



Antiques Trade gazette

The Art Market Weekly

ISSUE 2751 | 11 July 2026

antiquetrade gazette.com

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Wuthering Heights on a record high at £950,000 hammer price

by Roland Arkell

An 1847 first edition of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (offered together with *Agnes Grey* by her sister Anne) hit a new high when it sold for £950,000 at Christie's on June 30.

As the only textually complete copy in the publisher's binding that has appeared at auction since 1908, it set a record for any literary book after Shakespeare and for any printed book by a woman.

Wuthering Heights – and *Agnes Grey* – were quickly issued together in three

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Hare force



Tiles star among a bumper selection of Arts & Crafts
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Left: Nicholas Hilliard cabinet miniature of Lady Arbella Stuart sold by Wartski at the *Treasure House Fair* with an asking price of **£3.75m**.

Miniature work but a massive result

Just a few hours after the *Treasure House Fair* opened to the public, London jeweller Wartski announced the sale of a major highlight from its stand.

The Nicholas Hilliard cabinet miniature of Lady Arbella Stuart, aged 16, painted at Greenwich Palace in 1592, had been offered with an asking price of £3.75m.

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Wuthering Heights hits a new high

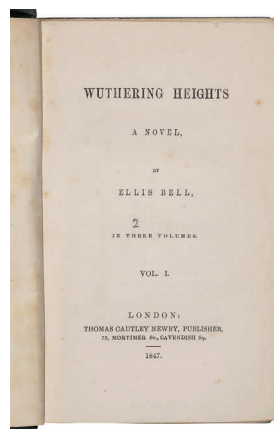
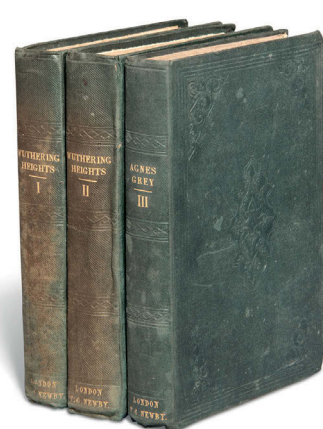
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volumes by publisher Thomas Cautley Newby following the enormous success of sister Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*. As Charlotte had published under the male pseudonym Currer Bell, Emily used the pen name Ellis Bell and Anne appears as Acton Bell.

Charlotte judged that "the books are not well got up – they abound in errors of the press" and she suggested that the run was limited to just 250. Scholars have recorded five different bindings: some in boards that Brontë said were "intended for the circulating libraries" and others in different coloured full-cloth bindings.

It is thought that only six copies in any variant of the cloth binding now survive. These include Charlotte's annotated but incomplete copy (lacking the titles and six pages of text) sold for \$70,000 at Christie's New York in December 2009 as part of the William E Self library.

The example in the Blavatnik-Honresfield library



(a variant in maroon cloth) is among the Brontë family items now in the Brotherton Library, Leeds, following a fundraising campaign. Sotheby's had delayed the sale of the collection in 2022 to give institutions a chance for to raise the £15m funds to buy it.

The record-breaking copy sold in London last week has a diagonally ribbed green-grey cloth. It had been in the same Kent country house library since shortly after its publication, having come for sale by descent from George Francis Robert Harris, 3rd Baron Harris (1810-72) of

Belmont House in Faversham. It was estimated at £400,000-600,000.

Christie's chose to include this 'rock star' book in its annual summer auction titled The Exceptional Sale: Masterworks Across Cultures – rather than the July 8 books sale. It attracted seven bidders in total, most of them from the UK and the US where *Wuthering Heights* has become part of the cultural fabric. With premium, the price was just shy of £1.21m.

Christie's specialist Mark Wiltshire said: "This is exactly the kind of book collectors

Left: exceptional first edition of *Wuthering Heights* in the original cloth binding, **£950,000** at Christie's.

Right: Old Kingdom limestone pair statue depicting Nebefwy and his wife Mes, **£3m** (with detail below).



dream about but almost never see. A first edition of *Wuthering Heights* in original cloth is extraordinarily rare. It's a true survival – and a landmark result for Brontë collecting."

Meet Nebefwy and Mes

Leading the June 30 auction was an Egyptian Old Kingdom limestone pair statue sold at £3m. The hieroglyphic inscription identifies the couple as Nebefwy and his wife Mes. Their son Meh-er-nefer

commissioned the 2ft (61cm) high monument in honour of his parents in c.2400BC.

Among the few surviving Old Kingdom pair statues in private hands, this example, owned by Sir James Porter (1710-86), the British ambassador to the Ottomans between 1746-62, has been recorded at Hovingham Hall in North Yorkshire since 1778. It came for sale at Christie's with an 'estimate on request' and a third-party guarantee.

Miniature work makes a massive price at fair

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As the great-great granddaughter of Henry VII and cousin to James VI of Scotland (later James I of England), Lady Arbella Stuart (1575-1615) occupied a pivotal position in the Tudor-Stuart succession and was long regarded as a potential heir to Elizabeth I.

Her royal blood proved a blessing and a curse, ultimately leading to her imprisonment and death in the Tower in 1615.

Here she wears an embroidered dress featuring armillary spheres and assumes a poised, frontal stance echoing the iconography of Elizabeth I's state portraiture.

The miniature was discovered in a private collection by art historian Elizabeth Goldring and portrait miniatures consultant Emma Rutherford of the Limner Company and published



in *The Burlington Magazine* in April 2024.

Painted on a sheet on vellum measuring 8½ x 7in (21 x 18cm), it is one of only six complete cabinet portraits known by Hilliard. The others – all of male sitters – are in major international institutions (the V&A, the Rijksmuseum, the Cleveland Museum of Art, Royal Museums Greenwich and the National Museum of Sweden).

Too big to be kept on the person, these works were designed for occasional display or for hanging on a wall. It is likely Lady Arbella's likeness was taken in connection with a possible dynastic marriage to Ranuccio Farnese

Left: at *Treasure House*, Simon Phillips of Ronald Phillips reported "an amazing fair" and a number of six-figure sales. They included this life-size bronze Great Dane, **left**, by the 19th century French sculptor François Auguste Hippolyte Peyrol.

(1569-1622), the elder son of the Duke of Parma. The financial accounts of the sitter's grandmother Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury (Bess of Hardwick), record that on July 27, 1592, 'Mr Hilliard' was paid £3 for completing a 'Pictuer £2', plus a tip of £1.14.

Wartski's sale, completed at *Treasure House Fair* on June 24, is thought to have set a new record for any British portrait miniature. The previous benchmark was set in 2016, when the National Trust acquired an Isaac Oliver miniature of Edward Herbert, 1st Baron Herbert of Chisbury, painted between 1610-14, for £2.1m.

Kieran McCarthy, joint managing

director of Wartski, said: "The landmark price underscores the exceptional rarity, historical significance and artistic brilliance of Hilliard's cabinet miniatures – intimate works that defined the visual language of the Elizabethan court." He said it was perhaps the most important British work of art his firm has sold in its long history.

Keep the faith

The fourth staging of the *Treasure House Fair* ran at the Royal Chelsea Hospital from June 24-30.

Organisers Harry van der Hoorn and Thomas Woodham-Smith reported strong sales for many of the 60 dealers and visitor numbers of 15,000, saying: "Our faith in the London market – and in the necessity of a high-quality multidisciplinary art fair at the end of June – was fully vindicated this week, with sales concluded from the early hours to the very last."

Next year it is scheduled for June 23-29.

Roland Arkell