

The Art Market Collecting**Koons and Monet set new auction records**

Plus: taboo painting of homosexuality for sale; supersized works for Basel Miami; and innovation at Photo London



Jeff Koons's 'Rabbit' (1986) fetched \$80m, pipping David Hockney for the record for a living artist

Melanie Gerlis MAY 16, 2019

Crashing US stock markets and stop-start trade discussions with China didn't seem to stop the telephone number sums spent at this week's bellwether Impressionist and modern evening sales in New York. These totalled \$343.4m (\$399m with fees) at Christie's and \$300.5m (\$349.9m with fees) at Sotheby's, both within estimate. Of the 104 works sold across both auctions, only 19 hammered for below \$1m.

The top-price work in this category was Claude Monet's standout "Meules" (1890), which dominated the Sotheby's sale and went for \$97m (\$110.7m with fees, estimate about \$55m), a record price for the artist. This sold out of the estate of the Toronto philanthropists Thomas and Mary Beck who had bought the painting in 1986 for \$2.5m (with fees). It was sold on May 14, backed by a third-party guarantor, partly to benefit two not-for-profit institutions.

Other hits of the week were Paul Cézanne's "Bouilloire et fruits" (1888-90) for \$52m (\$59.3m with

fees) and Vincent van Gogh's "Arbres dans le jardin de l'asile" (1889) for \$35m (\$40m with fees), top sellers from a group of five works from the collection of the late publishing magnate Si Newhouse at Christie's on May 13.



Claude Monet's 'Meules' (1890) set a new auction record for the artist, selling for \$97m, nearly double the estimate

Confidence from the Impressionist and modern sales at the beginning of the week spilled into the postwar and contemporary outings. Christie's, already set to have the highest grossing sale of the week, met expectations with a \$468m total (\$539m with fees) on May 15.

Works that had belonged to Si Newhouse again pepped up the action, led by Jeff Koons's three-feet high, stainless steel, inflatable-like "Rabbit" (1986) which sold in the saleroom to the art dealer Robert Mnuchin, father of the US trade secretary, for \$80m (\$91.1m with fees, est \$50m-\$70m). Because of increases in auction house fees, the result means that Koons pips David Hockney's price record for a living artist. Last November, Hockney's 1972 "Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)" also hammered for \$80m but cost \$90.3m with fees.

Koons's well-known work, credited with marking a turning point in contemporary sculpture, was

the only available version from a series of four. The Broad Art Foundation's example is currently on view at Koons's exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (until June 9).

Sotheby's contemporary auction on Thursday also came in within estimate at \$291.6m (\$341.9m with fees) with a handful of works far exceeding expectations. These included for Dana Schutz, the artist who sparked controversy with her painting of the murdered African American teenager Emmett Till at the 2017 Whitney Biennial. On Thursday her huge "Civil Planning" (2004) painting sold at Sotheby's for \$2m (\$2.4m with fees, est \$300,000-\$400,000), a new record for the artist. Schutz's auction record had first been broken earlier in the evening at Phillips, when her "Signing" (2009) sold for \$800,000 (\$980,000 with fees, estimated at \$250,000-\$350,000). Phillips's sale made a total \$85.3m (\$99.9m with fees) and also included a 2012 work by the artist-of-the-moment, KAWS, that soared above its \$600,000 to \$800,000 estimate to sell for \$5m (\$6m with fees).

A painting removed from view in India in 1986 because of its homosexual content is coming for sale next month for up to £600,000. Bhupen Khakhar's confessional "Two Men in Benares" (1982) is dominated by a self-portrait of the artist in naked embrace with another man, both life-size with erect penises, standing next to a temple. The work made Khakhar the first gay Indian artist to reveal his sexuality when it went on view at Gallery Chemould in Mumbai. Protests came from critics and locals, to the extent that the canvas had to come down after only two days of exhibition.

The Swiss collectors Guy and Helen Barbier bought Khakhar's controversial work back in 1986, when such paintings were selling for about \$1,800, according to Gallery Chemould. They are now offering it, together with 29 other works, on June 10 at Sotheby's in London (total auction estimate £2.1m-£2.9m).

Khakhar, an accountant-turned-artist who died in 2003, first visited the UK in 1976 where he met other gay artists including Howard Hodgkin (he stayed in his house) and David Hockney. Such associations helped Khakhar declare his own sexuality, according to Sotheby's specialist Manjari Sihare-Sutin. A painting by Khakhar that was in Hodgkin's collection, "De-Luxe Tailors" (1972), made the highest price for the Indian artist at auction in 2017 when it sold for £920,000 (£1.1m with fees). "Two Men in Benares" featured in Khakhar's 2016 retrospective at Tate Modern, *You Can't Please All*.

Art Basel's Miami Beach fair will have a new section for about 30 large-scale works, including sculpture, film and other installations, at its next edition (December 5-8). Works in the new Meridians segment will stand in 60,000 square feet of column-free space in the Grand Ballroom,

one floor above and connected to the main fair in the revamped Miami Beach Convention Center. It will be a smaller display than at Unlimited, the popular section for supersized work at the Basel edition, which will field 75 works in June, but is a similar concept.

Larger-scale works increasingly feature at commercial art events — though none to the extent of Unlimited — matching the growth of high-spec private museums and confident collectors around the world. Noah Horowitz, director of Art Basel Americas, says the platform goes beyond the market. “Look at Ralph Rugoff’s shows [in the Venice Biennale that opened this month]. About 80 per cent of the works are projects that wouldn’t fit in a gallery booth. We are trying to facilitate that type of production and ambition.”

Meridians will be overseen by the Mexico City-based curator Magali Arriola, who is organising her country’s pavilion this year at the Venice Biennale.



Adam Jeppesen's 'Work no. 127' (2019) is part of his Tanks series, on show at Photo London

There's plenty to satisfy lovers of classic photography in many of the 114 booths at the Photo

London fair, which runs until Sunday. But some of the most compelling works at this year's fifth edition are recent pieces that push the boundaries of the medium. Roman Road gallery brings a booth of work by the young French artist Alix Marie, including her "Zephyr" (2018), on which the image of a man's hand on a woman's head has been printed on to polyester silk and placed above three cooling fans, suggesting a wavering moment of indecision (£1,800). Another solo booth at Black Box Projects shows work by Denmark's Adam Jeppesen, including pieces from his Tanks series (started in 2017) that print cyanotype (blue) prints on to fabric that is suspended in oil inside a glass tank, creating a trapped animal-like object (£5,000-£13,500). Not to be missed, too, is a neat art fair in-joke at Sid Motion gallery where Abigail Hunt has repurposed last year's Photo London catalogue by ripping it up and creating attractive collages (all 2019, £750-£950). Photo London runs at Somerset House until Sunday.

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