

November 2017 Art Market Report

The New York sales came to a head last week with a number of important works that proved the art market to be in a healthy, if cautious, state. A true glimpse at the overall shape of the art market was difficult to ascertain, however, eclipsed as it was by the momentous sale of the ‘last’ Leonardo. The feat of this sale - which is being generally attributed to a triumph of marketing as opposed to the historic significance of the work itself - though it distorts the outside view of the art market, does demonstrate the unique fiscal and cultural influence that the art market still yields over the world.

To be distracted by *Salvatore Mundi* would be to grasp a very narrow and inaccurate view of the art market, so we look to the behind the scenes story and the strengths of the regular Impressionist and Modern and Post-War and Contemporary markets. Had the week not been punctuated by controversial Renaissance masterpieces and the surprise addition of a Ferrari to the Sotheby’s Contemporary sale, it would have reported stable sales and perhaps a tipping of the scales away from Post-War masters, in favour of Impressionist works that held their own this season, despite the seeming decline in interest noted in the May 2017 sales.

Auction Results, New York, November 2017

Christie’s, Sotheby’s and Phillips

Auctions	Est. Not Inc. BP*	Total Inc. BP*	Total Hammer
Christie’s Impressionist & Modern	\$360,300,000 – 476,800,000	\$480,414,000	\$416,270,000
Sotheby’s Impressionist & Modern	\$204,100,000 – 295,100,000	\$269,598,600	\$232,220,000
Christie’s Post-War & Contemporary (sale included the Leonardo)	\$404,600,000 – 481,300,000	\$788,942,250	\$692,410,000
Sotheby’s Post War & Contemporary	\$250,500,000 – 343,500,000	\$310,300,000	\$267,400,000
Phillips 20 th Century & Contemporary	\$90,000,000 – 123,500,000	\$113,800,000	\$96,860,833

Christie’s began the week with the Impressionist and Modern art sale, bringing to the block a number of highly anticipated masterworks, including a dozen from the Nancy and Perry Bass collection, which together made a record breaking \$143 million, making up 30% of the overall result.

Among the Bass works was the top lot of the night, Van Gogh’s *Laboruer dans un Champs*.

The work inspired the evening’s longest and most spirited bidding war with one phone buyer via Mark Porter, Chairman of Christie’s Americas, upping the stakes in a single bid from \$48 million to \$55 million, eliminating a great deal of the competition.

*BP stands for Buyer’s Premium, the additional charges added by the auction house to the final bidding or hammer price.

The work finally hammered down at \$72 million hammer going to Rebecca Wei, President of Christie's Asia on behalf of a rival phone client. The same buyer successfully snapped up two further works, one by Renoir and another by Chagall bringing their total spend to \$91 million including Premium.

Asian buyers have certainly been at the forefront of the art market for some time now and Christie's Asia specialists were especially active throughout the sale, indicating that Western Art is still in high demand with Chinese, Japanese and Middle-Eastern buyers.

Other top lots of the evening included Picasso's *Femme Accroupie (Jacqueline)* which sold above high estimate for \$32.5 million hammer; Fernand Leger's *Contraste de Formes* broke records for the artist at auction, reaching \$62 million hammer; and Monet's *Matinée sur la Seine* came down just above mid-estimate for \$23.3 million.

The calibre of works in Christie's sale was extremely high, and outshone their counterpart auction at Sotheby's, a pattern repeated in the Post-War and Contemporary sales later that week. Despite this, Sotheby's put up a good fight and counted among their lots a number of important masterpieces that carried them through to respectable, if not stellar, results.

The uncontested work of the evening was a painting by Marc Chagall, a beautiful picture of a couple's embrace, *Les Amoureux*, outsold its estimates of \$12 – 18 million reaching \$25 million hammer selling to a Russian client via a Sotheby's representative in the region. A second Chagall, *Le Grand Cirque*, also came amongst the top lots, with the longest bidding contest of the evening between Sotheby's Asia Chairman,

Patty Wong and London representative James Mackie; eventually going to Wong for \$14.5 million hammer. It was a big night for Chagall as his auction record was broken by these two works for the first (and second) time since 1990.

Asian buyers were also out in strength at the Sotheby's sale, as they took home five of the top ten lots, including two Monet's *Les Glaçons, Bennecourt* for \$23.4 million (which last sold at Sotheby's in 1983 when it was bought for \$605,000 including Buyer's Premium) and *Les Arceaux de Roses, Giverny*, for \$19.4 million. Overall, the evening was restrained but steady with all but 5 lots going unsold.

