

## A Closer Look

Greetings from snowy New York! Sorry the letter's a tad late this month; I've been on the road, doing the Florida art fairs. (Report on page 7.) In the meantime, the new auction season has rolled into motion. I'm sure you've read about the latest Kennedy liquidation. While not the landmark event that Sotheby's first auction of Jackie's stuff was in 1996, this three-day tag sale still brought out diehard fans happy to pay a premium for a personal slice of Camelot. Case in point: A JKO-monogrammed plastic trunk, used to hold her horse tack, sold for \$39,000 (est. \$800-\$1,200).

I always want to caution collectors about celebrity provenance. In the Kennedy realm, items most likely to appreciate significantly are those closest to presidential history. The rest? Gambling on souvenirs. Speaking of historic documents, a new collecting field was born this month at Christie's in a sale called "The Origins of Cyber-space." A 1946 document outlining plans for the development of electronic computers sold for \$72,000. Stay tuned.

—Missy Sullivan

## BUYING SMART

# Contemporary Photography



Cindy Sherman was one of the first photographers to show her work in a contemporary art gallery as opposed to a photography venue. Her seminal *Untitled No. 92*, one in an edition of only ten, sold in November 2004 for a record \$478,400.

When I speak to really seasoned collectors, ones who have been at it for 30 or 40 years, they always tell the history of their field in terms of the landmark private collections that came to auction. They wax on about those collectors, usually a generation ahead, whose connoisseurship and taste they admired, and whose stuff they seriously coveted. Stuff that, when it finally came to market, achieved record prices and gave the field a lasting reflected glow. With old master drawings, it was the Chatsworth sale. With baseball memorabilia, it was Barry Halper's stuff.

For the relatively young field of contemporary photography (1970s and beyond), the first such watershed collection hit the auction block only last November. Called "Veronica's Revenge" (for reasons too complicated to go into), the sale featured photographic

works of the 1980s and '90s, acquired by Belgian Baroness Marion Lambert, well before this stuff was considered interesting and worthy. Originally the collection was to have hung in her family's corporate bank headquarters. But according to the baroness, "a narrow-minded bureaucrat decided otherwise."

Maybe the gentleman didn't like Larry Clark's "Tulsa" portfolio, with its snapshot images of half-naked teens playing with guns and shooting up amphetamines. Perhaps he objected to the in-your-face politics of Barbara Kruger, whose advertising-inspired images come boldly emblazoned with aphorisms like "You are an experiment in terror." Might he have recoiled at Matthew Barney's wrestling satyrs? Or was he just unsettled by those vaguely creepy stuffed animal pictures of Mike Kelley's?

With the corporate home nixed, and no interested

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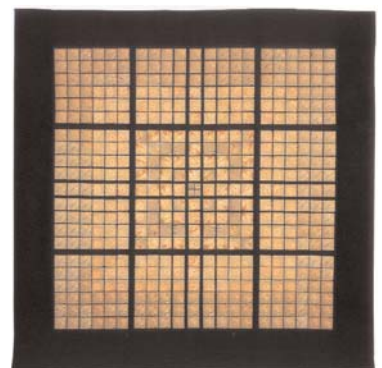
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## COLLECTOR'S EYE

# Art Quilts

Like many craft-based art forms, quilting can be weighed down by its history. Think quilts and you think beds. Think quilt designs and you envision center stars and double wedding rings and log cabins. But since the 1970s, many artists have looked at quilts and seen new possibilities for form and expression. Quilts have come off the bed and now hang on the wall. Artists no longer limit themselves to fabric, now including photographs, wood, ceramics and almost anything else you can think of. And they treat those materials in more painterly—and sculptural—ways than ever before. Into this nascent movement and market stepped entrepreneur John M. Walsh III of Martinsville, N.J., who



Kyeung Ae Cho's *Aged*: covered by wisdom incorporates knotty slivers of pine into her geometric design.

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# Contemporary Photography

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heirs, the baroness ultimately brought the collection to the auction house Phillips de Pury, which has carved a healthy niche for itself in both the contemporary art and photography markets. As it turns out, the sale represented a quintessential—and visionary—intersection of the two. These weren't tasteful nudes, windswept sand dunes or dramatically lit plates of fruit. They were head-scratching, provocative, get-under-your-skin pieces that challenge the way we look at and relate to a photograph. And the cognoscenti in the salesroom knew it. Every one of the 180 works sold, for prices ranging from \$2,880 to \$601,600 (36 in six figures). Eighteen artists' price records fell. And the auction earned the highest total (\$12.47 million) for any dedicated photography sale, ever.

Quite an achievement, considering that just 30 years ago, the major dialogue in the field was whether photography should be considered "art" at all.

