

Quinn's debut auction of diplomat Peter Cecere's folk and outsider art collection set for Jan. 26

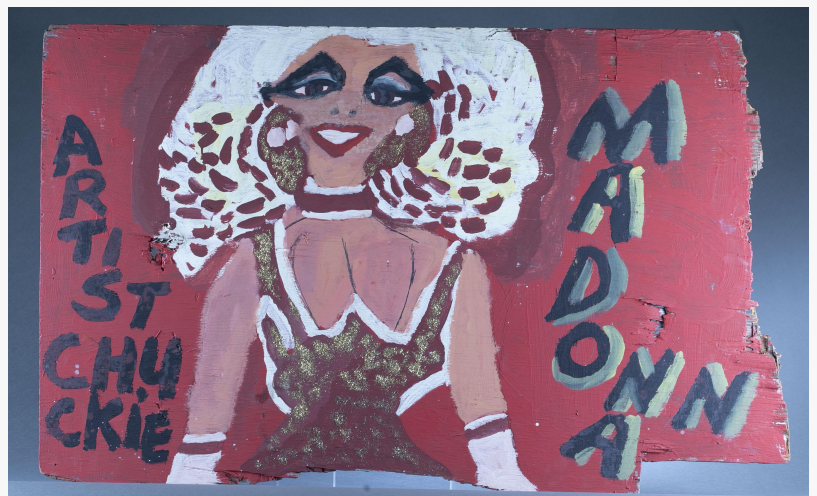
Cecere spent 50 years with the Foreign Service in Latin American nations and Spain, where he amassed a collection rivaling those of prestigious museums

FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA, USA, January 19, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Eccentric? Visionary? An American original? All three descriptions apply to the late Peter "Pete" Cecere, a US Foreign Service officer who discovered the quirky beauty and cultural importance of folk art more than 50 years ago.

"After I die, there's no more stories," Cecere said in a 2018 video documentary about his collection – but the colorful stories that already exist will be told one more time, on January 26 when Quinn's of Falls Church, Virginia, auctions the first installment of Cecere's vast holdings.

A career foreign service and cultural affairs officer, Cecere's first exposure to folk and outsider art came during his college days in the 1960s when a State Department scholarship enabled him to spend his junior year abroad in Chile. It was there that he first saw and bought unique and fanciful objects made by locals specifically to sell at tourist markets. After college, Cecere joined the US Foreign Service and, armed with a strong command of Spanish, was posted successively to embassies in Ecuador, Bolivia, Uruguay, Mexico, and Spain. Throughout his diplomatic journey, he acquired pieces that he found visually appealing and which reflected regional cultures. It was in Bolivia, for example, that he obtained the types of sophisticated textiles for which that nation's folk artists are so well known. At some point, Cecere's inner muse emerged and he started to craft his own distinctive pieces, quite skillfully.

Cecere estimated that, in his lifetime, he owned between 20,000 and 30,000 antique and vintage



Chuckie Williams (African American, 1957-2000), 'Madonna,' acrylic on thin plywood, signed and titled in composition, 50in x 32in. Exhibited at American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore, from 10/9/2010-9/4/2011. Estimate: \$1,500-\$2,500

pieces of folk and self-taught art. A 1990 auction, together with his gifts to museums, winnowed down that number, but his renewed vigor for collecting would threaten to close that gap.

Pete's generosity extended to many institutions: the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, N.M., the Tucson Museum of Art, the American Folk Art Museum in New York, and the San Antonio Museum of Art (SAMA), where Cecere was feted in 2013 with a high-profile exhibition titled "Pasion Popular." The show included 200 objects of 18th-century to modern-day Spanish and Latin American artworks that Pete had gifted to the museum, bringing his lifetime donations to SAMA to 300 works.



Sicilian donkey cart with figural and geometric decoration. Painted wood, metal. 39in x 86in.
Estimate: \$2,000-\$3,000

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Pete Cecere once said that after he died, there would be no more stories, but they will be told one more time through his collection, which we will auction on January 26th.”