The same cannot be said of Christie's Post-War and Contemporary Sale the following night. The sale room was packed with an eager audience many of whom had turned up to watch the Leonardo make art world history. Despite the small exodus that occurred after the twenty-minute bidding war, that at certain points was jumping in increments of \$2 million at a time, the room remained animated for all 58 lots.

Other highlights of the sale included record breaking works by Kerry James Marshall, Lee Krasner and Hans Hoffman. The obvious runner up of the evening, however, was Andy Warhol's *Sixty Last Suppers*. Displayed strategically alone in a room with *Salvatore Mundi* in the run up to the sale, contrasting shades of Leonardo da Vinci's brilliance, spanning over 500 years, was yet another feather in the cap of the marketing team that shouldered the auction of these works. *Sixty Last Suppers* reached \$56 million hammer, with an undisclosed estimate of \$45 million, one might wonder whether the work would have exceeded its estimate so highly had the piece not been so cleverly promoted as part of the Leonardo frenzy.

Salvatore Mundi

The frenzy itself was not unwarranted; the painting, ‘rediscovered’ in 2005 has both a history of questionable provenance and questionable authorship. The shade being cast upon its name however did nothing to prevent this rare work, one of only 15 Leonardo works on canvas to be known to exist, selling for \$400 million hammer, \$450 million including Buyer’s Premium. Beating both the records for most expensive painting sold on the private or the public market. The former two champions being Gauguin’s *When Will You Marry*, sold privately for \$300 million in 2015 and *Femmes d’Algers* by Picasso, sold also at Christie’s New York in 2015 for \$179 million. They have been eclipsed by the Renaissance master and the world waits with baited breath to see if the new buyer will soon reveal her or his self.

Timeline



The final two evening sales of the week, Sotheby’s Post-War and Contemporary and Phillips’ 20th Century and Contemporary Art could not help but feel somewhat overshadowed. However, though neither contained record-breaking masterpieces there was still steady bidding and decent prices achieved for important works. Whilst Christie’s snuck an Old Master work into their Contemporary sale, Sotheby’s daringly tried their own hand at genre-bending by placing the Ferrari Michael Schumacher drove to victory in the Monaco Grand-Prix in 2001 into their evening sale. And though no records were shattered, the car reached up to \$7.5 million, placing it in the top ten highest selling lots of the evening.

Sotheby’s top lot was undoubtedly Francis Bacon’s *Three Studies of George Dyer* that sold on a single bid for \$38.6 million, below its estimate of \$45 million.

The latter half of 2017 has proved a struggle for Bacon and this underwhelming sale came off the back of Christie’s failure to launch the estimated \$80 million *Study of Red Pope* in London little over a month ago.

However, there was still impressive bidding to be found for other pieces, such as Roy Liechtenstein’s *Female Head*, estimated at \$10 – 15 million, the work reached \$22 million hammer and a Louise Bourgeois spider which sold in the upper echelons of its estimated price, for \$14.6 million to a phone bidder via Sotheby’s Asia’s CEO Kevin Ching.

On the more contemporary side, works by young female artists were in high demand at Sotheby’s. Laura Owens, an artist who is currently the subject of a retrospective at the Whitney Museum, had an untitled piece come to the block and sold after four minutes of

competitive bidding, reaching \$1.76 million overshooting its \$300,000 high estimate by a long way. A similar story occurred for Ghanaian-British artists Lynette Yiadom-Boakie, whose joyful painting of dancing women *The Hours Behind You* was hotly sought after by multiple phone bidders and soared past its \$350,000 high estimate to reach \$1.5 million. A Cinderella story to be found in what might otherwise be read as a slightly unyielding night.

Phillips 20th Century and Contemporary sale painted a similar picture, of consistent sales but lacking the drama so heavily in evidence that week. The auction house has been very much coming into its own, squaring up to its larger established rivals Sotheby's and Christie's. The most exciting instalment of the night kicked off with Picasso's work on paper *Portrait de Femme Endormie*, which was snapped up by an Asian phone bidder for \$8 million hammer, nearly nine times its high estimate.

The top lot of the evening was Peter Doig's *Red House* sold amid applause to a client on the phone with Cheyenne Westphal for \$21.1 million, making it the third highest selling work by Doig at auction.

All in all, the auction market for Impressionist and Modern and Post-War and Contemporary works have proven themselves to be in healthy states after the November auctions.

Headline grabbing masterpieces, though they draw attention are not necessarily indicative of the overall state of the market and much more promising are the high prices being brought in at the lower end of the scale for more emerging artists.

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