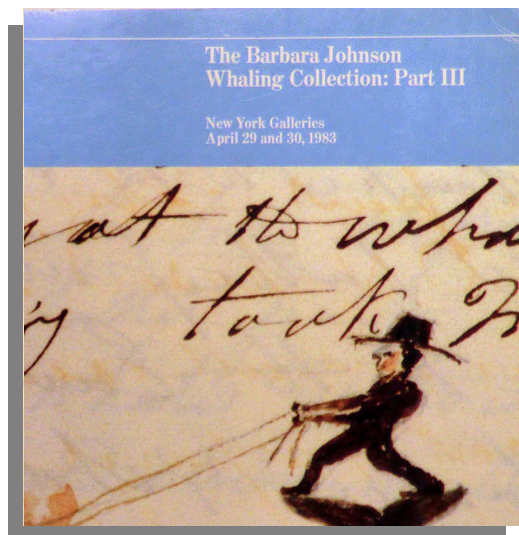


THE BARBARA JOHNSON WHALING COLLECTION (SEVEN VOLUMES)

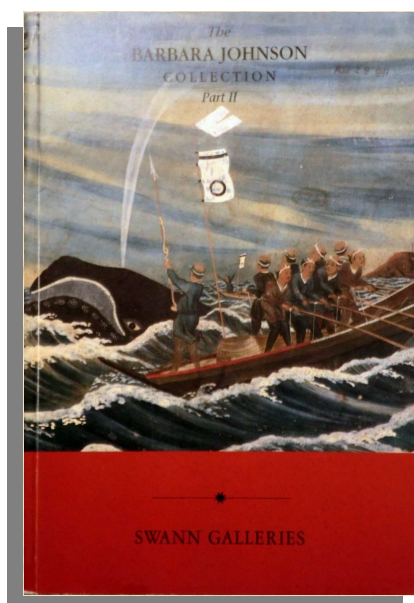


Seven auction catalogues dedicated to Barbara Johnson's collection of whaling art, antiques, and memorabilia. A large and significant collection in this very unusual field, the whaling collection was sold off by the owner at three different auction houses over a sixteen-year period. Barbara Johnson, née Piasecka (1937-2013) was a philanthropist, art collector, and heiress to the Johnson & Johnson fortune through her late husband John Seward Johnson I (1895-1983). Barbara Johnson, who studied art history at

Wroclaw University in her native Poland, collected

liberally but was particularly noted for her collection of art, antiques, and memorabilia related to whaling, the ancient but now-controversial practice of hunting whales for meat and oil. Johnson's whaling collection included books, manuscripts, documents, paintings, prints, whaling tools, nautical and navigational equipment, marine antiques, scrimshaw (whale and walrus teeth, bones, and tusks, usually decorated by sailors aboard whaling vessels), objects decorated with marine ivory, and diverse memorabilia.

Johnson formed her entire collection in about a decade, and then began to sell it off in 1981, even before her husband's death in 1983 and three decades before her own death. In her introduction to the first Sotheby's catalogue of her sale, Johnson had the following to say about the formation and dissolution of her collection:



“One day I had a very large whaling collection and everyone asked me how I got interested and why I collected it. I racked my brain to give a polite answer, and now I am selling it and everybody asks me why I am selling it and again I am racking my brain to give a polite, truthful, and satisfying answer. It is a little like asking why does one have children. I cannot really say why I had my child, I just know I had to. And I cannot say why I had my whaling collection, I just had it. It just happened, or so it seemed. Eighteen years after I had my child I was ready to wean her and send her into the world. I have similar feelings about the collection. It is ready now, it is ready to go into the world. It is finished.”¹

