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Posted on Fri, Oct. 10, 2008

Auctions: An auction trove from a Berwyn estate

By David Iams
For The Inquirer

Overshadowed by Blackburn Farm in Berwyn, the Devon Horse Show's staging area for so many years, Alexandra Mellon Grange Hawkins' sprawling estate next door was easy to overlook.

Set far back from the 106-acre estate's entrance on Sugartown Road, the main house was reachable by a long, winding driveway and showed little signs of life. The only things you saw moving much of the time were the deer Hawkins generously fed.

Hawkins, who died a few weeks ago in her early 90s, preferred it that way. The house, discreetly but elegantly furnished and decorated with good but not splashy artworks, was protected by an elaborate security system.

Once a year, however, she celebrated her birthday with a private dinner-dance under canvas, to which she invited friends and representatives of the many charities she could afford to support. A graduate of Bryn Mawr, she was, after all, a direct descendant of the founder of Mellon Bank and once married to a cousin of Katharine Hepburn.

These were events at which Hawkins would display minor eccentricities: color schemes in which the sparkles in her hair matched her fingernail polish and speeches at which she discussed each of her guests.

"And you always had to dance with her," recalled Steve Goff, former managing director of the Annenberg Center. "It was obligatory."

But even then, the house was generally off limits, and little was known about its contents. "I never saw anything inside," Goff said this week.

On Oct. 24 and 25, the estate will be open and the contents of the house offered for sale by Wilson's Auction of Chester Heights. "This auction has all the ingredients to be one of the best on-site auctions we have ever had," owner Michael T. Wilson said in a news release.

The Oct. 24 session, beginning at 10 a.m., will feature items sold for the Hawkins trust, including her Mercedes-Benz, 200 lots of Gorham "Martele" sterling, Louis Comfort Tiffany art glass, a Tiffany Studios bronze floor lamp, and an ivory-and-bronze figurine by Henry Kossowski, as well as a library of leatherbound books and professional lawn equipment and tractors.

The Oct. 25 session, also beginning at 10 a.m., will feature items sold for Hawkins' charitable foundation, including 18th- and 19th-century period furniture, much of it New England and Empire, according to Wilson's news release, and artwork including paintings by Christopher H. Shearer, Alson Skinner and Savely Abramovich Sorine. Also to be offered are a large number of Persian carpets and a 12-by-20-foot cobalt and gold Chinese carpet.

Preview will be noon to 7 p.m. Oct. 23 at the estate, 1025 Sugartown Rd., or by appointment. For information, call 610-358-9515 or go to www.wbaction.com.

Paintings at Freeman's. American and European paintings and prints will be offered Oct. 17 at this month's Freeman's Friday sale, beginning at 11 a.m. at 1808 Chestnut St.

For the most part, the more than 300 lots are expected to bring prices in the low four-figure range or less, according to presale estimates. (View the sale catalog at www.freemansauction.com.)

There are three Marc Chagall prints, including *Hochzeit (Marriage)*, a limited-edition pencil-signed and dated etching (\$4,000 to \$6,000), plus a half-dozen prints "after Chagall" expected to bring considerably less.

The offerings also include nine Renoir lithographs, with presale estimates ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000; two limited-edition Norman Rockwells, each expected to bring \$600 to \$800; three Andrew Wyeth prints, two of them - *Copper Hill* and *Bluff Point* - with presale estimates of \$1,000 to \$1,500, and a colotype stamped "proof" (\$500 to \$700); and a signed Antonio Pietro Martino watercolor scene of a boatyard expected to sell for \$2,000 to \$3,000. That would be



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a modest price, considering that Martino oils sell for five figures.

Perhaps the most unusual artist represented in the sale is Leonora Carrington, with three lithographs of surrealistic and unworldly scenes such as *Crookhey Hall*, which shows ghostly figures in front of a British country house. The three are expected to sell for about \$1,000 to \$1,800 each.

Previews are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday. Information: 215-563-9275.

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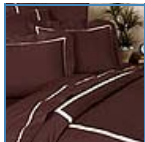
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