

De Morgan doubles up with charger and sketchbook

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The small 3½in (9cm) high vellum bound sketchbook, with De Morgan's large ink stick man monogram to the cover, numbered approximately 70 pages with pencil sketches to both sides.

They include designs for tiles and vases (several seemingly not brought to fruition) plus studies of figures, animals and birds and a series of cartoons including those titled *Earl riding on Caterpillar*, *A Baronet in too large a hat* and *Snockets Meeting*.

Some of the sketches from this notebook are reproduced in Anna Maria Wilhelmina Stirling's *William De Morgan and His Wife*, one of the first De Morgan biographies published in New York in 1922.

They are thought to be in addition to those that appear in *The Designs of William De Morgan* by Martin Greenwood (1989) that covers the complete collection of original pottery designs in the Victoria and Albert Museum and those from the De Morgan studio at the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery.

Consigned to Dominic Winter's July 16 sale of paintings, drawings and prints with a guide of £2000-3000, it took £20,500 (plus 22% buyer's premium).

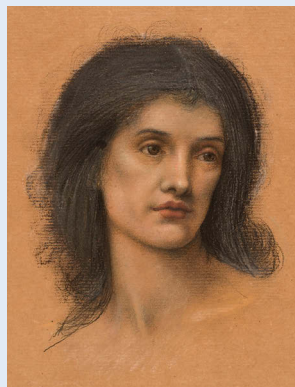


The sale of antiques and textiles the following day included an exceptional De Morgan ceramic: a 12in (30cm) charger decorated with sunflowers in turquoise and deep lapis-lazuli, lusted in copper, silver and gold.

The 10-year period at Sands End in Fulham from 1888-98 was the most prolific of De Morgan's career and involved some of the most ambitious designs and experiments in lustre decoration.

This dish painted by leading factory decorator (and future partner) Fred Passenger is from the so-called *Sunset and Moonlight* series that employed double and (as here) triple lustre effects. The deep blue lustre used to such effect on this plate appears to be a colour of De Morgan's invention.

In June 2024 Woolley & Wallis sold



Far left: a page from a William De Morgan sketchbook, **£20,500** at Dominic Winter.

Left: chalk and pastel study by Evelyn De Morgan, **£4000**.

a similar 10in (25cm) blue lustre plate decorated by Passenger with two fantastical birds for £6500.

However, the Gloucestershire dish sold well above its £3000-5000 estimate, hammering at £34,000.

While higher prices have been paid for De Morgan tile panels (a well-provenanced 64-tile panel in the Persian style was sold by Fieldings in Stourbridge in March this year for £65,000 – see ATG No 2685), only a small number of domestic wares have reached this level.

In May 2022, Christie's sold a 15in (39cm) polychrome faience vase decorated by Passenger with stylised peacocks and carnations for £50,000 as part of the collection of the banker and connoisseur collector Sir Nicholas Goodison (1934-2021).

This Gloucestershire dish and sketch

book had both come by family descent from Maxwell David Eugene Clayton-Stamm, a collector of Pre-Raphaelite art and its followers in the 1950s-70s. He co-authored *William De Morgan: Pre-Raphaelite Ceramics* (1971) with William Gaunt where the dish is illustrated in monochrome.

There was an overlap of bidders for both lots – a combination of high-end trade and private collectors from the US, UK and Europe. The sketchbook went to a UK buyer, the charger to a European customer.

Dominic Winter has sold many pieces for Clayton-Stamm heirs in recent years including a cache of 16 drawings by Evelyn De Morgan (1855-1919) offered in November 2018. The gold pastel *The Angel of Death* sold at £39,000 was among them (ATG No 2369).

Another Clayton-Stamm family consignment sold in July comprised a coloured chalk and pastel study of a female head by Evelyn De Morgan.

It is thought to be a preparatory work for the central figure in *Mercy and Truth Have Met Together, Righteousness and Peace Have Kissed Each Other*, a large-scale oil from 1898 that was destroyed by fire while in storage in 1991. It hammered at £4000.

Roland Arkell

Phillips raises buyer's premium but reduces for 'early bids'

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bid placed subsequently by them in the auction.

Phillips confirmed to ATG that clients do not need to be the leading bidder on the lot ahead of the auction in order to qualify for the reduced buyer's premium, and Priority Bids would not be noted publicly in the online catalogue entry or the 'current highest bid' displayed.

Not disclosed

The auction house said the process would be similar to the way absentee bids are currently handled in that they would not be at all disclosed.

The firm also said it would be possible for several bidders to place Priority Bids at the low estimate, making each of those bidders eligible for the reduced rate on that lot, should they

continue to bid and win the lot. If no one continued to bid and there was a tie, the first-placed bid would win the lot (as is currently the case with absentee bids).

For regular buyers, it presents a dilemma as to whether the lower charges are more attractive than the potential downside of 'showing your hand' before an auction.

If a client places an early Priority Bid on a guaranteed lot and is the winning bidder

(against the guarantor), the client will receive the reduced premium rate.

For the moment, Phillips has said this new structure will apply to all auctions in the autumn 2025 season across all categories apart from watches (for which the existing structure will be maintained). However, it added these charges could be extended 'potentially beyond' the autumn sales – presumably it could become permanent if it yields positive results.

The changes come three months after Martin Wilson assumed the role of chief executive officer at Phillips, replacing Ed Dolman.

Wilson said: "Rewarding all buyers who commit early will create more momentum in the early stages of bidding and a compelling auction experience."

"We believe that this strategic adjustment will lead to a more vibrant auction experience and ultimately support better outcomes for both our sellers and bidders."

Follow the leaders

Along with other major auction houses, Phillips has recorded a drop in turnover over the last year.

The firm reported a 14% fall in global auction sales for 2024, although it reported a solid average sell-through rate of 86% by lot across the year in its

four international salerooms.

It remains to be seen whether firms such as Sotheby's, Christie's and Bonhams will follow suit, although they are certain to be watching carefully. Often when one auction house changes its fees, the others move too – as happened in the first half of 2023.

Phillips' last buyer's premium change came in March 2023, a month after Sotheby's adjusted its own fees, and that was then followed by Christie's making changes in April of that year.

However, Sotheby's attempt to disrupt the market with a reduced and simplified pricing structure in May 2024 was not followed by its rivals. The firm eventually made a dramatic u-turn after seven months and rolled back its commission structure.

The updated buyer's premium rates at Phillips are as follows:

London

Up to £800,000: 29% or 25% for 'priority bidding' (previously 27%)
£800,000-4.5m: 22% or 20% for 'priority bidding' (previously 21%)
Over £4.5m: 15% or 14% for 'priority bidding' (previously 14.5%)

New York

Up to \$1m: 29% or 25% for 'priority bidding' (previously 27%)
\$1m-6m: 22% or 20% for 'priority bidding' (previously 21%)
Over \$6m: 15% or 14% for 'priority bidding' (previously 14.5%)