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It's Still a Hot Chase
On a Very Cold Trail
For a Hollywood Killer

By CARYN JAMES

Sidney D. Kirkpatrick’s 1986 book, “A Cast of Killers.” In novelistic style, Mr. Kirkpatrick retraced the steps of the director King Vidor as he investigated the case in 1967, planning to turn the mystery into a film. Mr. Kirkpatrick agrees with Vidor’s conclusion, that the killer was Charlotte Shelby, Minter’s suffocating stage mother, who was jealous of the 49-year-old Taylor’s attention to her 19-year-old daughter. Little did

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Obscured by the sale Tuesday at Christie’s in New York of lot No. 21 — Vincent van Gogh’s “Portrait of Dr. Gachet,” to a Japanese buyer for a record-breaking $82.5 million — is what happened to the 80 other lots of Impressionist and modern art.

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Many of them sold Analysis around or below the low estimate given by the auction house, and 24 works went unsold. In fact, “Dr. Gachet” aside, the auction was the latest evidence of what is widely perceived to be a scaling back in the art market from the astronomical expectations of the last couple of years.

The retrenchment — which is probably a return to the way it used to be at auctions — was suggested by the handful of works by Pierre Auguste Renoir, including “Seated Female Nude” that went on sale. Bidding for the work reached $550,000, well below the minimum estimate of $900,000. The retrenchment was also suggested by such high-ticket items as a Piet Mondrian that was estimated to sell for $12 million to $16 million, and that brought $3 million.

A record price was set for a painting by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec ($12.98 million), and a van Gogh self-portrait sold for $26.4 million. But reportedly a number of works sold only because in the last few days owners agreed to lower their reserves, or minimums below which they would not sell.

Exception to the Rule

How, then, to account for the $82.5 million paid for “Dr. Gachet”? There is, of course, a measure of unreality about excesses of this kind. But the sale must be partly attributable to the fact that van Gogh has always been an exception to the rule, holding as he does a pre-eminent place in the popular imagination. No painter has been the equal of van Gogh in terms of his forceful presence in the popular imagination. He is a more universal artist than any other, and his work is more immediately, more powerfully attractive to the masses than that of any other artist. But van Gogh is also a remarkable artist, and his work is more immediately, more powerfully attractive to the masses than that of any other artist. He is a more universal artist than any other, and his work is more immediately, more powerfully attractive to the masses than that of any other artist. A record price was set for a painting by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec ($12.98 million), and a van Gogh self-portrait sold for $26.4 million. But reportedly a number of works sold only because in the last few days owners agreed to lower their reserves, or minimums below which they would not sell.

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