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Head, and a Girl Smelling an Apple by Jeanne Schinto

Photos courtesy Skinner

Skinner, Inc., Boston,

Massachusetts

At Skinner's fall auction of paintings, sculpture, prints, and

photography, held September

was still talking with amazement about what had taken place in the same space two nights earlier. An anomaly on the order of, say, a Megabucks win for Skinner and for its unidentified New Englandbased consignor, a Qing Dynasty vase sold for \$24.7 million with buyer's premium (see M.A.D., November 2014, p. 11-A). No other item hammered down at Skinner has come close to achieving that figure, but for my money, it was a good thing that the art sale was a return to normalcy. It offered a total of 590 lots, approximately 77.8% of which sold for a total of \$1.87 million. News stories about a price like that of the vase are elating, but distorting, and may even deter those thinking of getting involved in collecting art at more modest levels. News that came via e-mail on

the same day as the art auction

was cause for another kind of

amazement. It was sent by the

Web site (www.artnet.com), which barrages me daily and, I have to admit, usually ropes me in with one or another of its sensationalist headlines (e.g., "Buy Pope Francis's Skullcap on eBay for \$115,000," "U.S. Tourists Steal Pompeii Artifact"). Skimming through "10 Things You Need to Know About Investing in Art," a report by Alexander Forbes on what he learned at the Fine Art and Finance Conference in Berlin, Germany, I found an eyebrow-raiser. Contradicting the mantra of just about every art advisor in decades past, the story said advisees are now being counseled *not* to buy what they love. "Put a damper on your passion for art when making purchases" is Forbes's one-sentence summary of one piece of advice. As he explained it, the reasoning is that collectors will probably end up paying more than they

should and won't get a return

passion for an artwork or artist

analysis of acceptable purchase

price ranges," he wrote, "it can

completely tip the scale from a

on their investment. "When

gets in the way of strategic

moderate return on investment to a devastating loss." Forbes qualified the statement a bit in his summary of the next tip: "But don't think that passionate collecting and achieving moderate returns are mutually exclusive." With "a bit of discipline, the right advice, and if all else fails, a trusty companion to rip the bidding paddle out of your hand, you could find yourself a member of what collector Sylvain Lévy said is a lucky sub-set of collectors who both get to enrich their lives with fantastic artworks and make some money in the process. Just don't think you'll end up the most popular collector in town," he cautioned.

You can look up Paris-based

Collection on line; he specializes

in the work of contemporary

Chinese artists. Indeed, most

inclined toward contemporary

auction had, as usual, relatively

artworks, and the Skinner art

many of the bidders were

conferees were probably

Sylvain Lévy and his DSL

thinking about investing rather than choosing art that personally appealed to them. Even dealers buying for stock don't they have to love what they want to sell for a profit in order to be effective? Apparently not, if you believe what you read on Artnet. Forgive the prelude, but I needed to vent. Without further ado, here is the report on the auction. Emil Nolde's gouache on wove paper Tulpen und Kakteen was the catalog cover lot. The Danish-born German artist's Expressionist interpretation of brilliant red and gold tulips and greener-than-life cacti came to the sale from a private collection in Massachusetts. A label affixed to the backing showed that it

had been sold in 1967 through

"M. Knoedler & Company." A

catalog note said it had been

Foundation. More recently,

gallery by the Nolde

consigned to the now defunct

Nolde (1867-1956) himself has

been in the news as the subject

of a retrospective at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Denmark (north of Copenhagen), which was on view at the time of the Skinner sale. Perhaps prompted in part by that milestone, there was brisk competition, and the painting sold to an American dealer in the room for \$153,000 (est. \$100,000/150,000). A phone bidder took the highest-priced artwork of the sale, a circa 1878 study of a man's head by John Singer Sargent. Estimated at \$200,000/300,000, the oil on canvas of a dark-browed, fulllipped, bare-chested young model had condition problems and was unsigned, but it came with good provenance. According to the catalog, the "recently rediscovered" work from a Rhode Island collection had been "untraced" since its acquisition in 1915 by Mrs. Reginald Nicholson, née Natalie Peterson, who was married that year and died in 1956. The catalog stated further that the painting's subject appeared to be the same person

depicted in several other early

Sargent studies, and that the

work was one of 11 acquired by

Knoedler from the collection of

Sargent's studio mate Auguste

Alexandre Hirsch (1833-1912).