What made the Lambert collection so visionary? Because it captured the heady period when photographers began to move beyond the need to document "reality"—or create an art-



**Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Woodland Chapel* (2001).** Never just "capturing a moment," Sugimoto's work often takes as its subject history and the passage of time. His works sell from mid-five into six figures.

fully composed view of it. Artists began using the camera—and more recently, digital image-altering technologies—to comment on our culture: everything from consumerism to gender roles to the alienation of man in the modern landscape. Lambert will be remembered for buying and supporting this material well ahead of the crowd.

The market has finally begun to see her wisdom. As New York dealer Marla Hamburg-Kennedy notes, the sale solidified the market's recent strength after a volatile few years. According to Paris-based artprice.com, prices in the contemporary segment of the photography market rocketed 70% between 1997 and 2000, dropped nearly 30% in 2003 as the auctions began to get saturated, then came back strong in 2004. Sotheby's, Christie's and Phillip's sell this material not only in their photography auctions, but in their contemporary ones as well. While only a handful of six-figure photographers, like Andreas Gursky and Cindy Sherman, make it into the blue-chip evening auctions, mid-five-figure sales abound for many artists in the day sales.

So, how do you begin to collect this stuff? How do you know what's good? Determining quality and value in the newer, untested material can be tricky business when the winds of fashion and hype blow so gustily through the market. Reputations can be fragile things. Critics and tastemakers can be fickle. If you collect with your eyes and your heart, and ignore the buzz, you're one step ahead.

What's the difference between a four-figure photograph and a six-figure one? The simple answer is a mix of originality of idea, quality of ex-

ecution, historical resonance, and career trajectory.

Will today's hot name be a lasting voice—or another flash in the pan? To start, it's not a bad idea to try and figure out how an artist fits into the continuum of art history. What artists influenced them? What innovations did they contribute? How deeply have they developed and explored their ideas? How important is the piece you're looking at within their own body of work?

Take the artists of the so-called Düsseldorf school: Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Thomas Ruff and Candida Höfer. All are darlings of the current market, with all but Höfer fetching well into the mid-six figures. Gursky, in particular, is known for his huge, vividly colored views of our big, fast, high-tech world. Often taken from a bird's-eye view (or digitally combining several views into one negative), his sublimely large images range from trad-

ing floors of international exchanges to enormous office buildings to alluring, other-worldly product displays. He makes big pictures about the big picture: where the individual plays no discernible role.

How does he link to history? According to Rick Wester, photography specialist at Phillips, Gursky's work shows direct influence of his teachers, the husband-and-wife team, Bernd and Hilla Becher, whose photographs of anonymous industrial structures are not only rigorously composed images, but a kind of anthropological inquiry into the man-altered landscape. Their approach, in turn, links back to the earlier German photographer August Sander, extending Gursky's lineage back to the turn of the century.

What Gursky and his compatriots brought to this lineage was a combination of color, heroic scale and the fact that the "reality" in his images is not found and captured, but digitally constructed for maximum expressive impact.

And his supersized prints, quite frankly, make it easier to charge heroic prices—upward of \$150,000 for a primary-market Gursky—as does the fact that most of his works are printed in limited editions of only six to ten. And then there's the significant museum attention. On the secondary market, prices for his large works jumped from \$90,400 in 1999 to a high of \$611,228 in 2002, one year after Museum of Modern Art gave him a big retrospective. Since then, his top works have settled between a quarter and a half million. But his work has been caught up in so much market hype in the past few years that I suspect his prices may undergo some further correction. So far this year, some

## RECENT NOTABLE SALES

Size matters, as evidenced by huge prices for mural-sized works by Germans Gursky and Struth. The other top prices all come from the go-go Lambert collection sale.

**\$611,228**

Andreas Gursky, *Untitled V*, 1997  
Christie's London, 2002

**\$600,000**

Andreas Gursky, *Paris, Montparnasse*, 1993  
Christie's, 2001

**\$534,400**

Charles Ray, *No*, 1992  
Phillips de Pury, 2004

**\$478,400**

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled No. 92*, 1981  
Phillips de Pury, 2004

**\$420,000**

Thomas Struth, *Pantheon, Rome*, 1990  
Sotheby's London, 2003

**\$411,200**

Mike Kelly, *Ah....Youth*, 1991  
Phillips de Pury, 2004



larger works have performed poorly in the European sales, with a few buying in.