*Matthew Quinn, Exec. VP,
Quinn's Auction Galleries*

In the aforementioned Four Coast Productions documentary about the Cecere collection, Dr Marion Oettinger, Curator of Latin American Art at SAMA, remarked: “Pete has a terrific eye, not only for what’s beautiful and important, but also for the exotic.” And “exotic” is probably the only word in the English language that would have accurately summed up the decor of Cecere’s spacious, barn-shape residence in rural Rappahannock County, Virginia.

There were large and whimsical welded-together scrap-metal animals, folk toys, religious works, macabre art, probably hundreds of masks made by indigenous peoples for use in dance ceremonies, and articulated crank-action pieces such as pecking-chicken whirligigs. In the great room, floating from an artfully painted iridescent sky-ceiling, there were angels, devils and even a flying cucumber-shape “bomb” named “Cuke Nuke.” Novelty items of questionable taste unapologetically adorned the home’s bathrooms. Paintings were displayed on every wall, stairwell and available shelf, including several pop culture-inspired artworks by a Cecere favorite, Chuckie Williams (African American, 1957-2000).

One particular Williams composition in the collection, an acrylic-on-plywood painting, depicts pop star [Madonna](#) in glamorous evening attire, with sparkly earrings. The 50- by 32-inch work was exhibited at the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore from 10/9/2010 through 9/4/2011 and will be offered on January 26 with a pre-sale estimate of \$1,500-\$2,500.

A mermaid body mask, most likely from Guerrero, Mexico, had resided in Cecere's collection since 1977. Made of painted, carved wood, it was originally purchased for \$425 from a vendor at El Bazar Sabado in Mexico City. Its estimate is \$600-\$900.

Cecere thought very highly of his collection of oversize Mexican animal sculptures. Each was fashioned from oil drums or other discarded metal, welded into a shape, then painted. One of several roosters in the "yard-art" menagerie, measuring 100 inches high by 68 inches long, is entered in the sale with a \$1,500-\$2,500 estimate.

A two-saddle stationary jumper horse came from the "B&B Carousell" (sic) at Steeplechase Park, Coney Island, New York. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2016, the B&B was the last operating carousel in Coney Island. Composed of painted wood and metal, the galloping steed carries a \$2,500-\$3,500 estimate. Also equine-related, a Sicilian painted-wood and metal [donkey cart](#) with figural and geometric decoration will cross the auction block with a \$2,000-\$3,000 estimate.

Willie Jinks (Georgia, 1921-2012) was the artist behind a jaunty birdhouse brightly painted in red, green and white. A signed piece, it is one of many affordable works that would appeal both to beginners and advanced collectors. Estimate: \$160-\$200

A 10-piece band of musicians by John Frank Vivolo (American, 1886-1987) is made of painted



Pete Cecere, who passed away on October 13, 2023, with a few of his Mexican "yard-art" animals made from welded and painted scrap metal.



Steeplechase Park Coney Island (NY) 'B&B Carousell' two-saddle stationary jumper horse. Painted wood, metal. 55½in x 95in. Estimate: \$2,500-\$3,500

wood with metal accessories, such as a small can that was repurposed as a drum. Ready to entertain bidders on auction day, the set is guided by a \$600-\$900 estimate.

For those who like old paint, there's an early 19th-century farmhouse secretary/bookcase finished in robin's-egg blue. Its design incorporates two doors with snipe hinges over a drop-down writing surface, above three drawers with metal shell pulls. Estimate: \$400-\$600

Quinn's Jan. 26, 2024 live gallery auction of 350+ lots from the Peter Cecere Folk Art Collection will start at 10am Eastern time, with absentee and Internet live bidding available through LiveAuctioneers or Invaluable.

Absentee bidding is also available through HiBid (Quinn's website). An open preview will be held at the auction gallery, 360 S. Washington St., Falls Church, VA 22046, from January 22-25, 2024, inclusive, from 11-4 local time. For additional information on any item in the auction, contact Corrie Brady by calling 703-532-5632, ext. 572, or emailing corrie.brady@quinnsauction.com. Online: www.quinnsauction.com.

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Mermaid body mask, most likely from Guerrero, Mexico. Painted, carved wood with scalloped lower body. Unsigned. Purchased for \$425 from Ogazu, El Bazar Sabado, Mexico City, January 1977. Estimate: \$600-\$900

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