

stern.de – February 26, 2008 - 17:58

URL: <http://www.stern.de/unterhaltung/ausstellungen/612352.html>

Beginn des Artikels

Interview with artnet founder Hans Neuendorf

## Art Shopping on the Internet



© artnet

Well-seasoned in dealing with art, and founder of artnet.com: Hans Neuendorf

**They all warned him. “Don’t do it, Hans! You’ve already lost so much money with that.” Yes, that’s true. And still: Hans Neuendorf (70), art dealer and one of the first internet entrepreneurs as such, once again ventures a relaunch of an enterprise which failed dramatically in 1999: art auctions on the internet.**

Mr. Neuendorf is well-seasoned in dealing with art: gallery owner, co-founder of the first international art fair in Cologne, market observer for decades, and founder of the web site artnet.com, which is used by roughly two million art experts per month. Still, he had it all wrong in 1999: at this stage, there weren’t enough internet users among the collectors. “We simply were there too early.”

**One of the stars of artnet’s auctions is Andy Warhol’s print „Marilyn“**

The time, however, has now come. This is why Hans Neuendorf started all over again with online auctions of photos, fine prints, paintings and sculptures last Monday. One of the stars of artnet’s new online auctions is Andy Warhol’s print “Marilyn”. It started at a reasonable US \$ 10,000 and quickly rose to US \$ 15,000. A painting of two female swimmers by Alex Katz went up from US \$ 500 to US \$ 900 within a couple of hours. Two bidders raised the price of a photograph by Cindy Sherman from US \$ 3,600 to US \$ 4,800 as in a ping-pong match. Generally photographs sell best: „Marie Antoinette“ by Hiroshi Sugimoto went up from US \$ 2000 to US \$ 5000, a photograph of a naked couple by Gregory Crewdson from US

\$ 800 to US \$ 3,200. It will only get really exciting after two weeks. Hans Neuendorf: "Those who are really interested will try to muscle in their bids towards the end."

Every auctioned lot can be compared with similar works. A unique service not offered by anyone but Mr. Neuendorf: Whoever clicks on the "Comparable Work"-button will learn, for instance, that Warhol's "Marilyn" should actually be much more expensive than listed on artnet: an almost identical lot changed hands at an auction for US \$ 39,000. Many a gem, however, remained undiscovered on the first day, for example a beautiful picture by Alexander Calder with a starting price of US \$ 25,000, which is worth at least twice as much. But it's only just the beginning.

**Mr. Neuendorf, you're starting art auctions on the internet at a moment when many fear that the art market will collapse.**

Hans Neuendorf: We're currently experiencing a rise in the market that we haven't seen before. The art market is far from collapsing. It is true, though, that some prices are exaggerated. Nevertheless, the big, broad art market is extremely successful.

**You're attracting buyers and sellers with a ten percent commission rate – as opposed to 25 to 30 percent required at the big auction houses.**

We want to accelerate and to cheapen art sales. There is a large number of dealers with huge stocks. They don't sell because they are angry about having to squeeze off 30 percent to convert things into cash. So the art piles up. But there are many people who want to buy something and would be overjoyed to get it at a good price.

**It is hard to imagine that storehouses are full of masterpieces. Aren't you appalled having to accept something mediocre?**

Obviously we try to get the best things. The estimations are subjective, though. Many things that I find scary are sold at high prices. The art market is huge.

**Will you reject anything at all?**

That depends on the judgment of our experts in New York. Of course there are things that are not interesting. Unlike ebay we don't accept everything, rather we make selections. Anyway, the range of what is accepted will be much wider than at auction houses.

**They don't take anything below US \$ 10,000.**

Even though there are wonderful things. Auction houses reject all artists who are not in fashion – because they fear they can't sell their artworks and wind up with the costs caused by transport, insurance and the exhibition. We don't have these costs.

**So you would put art on the net which is not hip.**

We can even create a secondary market for this group of artists, which the art market unjustifiably rejects at the moment. It's like on Amazon. There you can buy books you won't

find in the shops, the most extreme and extraordinary things. There is a market for everything.

**Is it possible to view the originals prior to the auction?**

No, we don't want that. Inspection is only possible after the sale. If a piece of art is completely different from what you expected, you're free to pull out of the sale.

**What's selling best?**

Most people don't buy what they find beautiful. They buy brands. Artists are brands. The more famous they are, the more firmly the brand is established. Also because of this the inspection of the original is not that important.

**So the expensive things will continue to be purchased only through the auction houses?**

No, that's completely wrong. Especially the expensive works sell better on the internet. Because the more expensive things are, the better known the brands.

**Will there be fixed auction dates on the net?**

No, we're planning one continuous auction. But of course we'll promote special things when we get them. Or you subscribe to our Market Alerts, and then you'll get an e-mail once something appears which is interesting for you.

**It is a bit exhausting to click through all your internet offers.**

No more exhausting than flipping through an auction catalogue. But we actually hope it's going to be exhausting to scroll through especially as we continue to offer more services.

**How does the auction work?**

There will be the opportunity to strike at a fixed price. But normally, the highest bid received before the end of the auction will be accepted. This is restricted to two weeks. Who's really interested will of course try to muscle in their bids towards the end."



© artnet

One of the stars of artnet's new online auctions is Andy Warhol's print "Marilyn". It started at reasonable US \$ 10,000 and quickly rose to US \$ 15,000.

**Delivery could be a problem. Does the seller himself have to do the shipping?**

We have nothing to do with the original. We're not an auction house in the strict sense but a platform. Like ebay. We provide sellers and buyers with a bidding mechanism and let them handle the rest themselves. This is the service.

**If my newly acquired artwork is in Canada, and I am in Berlin, who is going to pay the costs of transport?**

You'll have to negotiate this with the seller.

**Could the internet render art fairs obsolete some day?**

I can't imagine so. I think it's a different form of trade. People love art fairs also for their social component.

**Are you afraid of a flop as in 1999?**

No. I'm just anxious that everything will continue to run smoothly, technically, and I hope that we have many bids in the beginning. I am convinced, though, that people will get familiar with our auctions. This is a development on the art market which is due: handy and fast.

**Do you fear imitators or copycats?**

That's not that easy. The others don't have a price database built up over the last 20 years, no statistics, no charts and no indices on price developments. Not 2,000 galleries for a market survey, so that one can compare the offer, and no artist works catalogues. A good competitive advantage.

Interview: Anja Lösel