

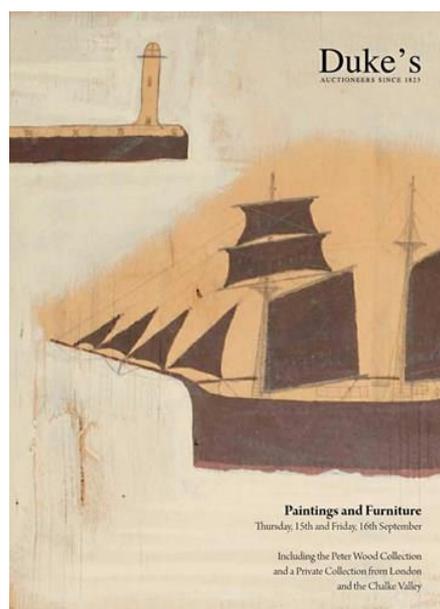


AiA Art News-service

ANTIQUES TRADE
gazette
THE ART MARKET WEEKLY

Auction house Duke's fined for offering fake Alfred Wallis works

Dorchester auction firm Duke's has been ordered to pay £18,275 after advertising fake works it claimed were by Cornish artist Alfred Wallis (1855-1942).



The front cover of Duke's September 15-16 catalogue included a detail of an 'Alfred Wallis' oil painting of a schooner in St Ives Harbour created on the back of a Liptons chest. The picture was subsequently declared a fake.

At Weymouth Magistrates Court on October 30, Duke's 1823 LLP (trading as Duke's Fine Art Auctioneers) pleaded guilty to eight charges under unfair trading regulations.

The firm was fined £6300, plus costs of £11,805 and ordered to pay a £170 victim surcharge.

The court heard how in February 2016 Duke's was offered the opportunity to sell a cache of eight unseen works, purportedly by Wallis. The vendor said they had come by descent from Emma Perkin, whose aunt cared for the artist in old age, and the works had been kept in an attic of a family member in Falmouth from 1961-2006.

An oil painting of a schooner in St Ives Harbour created on the back of a Liptons chest was estimated at £50,000, with a Victorian pine tool chest, decorated on the inside of the lid with a brigantine leaving Hayle harbour, pitched at £40,000.

The auctioneers received considerable 'cash in the attic' type publicity following the 'discovery' but doubts were subsequently cast on the provenance. The court heard that Duke's failed to take reasonable steps to follow these up.

However, Duke's said the paintings had been approved by Edward Mullins, a leading Wallis scholar and author of 1994 book *Alfred Wallis: Cornish Primitive*, who had - free of charge - written a foreword to the catalogue entries.

Just prior to the sale planned for September 15-16, Dorset Trading Standards chose to seize the items. A Players Navy Cut cigarette packet - carrying a pencil drawing to the verso - later proved to post-date 1956 (14 years after the artist's death) while paint analysis conducted on other items suggested that the works "were produced with deceptive intent, in relatively recent times, in order to resemble authentic pieces by Wallis".



In July 2016, Duke's hailed the discovery of a cache of works by Alfred Wallis including this tool chest painted to the lid with a brigantine leaving Hayle harbour. The auction house has been fined £6300 after admitting eight charges under unfair trading regulations.

Dorset councillor Deborah Cronney said: "Our Trading Standards team acted promptly to intervene in this unusual case when alerted to these suspected fakes being put up for auction.

Businesses applying claims and descriptions to items they are selling need to take reasonable steps to ensure they are true.

“Where they fail in these responsibilities and the financial consequences are significant we have a duty to investigate further and formal action will be appropriate in the more serious cases.”

Duke’s counsel Tim Bradbury said the auction house had since improved its due diligence policies and emphasised that the firm had been the victim of the dishonesty of others.