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Market News: Katz snaps up Churchill

A portrait of Sir Winston Churchill was a quick seller at 20/21, while London galleries preview the potential top lots for Frieze; Colin Gleadell rounds up the latest art market news



BY COLIN GLEADELL

SEPTEMBER 15, 2015 07:00



John Armstrong, *The Passion of the Inanimate*, 1947

[Enlarge](#)



Irma Stern, *Arab in Black*

[Enlarge](#)

A rediscovered portrait of Sir Winston Churchill by Walter Richard Sickert was one of the first sales at last week's [20/21 British Art Fair](#) at the Royal College of Art. Much admired by David Coombs, the expert on Churchill's paintings, and with a specially commissioned catalogue essay by the Sickert expert, Dr Wendy Baron, the painting is a preparatory study for the portrait that hangs in the National Portrait Gallery. It had belonged to the family of the artist, Paul Maze, a friend of Churchill's, and was drawn from life in 1927 when Sickert was teaching Churchill how to paint. Priced at £50,000 by the Court Gallery, it sold to the eagle-eyed London dealer, Daniel Katz. Among the other successful galleries at the fair was Piano Nobile which sold a vibrant abstract painting by Irish artist, William Crozier, priced at £85,000, and four paintings priced between £40,000 and £65,000 by the neglected English surrealist, John Armstrong, for whom they are holding a solo exhibition at their Holland Park gallery next month.

The heat is beginning to build up for the London contemporary art auctions that are held during the week of the Frieze Art Fair next month. Phillips, which has just hired three well connected experts who previously worked for Christie's – Hugues Joffre, Jean-Paul Engelen and Robert Manley (though the latter has yet to be signed off) – has announced that it has a \$15 million collection from the estate of the American dermatologist, Fredric Brandt, that includes works by hot American artists, Christopher Wool, Richard Prince, Ed Ruscha and Mark Grotjahn. Yesterday they added a collection of 32 Lucian Freud etchings, some of which could fetch around £100,000.

While Sotheby's has yet to reveal its hand, Christie's is set to announce probably the most valuable lot of the week with a painting by Peter Doig from his Concrete Cabin series, influenced by the architecture of Le Corbusier. Shown at the Tate in the artist's 1994 Turner Prize exhibition, it caught the eye of the American collector who bought it and is now selling. The price at the Victoria Miro Gallery in 1994 would have been about £10,000. The estimate next month will be "in excess of £9 million". The auction record for Doig is \$26 million (£16.9 million) set in New York in May.

This week the Asian art auctions in New York will provide the first big test of the market for Chinese art and antiques since the recent Chinese stock market crash. Star lot at Sotheby's is an 18th-century Imperial bronze bell, made for the court of the Qianlong emperor. It was bought in 1921 by newspaper baron, William Randolph Hearst, and is now being sold by his family with an estimate of \$1 to 1.5 million.

Bonham's South African art sale last week was dominated as ever by the paintings of Irma Stern, a portrait of an Arab in Black fetching the top price of £842,500. But, as has happened before, there were too many Sterns for the market to absorb, and five other paintings by the artist, estimated between £20,000 and £500,000, failed to sell.