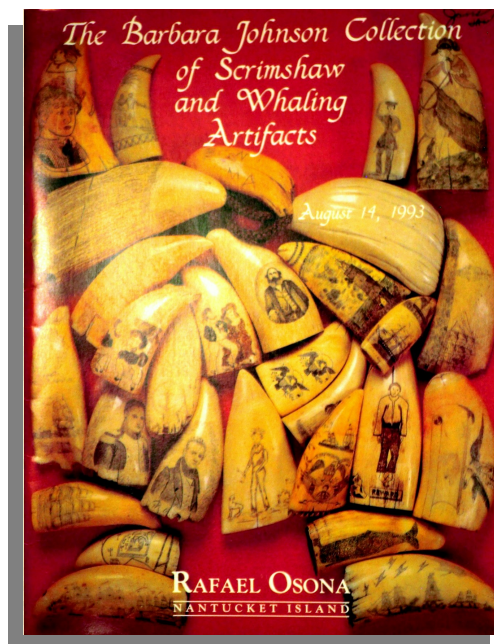
The dispersion of Johnson's whaling collection took place between 1981 and 1997 in seven sales at three different American auction houses – Sotheby's in New York, Rafael

Osono Auctioneers & Appraisers in Nantucket, and Swann Galleries in New York. Each of the seven auction catalogues includes an introduction written by Johnson; all are

thoughtful, interesting, and well researched – clearly the work of someone who intimately understood her collection and its significance.

Johnson's tastes were quite eclectic. In addition to whaling antiques and Americana, she also collected Renaissance and Baroque works of art, including the famous Badminton Cabinet, a landmark piece of Italian decorative arts commissioned by a British duke in the early 18th century. Johnson purchased the cabinet at auction in 1990 for a record-breaking \$15,178,020 and sold it at Christie's in 2004 for \$36,662,106. In the 2004 sale, to the Liechtenstein Museum in Vienna, the cabinet was the most expensive work of decorative arts ever sold at auction and the seventeenth most expensive work of art in any category.² Johnson's old master paintings collection, meanwhile, which Sotheby's called "one of the most remarkable formed in recent times [...] formed with the eye of a trained art historian but also incorporating a unique and deeply personal aesthetic", was exhibited widely during her lifetime.³ Much of it was sold by Sotheby's London on July 8-9, 2009, and final sales of her collection took place in July 2014, following her death the prior year.

\$1,200.00



Catalogues:

- Sotheby's, New York. *The Barbara Johnson Whaling Collection: Part I*. December 11-12, 1981. Softbound, 511 lots, illustrated. With price list.
- Sotheby's, New York. *The Barbara Johnson Whaling Collection: Part II*. September 24-25, 1982. Softbound, 533 lots, illustrated. With price list.
- Sotheby's, New York. *The Barbara Johnson Whaling Collection: Part III*. April 29-30, 1983. Softbound, 488 lots, illustrated. With price list.
- Sotheby's, New York. *The Barbara Johnson Whaling Collection: Part IV*. December 16-17, 1983. Softbound, 645 lots, illustrated. With price list.

- Rafael Osona Auctioneer & Appraiser, Nantucket, MA. *The Barbara Johnson Collection of Scrimshaw and Whaling Artifacts*. August 14, 1993. Softbound, 456 lots, 70 pages, illustrated. With price list.
- Swann Galleries, New York. *The Barbara Johnson Collection, Part I. Books and Manuscripts*. October 28-29, 1996. Softbound, 870 lots, illustrated.
- Swann Galleries, New York. *The Barbara Johnson Collection, Part II. Books and Manuscripts*. September 25, 1997. Softbound, 533 lots, illustrated.

NOTES

1. Johnson, Barbara. Untitled introduction. *The Barbara Johnson Whaling Collection: Part I*. New York: Sotheby's, 1981.
2. Christie's. "The Badminton Cabinet Sells For £19 Million/\$36 Million at Christie's: The Most Expensive Piece of Furniture Ever Sold at Auction ... Again!". Press Release. London. December 9, 2004. http://www.christies.com/presscenter/pdf/12102004/badmintonPostSale_120904.pdf. Accessed Oct. 15, 2014.
3. Sotheby's. "Barbara Piasecka Johnson". Old Master British Paintings Evening Essays. 2014. <http://www.sothebys.com/fr/news-video/auction-essays/old-master-british-paintings-evening-essays/2014/06/barbara-piasecka-johnson.html> Accessed Oct. 15, 2014.