Another historically important artist is Cindy Sherman, known for challenging long-held, media-perpetuated stereotypes of women by photographing herself costumed and staged in many “roles,” like those of the femme fatale, the housewife or the career girl. One of the first photographers in the 1970s to insist on exhibiting in a contemporary art gallery, as opposed to a photo gallery, her market is mature. According to Josh Holdeman, photography specialist at Christie’s, 8 x 10 prints of her “film stills” series sold for \$500 in the early 1980s. In the mid-1990s, MoMA reportedly bought the whole series of 69 for what was reported to be \$1 million, giving her prices a jolt. In the November Lambert sale, fine examples from the film stills series sold in the \$50,000 range. Other Sherman works regularly sell for six figures; a seminal image from her “Centerfold” series (see page 1) just set a record price of \$478,400.

What are some of the important trends being explored in the medium right now? Knowing them may help you connect a new photographer to the historical continuum. Many, says Rick Wester, were pioneered in the 1970s, like the whole move toward vernacular street photography. You see it in the work of artists like Gary Winogrand and Lee Friedlander, and their color counterparts William Eggleston, Stephen Shore, Joel Sternfeld and Joel Meyerowitz. Unlike earlier, more heroic images of the landscape by, say, Ansel Adams, these offhanded shots often convey the bland emptiness of America’s urban and suburban vistas. Right now, says Frish Brandt, Director of the Steven Fraenkel Gallery in San Francisco, there’s huge interest in work from the 1960s and ’70s. Eggleston’s prices have been on a tear, reaching up to a quarter million dollars at auction for

*Memphis*, a major work. Meanwhile, Shore, Sternfeld, Meyerowitz and Friedlander are all considered undervalued. Friedlander’s prices range from \$3,200 for a contemporary print of an earlier negative up to \$40,000 for a rare desired vintage print. With a MoMA exhibition due later this year, his prices are expected to pop.

A similar informality of approach is seen in the trend of autobiographical narratives, practiced by artists like Larry Clark, Tina Barney and Nan Goldin. Goldin is known for her intimate vi-



Artists like Adam Fuss are experimenting with and updating old techniques, like the daguerreotype and the photogram.

sual diary of her close circle of druggies and drag queens, now selling in five and six figures.

Another trend afoot: the exploration of retro photographic techniques pioneered in the 19th century. Contemporary artist Vera Lutter uses a massive, room-sized camera obscura to make unique, ethereal time-lapse images of industrial environments. Adam Fuss, meanwhile, uses techniques like the daguerreotype and the photogram (see above) to create poetic images that evoke the ephemeral nature of time. But being part of the digital age, Fuss will also make a unique daguerreotype and then sometimes print an inkjet scan of it. Depending on media and print size, his works sell for between \$4,000 and \$45,000.

Indeed, the digital age has launched a huge challenge to the role of photography as a vehicle for visual “truth.” As with Andreas Gursky, many artists use digital tools to blur the lines between reality and artifice. Gregory Crewdson goes so far as to design and build tableaux—like elaborately lit little movie sets—that he photographs to make creepy, psychologically tense technicolor images of suburbia. Loretta Lux’s digitally altered pictures of children, merged with her own painted backgrounds (at left), have risen in price from \$4,000 to the high teens in just two years.

Keep in mind that the size of an edition will affect value (look for editions under 20), and know that artists often do several editions in several sizes. Find out



Loretta Lux digitally combines children’s portraits with her own painted backgrounds to create bold, unsettling images.

## CONSERVATION: WHEN SIX-FIGURE PHOTOS FADE

When I spoke with San Francisco collector Robin Wright a little over a year ago, she told me that a large, double-panel Andreas Gursky photograph she had bought ten years earlier had experienced what she called “color shifting.” The original had vivid reds, particularly important to the photo’s compositional and tonal balance. And despite the fact that she did all the right things, and kept it away from light, it no longer looked as crisp and vibrant as when it left Gursky’s hands.

The image in question was a chromagenic or “C-print,” commonly used by artists working in color. According to Henry Wilhelm, the country’s leading authority on the stability and preservation of traditional and digital color photographs, there are four major brands of paper used with C-prints. And his research shows that Fuji paper is twice as stable as the others (Kodak, AGFA, and Konica Minolta). “Loss of magenta tells me that it probably wasn’t printed on Fuji paper,” says Wilhelm. Deterioration is usually characterized, he says, by color fading, a shift of color balance (the grays become greenish-gray), loss of highlight detail and a yellowing of the paper. “The look of a brilliant pale blue sky will be quite profoundly impacted, and could become much less appealing.”

