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Experts Say This Ugly 'Warhol' Painting, Which Sold at Auction for \$247,000, Is Un-Warholian

Brian Boucher, Tuesday, August 18, 2015



Stevens auction house offered this work, which it classifies as an Andy Warhol portrait of Coco Chanel.

Mississippi auction house Stevens, which is mostly in the business of selling antiques and estates, is [boasting of a \\$247,000 sale this month](#) of an alleged portrait by Pop artist [Andy Warhol](#) of iconic fashion designer Coco Chanel.

The work had been estimated to sell for anywhere between \$50,000 to \$2 million, company president Dwight Stevens told artnet News by phone. Stevens said that his consultants guessed the date of the work to be early in Warhol's career, perhaps the mid-1970s.

Warhol began regularly showing his work in the 1950s and exhibited work at a show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1956.

"It's all a guess if you don't have proof," he said.

Though the work is said to bear the authenticating stamp of the artist's estate, something didn't seem right to the former Andy Warhol Museum director Tom Sokolowski, who didn't hesitate to give artnet News his assessment of the work by phone today.

"It looks more like Caitlyn Jenner than Coco Chanel," he said, adding, "it even looks like it was *painted* by Caitlyn Jenner! There's nothing about that work that bespeaks Andy Warhol in the slightest. How the authentication committee could have stamped it as authentic is just beyond any sentient person's imagination."

Critic Blake Gopnik, currently at work on a book on the artist, was equally skeptical in an email to artnet News.

"The 'Coco' certainly doesn't look like any Warhol I've had the chance to see, even considering the range I've come across in his commercial work," Gopnik wrote. "If one day he'd woken up and decided to make something utterly new, and as ugly and stupid as the 'Coco' painting—not entirely beyond imagining even with Warhol—we could never tell it was by him. (I'm researching such a case now, where some bizarre late works that look nothing like Warhols come with documents that suggest they could be by him.)"

Informed of the existence of skeptical expert opinion, Stevens was confident.

"We had numerous people look at it," he said. "We were relying on others. We brought in art dealers and so-called experts. They said it was really baffling to them because they hadn't seen anything quite like it, and that it could be one of his earliest works."

In the end, he said, it is up to the buyer to determine whether or not they believe it is a work by Warhol.

"I left it up to the bidders. They brought their experts, and they were satisfied."

"Executed in Warhol's inimitable style," says the house, the work in question is a monochrome image of the famous French designer in an imposing broad-brimmed hat, against a patterned background. It's not apparently based on a photograph, as were Warhol's most recognizable celebrity portraits, and it eschews the Pop artist's trademark bright hues. The work comes from an unnamed Dallas collector who bought it at a Canadian gallery, which Stevens identified as Jack Hamilton Gallery, in 1985. The buyer prefers to remain anonymous, Stevens said.

The Andy Warhol Foundation, contacted via email, stated its policy: "We do not offer opinions on works of art purported to be by Andy Warhol, whether on or off the record. The Andy Warhol Art Authentication Board (AWAAB) was authorized to cease operations in October 2011 and no longer exists."

A press release by the Aberdeen-based auction house and published on [ArtDaily](#) indicates that the work is executed in "synthetic polymer and silkscreen ink on canvass" (*sic*), while a caption says that it is an oil on canvas. artnet News could not confirm details of the work or the prices, as Stevens is not part of artnet's auction price database.

The August 8 sale took place at the 1847 estate Lauri Mundi, and also included "a [Marc Chagall](#) original lithograph, along with other Victorian works of art." Chagall was 14 years of age when the Victorian era came to a close. Warhol was born 27 years later. Among the other treasures on offer in the 420 lots that went to the auction block were a 91-inch-high rosewood étagère with dragon carving from the Tennessee home of President James Knox Polk, which fetched \$26,450, and a Baccarat crystal chandelier that went for \$12,650.

The house does occasionally sell art. "We sold a Chinese plaque recently that was estimated at up to \$10,000," said Stevens. "It brought \$82,000."

For Southerners, the auctioneers seem a bit preoccupied with the heat on the day of the sale. "The weather was a bit warm," said Stevens, "but the crowd was lively and everyone had a good time." According to the house's website, cooling fans were made available to those in attendance.

Expect the heat to ratchet up, figuratively if not literally, at a sale in Natchez, "slated for sometime in mid-October," where the house will offer "another original

portrait painting by Warhol from the same collection—this one perhaps even more desirable, because it depicts the late screen legend Marilyn Monroe."