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THE ART NEWSPAPER

Sotheby's acquires tech startup Thread Genius

**The company uses image recognition software to find works of art that match users' tastes**

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Andrew Shum, Richard Vibert and Ahmad Qamar Sotheby's

Sotheby's auction house has acquired a New York-based startup called Thread Genius, which uses image recognition technology to present users with art they might like based on personal preferences. The platform was co-founded in 2015 by Andrew Shum and Ahmad Qamar, former engineers at the streaming music service Spotify, who are joining the auction house to work alongside the data scientist Richard Vibert, another recent recruit.

Combined with the Mei Moses Art Indices, a database of 50,000 images of works previously sold at auction that the house acquired in 2016 and is working to expand, this the Thread Genius algorithm can identify a stream of similar objects by analysing digital images online. The acquisition of both technologies allows Sotheby's "to be more nimble in connecting buyers and sellers, increasing the volume of opportunities for collectors at all price points", according to a statement.

While sales have historically been made by teams of specialists at the auction house who know their clients' tastes and look for works to fit their budgets, technology "can deliver better insights and match those three elements faster, providing our staff with better tools, our clients with a better experience and our consignors with even better results", says the auction house's CEO Tad Smith.

Thread Genius is one of several technologically minded acquisitions Sotheby's has made in the past two years. Similar taste predictive initiatives are already underway among other art-market players, including Artsy, which a year ago hired AI specialist Hugo Liu as chief scientist to expand its machine-learning and predictive capacities.