What can you do to preserve valuable color photographs? First, always keep the works out of the way of direct sunlight. And while you probably don’t want to go as far as zero-degree cold storage like some photo archives, Wilhelm recommends keeping the A/C on in warm weather, even if you go away. ¶fc

which edition best serves the image before you buy. Compared to earlier photographic movements, where connoisseurship has much more to do with the nuances of the physical print itself, contemporary collectors are more concerned with the image than the print. But that’s evolving as photographic materials change. Older, 1980s chromagenic “C-prints” were not printed as often on Fujicolor Crystal Archive paper—which, says Henry Wilhelm, an authority on the preservation of color photography, is the most stable ground for those types of prints. Early C-prints can deteriorate (see *sibebar*, above). Interestingly, Wilhelm notes, current inkjet technology is now more stable than non-archival C-prints. As technology evolves, connoisseurship will follow. In the meantime, focus on finding images you love. ¶fc

# Art Quilts

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since 1992 has amassed arguably the world's most renowned collection of contemporary art quilts. The 68-year-old Walsh, founder of Waltron LLC, a manufacturer of water-quality instrumentation, now owns some 70 examples, representing pivotal works by the major artists and encompassing a full range of techniques and subjects, from colorful abstractions to intricate landscapes and plant studies to storytelling and social message quilts. Highlights have been exhibited at the University of Kentucky Art Museum in 2001 and, most recently, at the prestigious International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska.

## Why collect contemporary quilts?

It was part of my heritage, but not a prominent one. My grandmother had made quilts, and I had slept under a homemade one as a child. When I was on a business trip in England in 1988, I saw a BBC program about the contemporary quilter Michael James, and became intrigued. For about four years I dabbled, starting with traditional quilts: Mennonite and Amish quilts, crazy quilts. Then in 1992, I saw six different quilt exhibitions in Louisville, Ky., over the course of 24 hours—a real immersion. The exhibitions ranged from Amish to contemporary to African-American to narrative quilts and were part of a big event that also included three days of seminars. So I invested those three days to get myself figured out on this topic. After seeing all six exhibits, I determined that I loved the contemporary quilts best, but I still had no way of going about it. The last day there was a lecture on how to collect contemporary quilts. The speaker mentioned the dearth of dedicated collectors of this material.

## So how did you proceed?

I introduced myself to the most renowned collectors in the quilt world, Bob and Ardis James, and asked how to collect contemporary quilts. It's not like they're hanging for sale in too many contemporary galleries. They introduced me to their consultant, Penny McMorris, a scholar and curator who had produced a 13-program series for PBS on quilts. On the spot, we decided to work together for a year to buy ten quilts and see how we felt about it at the end of the year. In that time, we bought 15 quilts. And Penny still advises me today.

## She became your mentor?

Yes. Shortly after I met Penny, she invited me to her house. She had a huge collection of slides and was tracking all the major contemporary quilt artists. I sat at the light table in her kitchen from 8 am to 4 pm in the afternoon, looking at some 800 slides. She had picked work by 15 artists, tracing their artistic development. That was my crash course. At the end of that eight hours, I began to understand what it was all



Being in the water purification business, and growing up around water, Walsh is naturally drawn to quilts with an aqueous theme. Above, Katie Masopust's *Rio Hondo* (1994).

about and where I was headed. She is the curator and the spirit of the collection. But I am at the point now where I do occasionally buy something without her actually seeing it.

## What are the parameters of the collection?

What we're trying to do is document the full range of what is happening in the movement. We are looking primarily for two things: the best works by the best artists and quilts that are pushing the envelope in materials or design.

## What exactly do you mean by pushing the envelope?

Bear in mind that we define a quilt simply as a fabric sandwich. After that, anything goes. It's no longer just traditional patterns like log cabin or center diamond. Some quilts I have look like paintings, like those by Velda Newman, which evoke Georgia O'Keeffe's large-scale, close-up flower pictures. I also look for innovative use of non-traditional materials. I have a huge (12 x 8 foot) quilt by Anne Kingsbury from the early 1970s, made entirely of leather and ceramics. It shows a three-ring circus, with a lion tamer and highwire and horseback riders. The circus audience is comprised of 376 hand-crafted ceramic plaques, each individually laced into the leather.

One of the most original pieces I have is by

Arturo Sandoval, a professor at the University of Kentucky. He took used 35mm movie film, bleached it to look like mother of pearl and wove it into a fabric. From this he created an eight-foot-diameter circular quilt (see page 5), on which he appliquéd painted circles representing planets or stellar objects. He then mounted it all on a motorized mirrored disk, which rotates at two RPMs while attached to the wall. Called *Millennium Portal Number 1*, it's his vision of what you see when you look out of your spaceship, spinning through the solar system.

## Who are the most established quilt artists?

This movement started in the 1970s, and its two best known and most widely collected artists—Michael James and Nancy Crow—are still working and evolving. I have some early Nancy Crow works, one from a series she did on what happens when two people meet and get to know each other. It's called *Bittersweet 16*.

