

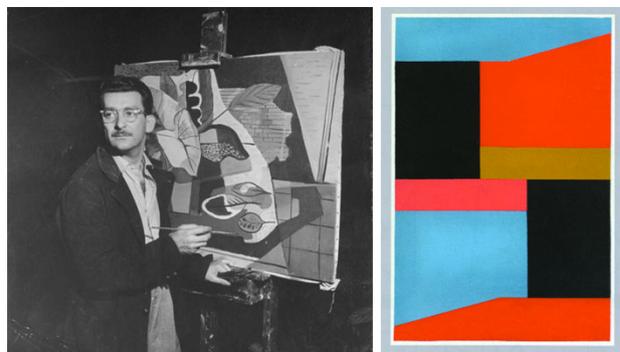
THE ART NEWSPAPER 

Christie's pulls works after 'forgery' concerns

Ten items from one collection withdrawn from New York auctions

By Silas Martí.
05 June 2013

Christie's withdrew ten works by Brazilian artists from its auctions of Latin American art in New York last month (scheduled to take place on 29 and 30 May). The works, allegedly by artists including Ivan Serpa, Mira Schendel, Roberto Burle Marx, Ione Saldanha, Hércules Barsotti, Ubi Bava and Amílcar de Castro, were "withdrawn pending additional research", says a spokeswoman for the auction house. All of the works came from the Rio de Janeiro-based Ralph Santos Oliveira collection. The collector told the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S.Paulo* that he was "shocked" by the removal of the pieces. He said he had tried to place them at auction on behalf of the owner, his grandmother, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease and cannot recall where the works were bought.



The Brazilian artist Roberto Burle Marx working at his home and, right, a painting attributed to Ivan Serpa-Untitled, 1957- that was among the works withdrawn from sale

A spokeswoman for Christie's said that these were "rare circumstances" and that there are "occurrences when information comes to light after publication [of the catalogue] that was previously unavailable".

Members of the Brazilian art trade say they had doubts about the works. André Millan, the owner of the São Paulo-based gallery Millan, which represented Schendel's estate for a decade until 2012, says he had concerns about a picture Christie's sent him by email of a work purported to be by Schendel. The work (Untitled, 1964, tempera on burlap mounted on wood, est \$35,000-\$45,000) was later withdrawn.

Gustavo Rebello, a Rio-based dealer and collector of works by Ivan Serpa, says that he had a similar impression regarding the works by Serpa, which he saw for the first time in the catalogue. "They seemed very suspicious, clearly strange," Rebello says. "They also seemed too flat and plain to be Serpa paintings, especially the smaller ones."

A week after the removal of the works at Christie's, Phillips also removed a work by Alfredo Volpi from its Latin American art sale, scheduled for 23 May. Representatives of the artist's estate alerted the auction house about the work on paper, which was dated 1970 and estimated to sell for \$20,000, because they thought it was "suspicious", says Marco Antonio Mastrobuono, the head of the Instituto Alfredo Volpi. "Works on paper were made by Volpi in the early 1960s, but never on a sheet with a letterhead like the one shown. This probably belongs to the same series of fakes on paper that surfaced around 2005."



Laura Gonzalez, a specialist in Latin American art at Phillips, says: “The Volpi was a very unusual thing to happen to us, because we have strong connections in Brazil. It was removed from the sale as soon we heard from the Instituto Volpi.”

The recent cases highlight the problem of fakes in the Brazilian market. “The more expensive a work is, the more there are attempts to clone it,” says Paulo Kuczynsky, a prominent São Paulo dealer who was consulted by both Christie’s and Phillips regarding the latest concerns. “Some of [the works] are as false as a \$3 bill.”

Trade sources say it is nearly impossible to bring a forger to court, because Brazilian law does not classify the forging of a work of art as a criminal offence. Someone can be accused of larceny or misrepresentation, but not arrested for falsely claiming a work of art to be by a recognised artist.

Lawyers representing the estates of important Brazilian artists, including Volpi, Candido Portinari, Flavio de Carvalho and Aldo Bonadei, are studying how the law can be amended and are lobbying the government to reconsider the issue as a criminal matter.