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A Question of Value

Stories from the Life of an Auctioneer

Robert Brunk

In the late 1970s, Robert Brunk discovered the world of auctioneering in and around Asheville, North Carolina. Drawn to a unique mountain culture and the history of fine art, Bob and his young business, Brunk Auctions, became part of a hustling network of commerce; from roughly 1980-2010, the passion to collect, buy, and sell reached remarkable heights. Auction houses and antique stores thrived; people paid hundreds of dollars for a humble country basket, and thousands for a rare piece of folk art.

In thirty-one compelling and compassionate essays, each named for a specific item or remarkable situation Bob encountered in his long and successful work as an auctioneer and appraiser. Objects are presented as invitations to consider personal and collective histories often related to unresolved social inequities: racism, the plight of indigenous peoples, and the challenges facing many elderly people. Bob also describes how his business grew to offer the finest examples of American and European art, his career often conflicting with his Mennonite background and the complexities of ownership and value. The result is a portrait that reflects the best and worst of ourselves as we search for ways to live with objects—and then decide what to do when it's time to let them go.

Robert Brunk's writing has been widely published and Notable in *Best American Essays*. He is founder of Brunk Auctions in Asheville, NC.

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