I recently acquired a new work by Michael James, now head of the International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska. It's called *A Strange Riddle*, and it's based on Freud's inquiry

into how early childhood memories can affect our later life, even if we can't recall them. In this quilt, he poses the question of what impact, if any, the fancy fleur-de-lis-like wallpaper that decorated his baby nursery might have had on him as an artist decades later. The quilt's four panels include a transfer photograph of him at age five months in his crib, a CAT scan of a brain, an evocation of the nursery wallpaper design, and lastly, a simple geometric design with faintly printed words "I don't remember, I just don't remember." The whole thing is a major new direction for him, very conceptual.

## I understand that you also commission artists.

Yes. I'm just about to embark on my sixth one. Many of these quilts take a lot of time to make, a year or more, so I'm trying to give the artists some open space to be as creative as they want without the pressure of doing something saleable. I've had wonderful experiences. My only parameter is that the theme should be related to water. My weekend cottage has a stream, I grew up around water, my business is about water. It's a wide theme, allowing the artists to go in pretty much any direction they want.

## How much do you participate?

It ranges from artist to artist. Wisconsin-based artist Tim Harding worked mostly on his own,



with minimal involvement from me. He made a diptych, about 8 feet tall and 13 feet wide. By taking layers of monochromatic silk and stacking them, and then cutting down through the layers to the one he wants, he was able to make the water actually look like shimmering waves. On the other end of the spectrum, Joan Schulze, a California artist and poet, asked me to take photographs of water, which she printed on fabric and actually incorporated into the quilt. I took photos of the stream and waterfall near my cottage. It's a very special place to me.

**Tell me about your most recent commission.**

It's by a Seattle artist named Rachel Brumer. Her images are very straightforward, often worked into a traditional geometric framework, but there is a tremendous depth of feeling to what she does. This one is large, also a diptych, about 7-1/2 feet tall by 11 feet wide. When she started, she wrote to me and said she was researching the idea of the role water plays in the world's religions. Part of the design shows the seven stages of washing someone's feet. The effect is extraordinarily calming.

**How has the market changed since you began?**

It's interesting. When I started in 1992, the price range was \$2,000 or 3,000 up to \$12,000. But then for a while prices took a significant dip, in large part because there's still not a slew of collectors competing for this material. There are



**Not your grandma's quilt design: Arturo Sandoval's innovative Millennium Portal Number 1 (1993) incorporates bleached movie film and rotates on a motorized disc to evoke the view from outer space.**

other serious collectors out there, but they tend to focus on one aspect, like artists from a specific geographical region. I am looking to be more comprehensive. I've even started collecting overseas, in places like England and Germany, where quilting is experiencing a burst of activity. But by and large, it still seems to be something that sprouted mostly from American roots. The greatest energy is coming from the U.S.

Seminal works by the top recognized artists—Crow, James, and also Faith Ringgold—can sell for as high as \$50,000 at upscale galleries. But the sweet spot for many top quilt artists is \$15,000 to \$25,000. For most others, the prices range from mid to high four figures, having pretty much doubled since I began 13 years ago.

One aspect of the pricing that is interesting: Some artists price their work on a square-foot basis. There is a constant debate between the artists on how to price and market the work.

**So you buy directly from the artists?**

Mostly I do buy directly from the artists, most of whom Penny knows and has introduced me to. I get a lot of work offered to me directly. My best sources for buying are the invitational exhibitions like Quilt National, a biennial show in Athens, Ohio, and the Visions quilt show in Oceanside, Calif., each December. Those are the two main places where the artists show their work, that I try not to miss. I have bought from galleries, but not many: usually the Gallery at Studio B in Lancaster, Ohio, and Connell Gallery in Atlanta.

**Has this been a good investment?**

I don't look at this as an investment. I look on it more as a trust. Sure, the value I have insured the quilts for has doubled over time. But I don't see myself selling these quilts.

**Is a quilt's value affected by whether the stitching and quilting are done by machine or by hand?**

No. Not as long as it serves the artist's intention.

**How do you live with them?**

I normally have three or four hanging in my house and five up in my office. One fun thing about having them in the office is letting employees choose which ones to hang. I sometimes do a slide show or let them browse through the exhibition catalog to decide what they want.

**And what are the conservation issues?**

To start with, I always wear cotton gloves, because if you handle them with bare hands, your skin oils can eventually degrade the fabric. A basic rule of thumb: don't let one hang for more than a year, unless it's stretched. Humidity and the sheer weight of gravity will cause them to sag. You have to rest them. I store them layered on a bed, with sheets in between. Some require their own storage crate. I don't believe in rolling quilts, which creates tension and compression. I'm considering putting an addition on my house or getting a new one so I can have a dedicated space. Right now I use extra bedrooms. And you also have to keep quilts out of natural light and fluorescent lighting to avoid fading. In my office, we never hang them in rooms with windows, and we use plastic shields to filter out the UV rays.