To open the bidding, Skinner CEO Karen Keane asked for the low estimate, as she often does (if there are no takers, she reduces the figure, in a kind of reverse auction). The phone bidder went for it; there were no competitors; and that was the end of that. The final bill for the currently living in France. Two oils by Charles Courtney Curran (1861-1942) came to the sale by family descent from the collection of William Knickerbocker Wallbridge (1882-1979), and each sold well. One was a 1911 portrait of a fetching young girl smelling a just-picked apple in an orchard. Apple Perfume sold to a phone bidder for \$65,190 (est. \$50,000/70,000). The other Curran depicted one of the white-painted Neoclassical architectural structures of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Clearly showing where the White City got its name, The Water Gate sold for \$46,125 to an absentee bidder (est. \$30,000/50,000). Russian Peasants, a circa 1930 gouache and graphite on paper by Boris Dmitrievich Grigoriev was one of the surprise hits of the sale. In a

a \$6000 absentee bid and went on to sell to an on-line bidder for New Yorker-esque caption. Lots that took on water and ultimately sank when their turn at the auctioneer's podium came up included a Jane Peterson oil on canvas of the ablution fountain in Hagia Sophia (est.

\$30,000/50,000); the Istanbul scene was

1942 photographs documenting the Massachusetts Women's Defense Corps (est. \$15,000/20,000); with a lower reserve, it might have gone to an institution that could appreciate this anomalous aspect of Adams's career—or to one devoted to women's history. A bronze sculpture by Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Richard Guino, Le petit Forgeron, was bought in, too, then sold after the auction for \$14,760 (est. version, which was executed in 1916.

in a Vandeuren Galleries frame but had an added signature. Another

buy-in was a highly uncharacteristic Ansel Adams portfolio of 57 circa

The auction's prints section offered, as usual, everything from Rembrandt to Rauschenberg. Highlights included Roy Lichtenstein's Still Life with Windmill, which went at \$19,680 to a phone bidder; a 1944 M.C. Escher lithograph, *Encounter*, for \$11,070; 20th-century Japanese artist Shiko Munakata's Head of a Woman at \$10,455; and Soleil Couchant by Camille Pissarro, an 1879 etching, aquatint, and drypoint on paper, final state of four, from an estate, that rose to \$9840. As for Rembrandt and Rauschenberg, The Goldsmith, an etching by the 17th-century Dutchman, sold to phone bidder for \$12,300 (est. \$6000/8000), while a 1981 color offset lithograph by the 20th-century American that promoted "Artists Rights Today" made \$1046 (est. \$700/900). Two other Rauschenbergs, color screenprints on paper, were passed.

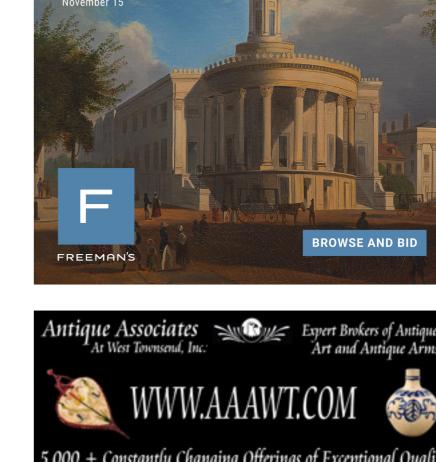
Newly headed by Michelle Lamuniére, the photography section of Skinner's art department is still somewhat of a seedling, but it's big enough to help the cause of a local nonprofit institution, the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University (www.bu.edu/prc). At this sale, it offered 27 prints by well-known photographers with Boston connections, the proceeds of which benefited PRC. At one of the preview nights, Lamuniére, who had a research fellowship courtesy of PRC while earning a graduate degree at B.U., gave a gallery talk that focused on selections from these works. On auction day, bidders spent

the most for images by Abelardo Morell (\$1968); Ernest Withers (\$984); Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison, a married couple working as a team (\$984); and Joyce Tenneson (\$1353).

