

# Maud Lewis 'Lobsterman' Painting Once Traded for A Tie Tack Fetches more than \$50,000 at Auction

News-Press Release

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## Summary

The late London, Ontario artist John Kinnear traded his Maud Lewis (1903-1970) painting titled The Lobsterman to jeweler John Ellington for a sapphire tie tack in the 1970s.

## Message

New Hamburg, Ontario, Canada, November 1, 2023 -- A rare Maud Lewis (1903-1970) painting, traded by a London, Ontario artist in the 1970s to a London goldsmith for a tie tack, recently sold at auction for over \$50,000. The late artist John Kinnear, a snappy dresser, was reeled in by a blue sapphire goldsmith John Ellington had in his Richmond Street shop and so the two men agreed to a trade: one custom sapphire tie tack for "any painting" Kinnear had on his studio wall down the street. When the time came to make the trade, Ellington shied away from Kinnear's own paintings, which were appealing but too large. Instead, he set his eyes on the only Maud Lewis on the wall -- a small, delightful painting of a pipe-smoking lobster fisherman. Kinnear initially resisted, saying that was his favorite painting, but Ellington reminded him he "said any painting", so in the end they happily did the swap. Ellington enjoyed The Lobsterman painting in his home for roughly 50 years before consigning it to New Hamburg-based Miller & Miller Auctions for their Oct. 14 Folk Art sale, where it sold for over \$50,000 (including buyer's premium). This is the second Maud Lewis painting obtained through a noteworthy barter arrangement with Kinnear. In May 2022, Miller & Miller Auctions sold one of Lewis's paintings, Black Truck, for a record-breaking \$350,000. Kinnear had traded that painting to the owners of a London restaurant for a few grilled cheese lunches. John Kinnear had struck up a friendship with the late Maud Lewis (1901-1970), now considered one of Canada's most renowned folk artists and who has since drawn interest internationally. Lewis lived in Marshalltown, Nova Scotia and Kinnear was in London, Ontario. In 1965, he'd seen her profiled in The Star Weekly and on CBC-TV and was deeply moved by her poverty and her physical disabilities. He also recognized her talent so he began sending her proper paints and primed Masonite boards. In return, she wrote back and sent him paintings, some of which were gifts and some of which he sold on her behalf for \$24. In her lifetime Lewis never sold a painting herself for more than \$10. The Lobsterman is considered a rarity, according to Alan Deacon, a Nova Scotia-based expert who's been studying Maud Lewis for over 50 years. She's considered a "serial painter" because she painted the same subjects over and over, but no one has seen another painting like The Lobsterman. "It's also rare to have such a large figure in a Maud Lewis painting," says Deacon, "so the rarity and the figure make it a special painting." Kinnear and Lewis maintained their friendship for five years, until Lewis died of pneumonia in 1970. It's estimated she sent him 40 paintings during that time, many of which were sold in the London area. "I think it's safe to surmise Maud had an affection for Kinnear and the paintings she sent him were perhaps special," says Ethan Miller, co-owner of Miller & Miller Auctions. "It was rare for her to correspond with people, so this was an unusual situation. This was also an unusual painting, not to mention Kinnear's favorite." The painting was sold to a private Canadian collector. Watch this YouTube video to see John Ellington tell the story of how the swap went down:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXh6mY0noRM> For more information, please contact Ethan Miller at 1-519-573-3710, or via email at [info@millerandmillerauctions.com](mailto:info@millerandmillerauctions.com). You can also visit Miller & Miller Auctions, Ltd. online at [www.millerandmillerauctions.com](http://www.millerandmillerauctions.com). About Miller & Miller Auctions, Ltd.:

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