**WHERE TO BUY ART  
ART QUILTS**

**Connell Gallery, Atlanta, Ga.**  
404-261-1712

**The Gallery at Studio B, Lancaster, Ohio**  
[www.galleryatstudiob.com](http://www.galleryatstudiob.com)

**Quilt National, Athens, Ohio.**  
<http://home.frognet.net/~fletcher/quilt/>

**Visions Quilt Show, Oceanside, Calif.**  
[www.quiltvisions.org/](http://www.quiltvisions.org/)

**WHERE TO SEE  
ART QUILTS**

**New England Quilt Museum**  
Lowell, Mass.  
[www.nequiltmuseum.org](http://www.nequiltmuseum.org)

**International Quilt Study Center**  
University of Nebraska, Lincoln  
<http://quiltstudy.unl.edu>

**Museum of the American Quilters Society**  
Paducah, Ky.  
[www.quiltmuseum.org](http://www.quiltmuseum.org)

**San Jose Quilt Museum**  
San Jose, Calif.  
[www.sjqquiltmuseum.org](http://www.sjqquiltmuseum.org)

**You've lent your quilts to various exhibitions. What have you learned from that experience?**

This is actually an area of great education for me. I've written my own loan agreements with museums. Most museums' standard agreements are not adequate or appropriate. Most base it on what's in their existing insurance policy. And most policies exclude different causes that have to do with neglect. I focus on security and lighting and whether food and beverages are allowed near the works.

I've also learned to always use a recognized art shipping company. That's because I once had a quilt disappear on its way back from a museum show. I got the FBI involved in trying to track it down. Six months later, the piece, by an artist named Katie Pasquini-Masopust, showed up in a salvage company in Atlanta. Because the artist had stitched her name on the quilt, and Santa Fe, where she lived, the salvage company was able to find her.

**What's your favorite aspect of collecting?**

My real rewards? To live in the presence of beauty and to enjoy the friendships I have developed with the artists. They have enriched my life tremendously.

**Thanks.** ꞑfc

# Passion Under the Palms

Florida's winter fairs have begun to rival the European ones in quality, making them destination events for serious collectors. Plus, they get bonus points for weather.

Used to be, all you could come home with from Florida was a sunburn, a Mickey T-shirt and a suitcase full of shells. These days, you should leave space in your bag for a Warhol print or Sargent drawing. Because in the last two years, South Florida has become the "it" spot for high-end art and antique fairs.

In early December, Art Basel Miami Beach (attendance: 30,000+ over three days) lured NetJets full of New York's culturati to South Beach for a bacchanal of parties and frenzied check-writing. With prices for contemporary art sizzling hotter than habañeros, I heard repeated stories of sold-out dealers having to turn away collectors begging for something—



anything!—by hot young names like Christian Holstad, Hernan Bas or Wangechi Mutu. I am reminded of something blue-chip dealer Richard Feigen said recently: that many contemporary collectors are collecting with their ears and not with their eyes. Sadly, it's true.

The months of January and February saw no fewer than four fairs in Miami and Palm Beach, three of which I attended (two as a featured speaker). Buyers proved more judicious at the Palm Beach! International Fine Art & Antique Fair, which also claimed a 30,000+ attendance (over nine days), including more than 50 museum groups and international jetsetters from David and Julia Koch to Mr. and Mrs. Winston Churchill to the freshly minted Mrs. Trump.

With 102 of the world's best dealers represented, quality abounded, from the huge Zurbarán *Crucifixion* (asking price: \$3.8 million) to a large, pink-and-green late Picasso canvas of sleepers, tagged at \$12.5 million. While not as barn-burning as Miami, major transactions did occur. London dealer Richard Green reportedly sold an early 17th-century skating scene by Hendrick Avercamp (*above*) on the opening weekend



**Top:** Biedermeier settee sold by Iliad Antik for \$45,000. **Middle:** Georgia O'Keeffe's *Abstraction*, 1930, priced at \$350,000 at Mark Borghi. **Left:** Richard Green bought Avercamp's skaters a year ago for \$8.6 million and sold it for a reported \$12.5 million. **Bottom:** Cutting-edge design by Marc Newson at Barry Friedman, one of six made: "\$100,000-plus."

for \$12.5 million, after snagging it a year earlier at Sotheby's for \$8.69 million. (See my December issue, "50 Most Notable Sales of 2004.") Not bad appreciation for a 12-month hold.

Conversation pieces abounded. Looking for a howdah (a canopied seat for use atop an elephant or camel)? A c.1820 ivory and yellow-silk example graced the booth of London antique

dealer Mallett, for a mere \$560,500. Dutch dealer Fijnaut & Paol stopped passers-by with a striking, red-painted board bursting with bed-springs (1962) by EuroPop artist Arman, for \$320,000. With American Pop art selling well into the millions, the more conceptual Europeans—at this price—are ripe for rediscovery.