more information, phone the auction house at (617) 350-5400 or visit

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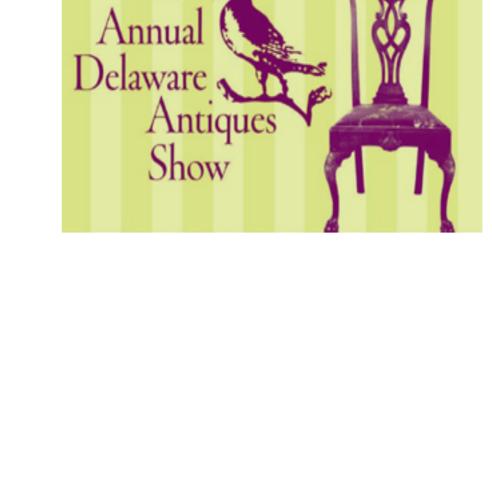
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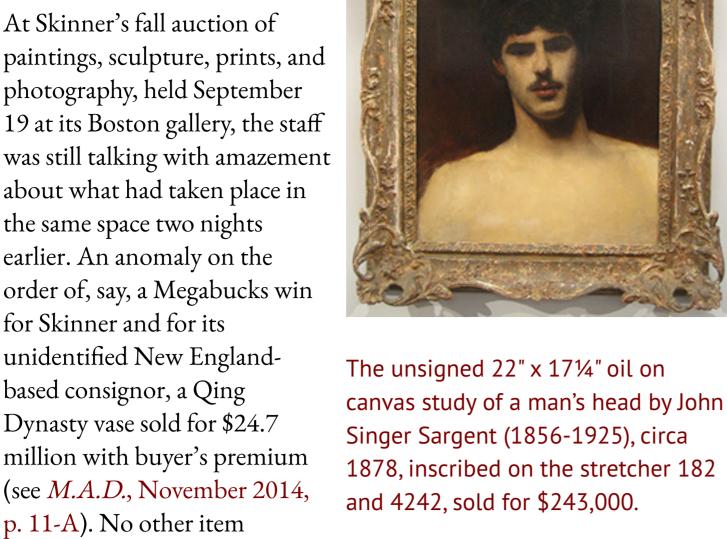


Join

Ruby







artist moved to Cragsmoor, an art colony in a tiny community along the Hudson River, north of Poughkeepsie, New York. Schinto photo.

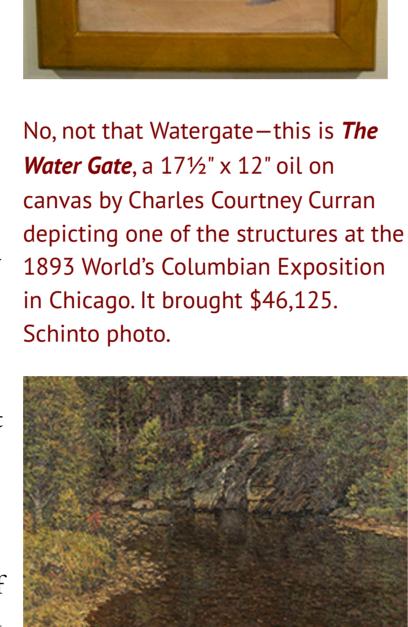
Apple Perfume by Charles Courtney

Curran (1861-1942) brought \$65,190.

The 22" x 18" oil on canvas is signed

and dated 1911, the year after the





Trout Brook, a North Newry, Maine,

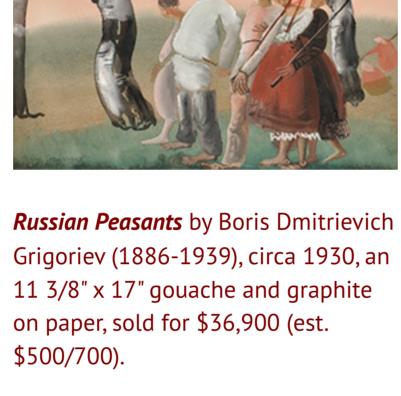
landscape by John Joseph Enneking

sold for \$17,220.

