian Wright Edelman and Peter Edelman, among the founders of the New Israel Fund. Ezra Edelman also serves on the board of Americans for Peace Now.



From left: Justin Paul, Justin Hurwitz and Benj Pasek won the Best Original Song Oscar for *City of Stars*.

Photo: Lionel Hahn/Abacapress.com

VIEWING IN MELBOURNE THIS WEEKEND



CHARLES BLACKMAN
Women Lovers, circa 1980
oil on paper on board
\$45,000-\$55,000

mossgreen
AUCTIONS

The Lowenstein Collection

of Modern & Contemporary Australian Art

Viewing:
Friday 3 – Monday 6 March,
11am–5pm

Tuesday 7 March, 11am–3pm

Auction:
Melbourne, Tuesday 7 March, 6pm
Mossgreen, 926-930 High Street
Armadale VIC 3143

Enquiries: 0409 439 943
jon.dwyer@mossgreen.com.au

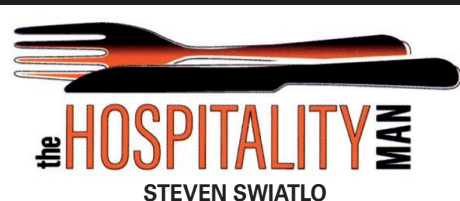
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