Also noteworthy: An extremely elegant Viennese Biedermeier settee (c.1825-35), with sensuously curvaceous legs (*at left*) sold for \$45,000 at Iliad Antik (which reported selling nearly 25 pieces at the fair). It's yet another sign that collectors are eschewing traditional furniture styles and looking for sleeker, more modern lines. Fans of red-hot postwar design could pick up the unusual 1960s Verner Panton lamp brought by Dutch dealer Joakim von Pitmar, with its cascading clusters of opalescent shell disks (only \$21,000). Or the supremely sculptural Orgone Chair ("over \$100,000," dealer Barry Friedman said coyly), Marc Newson's 1993 design of polished aluminum and orange lacquer (*below*) that looked like a huge shiny bent burrito.

Two weeks later, at the same venue, the Palm Beach Jewelry and Antique show launched, with a slightly less formal vibe. But the show was well vetted and sales were brisk. On the high end, Alexander Gallery brought a luminous early Flemish *Madonna and Child*, c. 1485, by Gerard David, for \$4 million—a steal compared to, say, Damien Hirst's shark in formaldehyde, which reportedly just sold for \$12 million. Alexander's spotlighted lot? The rediscovered 1864 canvas by Thomas Schuz called *The Stage of Life*, a large allegory of a woman's life, from girlhood to grannydom.

Conversation pieces here included the four 20-plus-foot, exquisitely detailed maritime models brought by Jim's of Lambertville, including ocean liners like the Cunard White Star Line *Majestic* (\$325,000).

There were plenty of undervalued finds in the area of American modernism. At Mark Borghi's booth, a sublime little Georgia O'Keeffe abstraction (*above, left*) garnered lots of interest with an ask of \$350,000. And with prices for the women of the Abstract Expressionist era on a steep rise, his wonderful Joan Mitchell canvas, priced at \$325,000, was probably the only one of its kind available on the market for less than \$500,000.

These were just some of the treasures that greeted fairgoers at every turn, proving Florida to be a new wintertime collecting mecca. ☿



# Upcoming Sales | What to Buy...and Why

**VINTAGE FILM POSTERS** (*Christie's London, March 9*)

## LOT 128: French Casablanca poster, 1942



DESCRIPTION: 47 x 33 inches • ESTIMATE: \$29,000–\$38,000

**TOP LOT** You must remember this... Posters from the Bogey-Bergman classic are extremely scarce, given that wartime paper shortages caused virtually all posters to be pulped and reused. The only other copy of this French design to hit the auction block in the last ten years sold for \$86,600 in 2000. Price could very well play it again, Sam.

## LOT 271: Dutch Phantom of the Opera poster, 1925

DESCRIPTION: 42 x 25 inches • ESTIMATE: \$1,900–\$2,800

Continental posters have long been overlooked on the market, with Swedish examples just now beginning to buck the trend. But this example has a good chance to set the Dutch record. Why? Not only is it from the original Lon Cheney classic, but its startling design—with that dramatically gruesome face—gives it a horror movie feel. That's significant because many of the top movie poster prices are for films from that genre, like *The Mummy* and *Frankenstein*. A six-sheet American version of *Phantom* sold for \$57,500 in 1995. Few Dutch posters even crack a thousand dollars.



**19TH & 20TH CENTURY PRINTS & DRAWINGS** (*Swann Galleries, New York, March 10*)

## LOT 758: Charles White, *Mother and Child*, 1947

DESCRIPTION: Color casein and crayons on thick cream wove, 22 x 29-1/2 inches. • ESTIMATE: \$20,000–\$30,000



**TOP LOT** A very rare color drawing by African-American artist Charles White, done at the height of his career while he and his wife, renowned sculptor Elizabeth Catlett, were living in Mexico, studying in the studio of muralist David Siqueiros. White's prices, like those of other top 20th-century African-American artists, have been on a steep rise over the last few years. Last year, original black-and-white drawings sold for \$26,000 and \$34,500. This scarce color work from the peak of his career should do better.

## LOT 686: Dox Thrash, *Afternoon Chat*, c. 1939-40

DESCRIPTION: Color carborundum relief etching on cream wove paper • ESTIMATE: \$4,000–\$6,000

While working with the WPA Graphic Arts Workshop in the 1930s, this important black printmaker made his name innovating the technique of using carborundum crystals (normally used to remove images from lithographic stones) to create rich shadowy chiaroscuro effects in copper-plate etching. An influential teacher, Thrash created only some 50 print editions, each in small runs. The only other known pull from this rare edition is in the Smithsonian. His prices, too, have taken off: last year, two works smoked their estimates to sell for \$9,000 (on an estimate of \$300–\$500) and \$12,000 (on an estimate of \$4,000–\$6,000). A retrospective of his prints showed at the Philadelphia Museum.