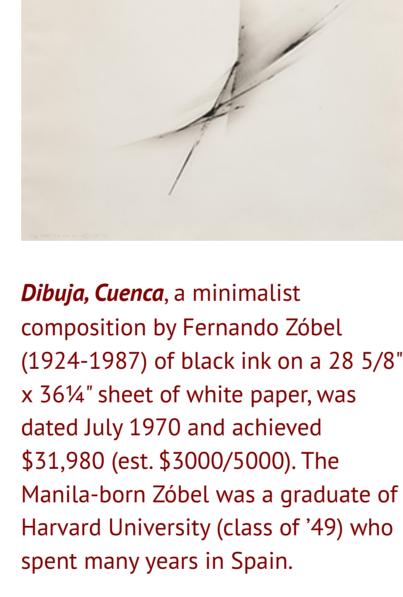
\$8000/12,000).

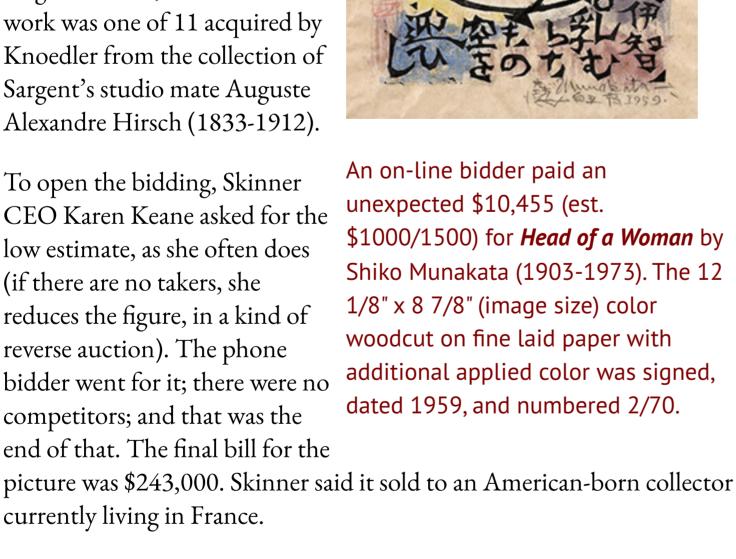
(1841-1916), oil on canvas, 24" x 30",

A 24" x 30" oil on canvas by Jane few. Nonetheless, I wonder how Peterson, *Flowering Trees in Bright* **Sunshine**, made \$19,680 (est.









marked understatement, Skinner art department head Robin S.R. Starr quipped as she prepared to sell it, "There's been a little bit of interest in this." Estimated at \$500/700, the 11 3/8" x 17" cartoonish depiction of barefoot workers carrying rakes and walking through woods opened with \$36,900. The painting came to the sale from the estate of Russian-born artist Mischa Richter (1910-2001), who had a long association with the artist communities of Provincetown, Massachusetts, and whose cartoons appeared regularly in *The New Yorker*. I have to wonder whether the cartoonist had noticed that the Grigoriev painting almost cries out for a

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\$30,000/40,000); it had been cast at a date later than the original plaster In the under-\$20,000 category, the so-called middle market that continues to struggle, there were several very good oils that got bidders' attention. Peterson's Flowering Trees in Bright Sunshine was one, selling for \$19,680 (est. \$8000/12,000). There was also American Impressionist Theodore Earl Butler's *Train at Giverny*; signed and dated '04, it brought \$10,455 (est. \$8000/12,000). Another was John Joseph Enneking's Trout Brook, a North Newry, Maine, landscape in a period Foster Brothers frame; it fetched \$17,220 (est. \$7000/9000).

Skinner's next art sale in Boston is scheduled for January 23, 2015. For

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