Impressive 2011 Online Art Sales on artnet Auctions


New York / Berlin / Paris, January 31, 2012—If you haven’t noticed already, now is a good time to take a look at the world of online art sales. In the last year we’ve seen the launch of the cyberspace VIP Art Fair (whose second iteration opens next week), and Christie’s New York hosted its first exclusively online auction during its Elizabeth Taylor blitz in early December.
The past year saw some big prices on *artnet Auctions*, too. Below are highlights of the 2011 sales on *artnet Auctions* in the categories of unique works of art, prints and multiples, and photography.

**Unique Works**

As in conventional auctions, postwar material drew some of the highest prices. Never far from the top in any art sale, Andy Warhol snagged first place (not just for unique works, but for all works) with the sale of *Flowers*, for US$1.3 million, which was the second highest price for a Warhol "flower" painting at auction last year. The canvas has flowers in a deep, bright shade of blue and is one of four in the *Flowers* series dated 1978; the vast majority of these works date to 1964–1965.

In a different mode entirely are two pictures by Thomas Hart Benton (American, 1889–1975) that fetched US$198,559 and US$143,750. The Regionalist painter and one-time mentor to Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956) depicted his family enjoying a palm-tree dotted beach in *Eleuthera* (1955), named for an island in the Bahamas where the Bentons vacationed. The bigger price was paid for the mythical *Ten Pound Hammer* (1965), which shows three black men working on railroad tracks with a train steaming in the background. Benton must have liked the image—he released it as a lithograph in 1967 in an edition of 300.

A conceptual video sculpture by Nam June Paik (American/Korean 1932–2006) sold for US$92,000, proving that mixed media works can do well online, too. *Polaris* (1990) is composed of four televisions arranged like petals around a globe and backlit by concentric neon florescent tubes. It was exhibited in a 2000 survey of the artist’s work at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Another conceptual work, the checkerboard abstraction *Check #9* by Sherrie Levine (American, b.1947), sold for US$115,000. Levine gained notoriety in the ‘80s when she exhibited her "photographs of photographs" by Walker Evans (American, 1903–1975) of desolate farmers during the Great Depression, unaltered and indistinguishable from the originals. Her solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art is just closing now, and her oeuvre seems particularly resonant today with the renewed debates concerning appropriation and copyright infringement in art.

**Prints and Multiples**

A portfolio of 37 prints by Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, otherwise known as Le Corbusier (Swiss, 1887–1965), was the highest-earning work on artnet in the prints and multiples category. If the architect’s buildings lead you to believe he dreamt only in black-and-white, the *Unité series* (1953, printed in 1963) is evidence to the contrary. The set has 17 prints in color and 17 of the same prints, sans color, along with three additional black-and-white prints.

This particular folio belonged to the architect Mohindra N. Kawlra, who worked closely with Le Corbusier in the 1950s. It established the record for prints by the artist at auction when it sold for US$57,500 at the inaugural design auction on artnet in May 2011.
Three of the top 10 prints were by Warhol, but second place was taken by an artist with whom he collaborated. Jean-Michel Basquiat’s (American, 1960–1988) set of four, large-format screenprints titled *Portfolio II* was originally printed around 1982. The present set, which sold for US$47,727, was a posthumous edition printed in 2004–2005. A portfolio of five prints called *Flowers* (1990) by Basquiat’s friend and fellow street artist Keith Haring (American, 1958–1990) brought US$32,775.

In a year when Zhang Daqian (Chinese, 1899–1983) overtook Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973) as the year’s top auction earner, it comes as no surprise that a set of 10 prints by five leading Chinese artists also makes our list. *The Giants of Contemporary Chinese Art* (2005) contains two prints each by Fang Lijun (Chinese, b.1963), Yue Minjun (Chinese, b.1962), Wang Guangyi (Chinese, b.1956), Zhang Xiaogang (Chinese, b.1958), and Zeng Fanzhi (Chinese, b.1964). It is the last of an edition of 99 and sold for US$34,150.

Warhol’s portraits of Chairman Mao, Mick Jagger, and the Marx Brothers brought US$37,000–54,500, and a Warhol-esque screenprint of a crying Marilyn Monroe (complete with diamond dust) by “neo-pop” artist Russell Young (British, b.1960) realized US$27,780.

**Photographs**

Warholmania gripped the photographs category as well. One set of 12 photos that features some of the artist’s most beloved subjects, among them Salvador Dalí (Spanish, 1904–1989), Liza Minnelli, Jackie Onassis, and Pope. The portfolio sold in May for US$140,300, over its high estimate of US$120,000. Earlier in the year, another suite of the same photographs brought US$126,500 against a high estimate of US$90,000.

A relatively tame picture by famed homoeroticist Robert Mapplethorpe (American, 1946–1989) showing two men in profile sold for US$83,636, and a large-format Thomas Struth (German, b.1954) photograph of a cemetery in Tokyo, dated 1996 and donated by the artist, raised $80,500 for the victims of last year’s devastating earthquakes in Japan during the *Arts for Japan* charity auction, produced in collaboration with Berenberg Art Advice.


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