**MODERN DESIGN** (*Wright Auctions, Chicago, March 20*)

## LOT 120: Paul Evans prototype “Cityscape” cabinet, 1970s



DESCRIPTION: Chrome-plated steel over wood, 105 inches w x 24.75 d x 62.75 h • ESTIMATE: \$20,000–\$25,000

**TOP LOT** For design mavens looking ahead of the collecting curve. Interest in 1960s and '70s design is heating up, and Evans is an important sculptor-turned-designer whose work remains undervalued. Best known for his welded-steel “brut” pieces of the 1950s and '60s, he switched gears in the 1970s with the “Cityscape” series, eliminating all surface decoration and working with purer, more architectural forms. This rare and monumental one-off is the prototypical design in that series, the only chrome example known. This will be a test of Evans' market.

## LOT 244: Frank Lloyd Wright executive armchair for Price Tower, c. 1956

DESCRIPTION: Painted steel and upholstery • ESTIMATE: \$15,000–\$20,000

Frank Lloyd Wright was never known for designing comfortable office chairs—whether it was the severe, grid-back seats from the Larkin building or the curving, cushionless three-legged ones from the Johnson Wax building. So this late design, created to furnish Wright's only skyscraper, is rare in that it finally puts a comfy cushion on the angular geometries he so loved. Previous examples have sold at auction from \$16,000 to \$26,000. While this rare executive chair comes out of the Price family, it would be worth more with the original finish and upholstery (fabric is a later approximation).



# MARKET WATCH: RECENT NOTABLE SALES YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

**Item** **Where Sold** **Sale Date** **Price Estimate/Price Fetched**

## VINTAGE AUTOMOBILES



**1954 Oldsmobile F-88 Motorama Show Car**

**Barrett-Jackson**

**2/05**

**no reserve/\$3.24 million**

**BUZZ:** Ultra-rare piece of American automotive history, for which the buyer gleefully overpaid. This one-off concept car, designed by Harley Earl, Oldsmobile's so-called "godfather" of automotive design, was rolled out at GM's 1954 Motorama, complete with a racy fiberglass body, bullet tail lights and a "rocket" V-8. A rare survivor (most concept cars were destroyed), it was bought by John Hendricks, chairman of the Discovery Channel, for his Gateway Colorado Auto Museum. A frantic bidding war resulted in a record for any car sold at Barrett-Jackson, and a hammer price at least twice what experts predicted.

## RARE COINS



**1787 Brasher Doubloon**

**Heritage Numismatics**

**1/05**

**no reserve/\$2.9 million**

**BUZZ:** Touted as "the single most important coin in American numismatics," the Brasher Doubloon—hand-struck in 1787—is believed to be the first gold coin made in the United States. Of the ten examples that survive, this one is unique for having the designer's initials, EB (for Ephraim Brasher) punched across the eagle's breast instead of on its wing. Steven Contursi of Rare Coin Wholesalers of Dana Point, Calif., beat out 11 other bidders. It had previously been bought at auction in 1981 for \$625,000.

## OLD MASTER SCULPTURE



**Franz Messerschmidt, *The Ill-Humored Man*, c. 1770**

**Sotheby's**

**2/05**

**\$300,000–\$500,000/\$4.8 million**

**BUZZ:** The Louvre lets loose! After watching the venerable French institution walk off with this rare 18th-century bust, carved by Austrian court sculptor Messerschmidt, officials from the Metropolitan Museum and the J. Paul Getty Museum, along with three other losing bidders, probably made the same "ill-humored" face. One of only 43 "character heads" by the artist known to survive, it made its market debut by breaking the record for a piece of 18th-century sculpture.

## DOGS IN ART



**Cassius Marcellus Coolidge, *A Bold Bluff and Waterloo: Two*, 1903**

**Doyle**

**2/05**

**\$30,000–\$50,000/\$590,400**

**BUZZ:** No, it's not a misprint. As pedigreed pups competed for Best in Show at the annual Westminster dog show, bidders up-town excitedly wagged their paddles to the tune of \$600,000 for two companion pictures of dogs playing poker. The astounding price represented a world auction record for populist illustrator Coolidge, whose previous top price had been \$74,000. How to explain this result for images that launched a thousand velvet paintings? The stars aligned: from the Westminster show to the current pop-culture passion for poker to the art-world fashion for kitsch. Has the latter impulse finally run amok?

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## Forbes COLLECTOR

is published monthly by Forbes Inc., 60 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011  
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**Price per issue: \$20**

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