

Capitalising on Frieze

Christie's and Sotheby's reposition their mid-season sales as contemporary art market events

LONDON. Although this year's Frieze fair season offers no auction-room spectacle as surreal as last year's Damien Hirst Pharmacy sale, both Christie's and Sotheby's have recast what would traditionally have been mid-season auctions as contemporary-art events to capitalise on the international collectors jetting into town for Frieze.

"We would never have organised a contemporary sale of this size and magnitude without Frieze," explains Christie's contemporary art specialist Katherine Burton.

"Because of the fair, we decided to handle this like an evening sale, with strong promotion and a thick catalogue. With the younger artists, it gives the works a platform they would never have had in an evening sale."

In the spotlight at Christie's auction, which takes place in King Street tomorrow at 4pm, are two "Leipzig School" painters, Tim Eitel and Matthias Weischer, neither of whose work has sold at auction before (a piece by Weischer was slated for sale at Phillips de Pury last November, but it was withdrawn and sold privately). Both are the subject of furious competition due to the monopoly exercised over new work by their German dealer, Gerd Harry Lybke of Eigen + Art.

Estimated at £25,000-35,000, the 2001 Eitel work *Mondrian (blau/weiss)* could easily double its estimate. "This is the best Eitel work



from 2001," concedes Lybke, who did not sell it originally and does not like seeing it come up for auction. "At least when the price goes crazy, I can stop even discussing giving collectors' discounts," he says. Weischer's *Untitled*, 2003, estimated at £18,000-22,000 is thematically similar to his room in the current Venice Biennale. It is likely to soar way above estimate as well. Pegged at precisely the same £18,000-22,000 price range and

slotted as the sale's first lot, the Polish artist Wilhelm Sasnal's *Untitled (two men throwing bombs from a plane)* represents only his second painting to be auctioned; the first one more than tripled its \$20,000 low estimate last November at Phillips de Pury. Given the current intense speculation around his work, the piece will almost certainly start things off explosively.

Among the more established contemporary

stars, insiders expect serious bidding for Elizabeth Peyton, whose prices rocketed last spring when *John Lennon 1964* sold for \$800,000. Her *Fred Hughes in Paris*, 1994, goes on sale tomorrow with an estimate of £80,000-120,000. "Her primary prices are much lower than that, but it's very difficult to get hold of fresh work," says Ms Burton. "Fred Hughes isn't John Lennon, but at her last show at Sadie Coles, nearly all work sold to museums."

London painting star Chris Ofili has two significant works going under the hammer in the next few weeks and insiders predict a major price jump. Tomorrow Christie's is selling the 1999 work *Nooca*. It is one of five from Ofili's

Above, Tim Eitel's *Mondrian (blau/weiss)*, 2001 (estimate £25,000-35,000) and, above right, Chris Ofili's *Nooca*, 1999, (estimate £300,000-400,000) go on sale at Christie's tomorrow at 4pm

Below, Eberhard Havekost's *Untitled DD00*, 2000 (estimate £40,000-60,000) is the cover lot of Sotheby's auction on Tuesday



signature *Afrobitics* series, with an estimate of £300,000-400,000.

Visitors to the Sotheby's preview for its London sale next Tuesday could not miss the large 2001 Ofili work *Strange eyes*. It goes on sale on 9 November in New York with an estimate of \$800,000 to \$1 million.

Sotheby's London sale on Tuesday is a far more classic mid-season mix, with 209 works comprising a smattering of younger work, some YBAs such as Sarah Lucas and Damien Hirst, works from the estate of Cologne restorer and advisor Wolfgang Hahn, and auction-house warhorses such as Lucio Fontana, Alexander Calder, and Sam Francis.

Nevertheless, Sotheby's is promoting the sale under the banner of "Bright Young Things", leading the sale with five lots (all with price guarantees) of young German paintings: two Frank Nitsches, a Neo Rauch drawing, a Thomas Scheibitz and the Eberhard Havekost painting *Untitled DD00*, 2000.

Speaking to The Art Newspaper at Frieze, a New York-based art consultant who asked not to be named said estimates for all five works are aggressive. "To me, those works looked better in reproduction than in reality," he said. "The estimates are astounding given the quality." Nonetheless, another Manhattan adviser predicted, such prices are likely to be met. "The dealers are restricting access to work, and the ones getting pushed to the bottom of the pile are the people bidding," he said. "The auction houses can play on that to extract high prices, because whether you're at auction or in the fair, it's a seller's market."

Marc Spiegler



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