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Art: If It Doesn't Match the Rug, Put It in the Vault

By GRACE GLUECK

Forecast: Cultural uplift, accompanied by rising sales and prices.

That was the gleeful prognostication of one free-wheeling international dealer for the art market, in a survey this year for the year just ended to support his prediction.

In New York, the world's leading art auction houses—Sotheby's and Christie's in London and Parke-Bernet and the American Mid-West—set a record total auction turnover of $62,100,000, with Parke-Bernet alone increasing its business by more than $9 million over the preceding year. (Christie's was not up to last year's total.)

The over-all figure is a respectable slice of the world's art sales, according to Sotheby officials at $425 million, four times the turnover of 10 years ago.

Total Put at $3-Billion

The $425 million, in turn, is a big bite of the world's entire fine-art market, estimated by Sotheby officials at some $8 billion.

The market spreads its tentacles, however, as in the words of J. O. Chance, chairman of Christie's, Sotheby's chairman, who asked Wilson, recently estimated that there were over 100,000 individual collectors in the world, ready, willing and able to spend $100,000 or more for a single work of art. One of them, Paul Mellon, paid nearly $800,000 for Carew, a Pastel, which was auctioned at Parke-Bernet last year. The price established a new world auction record for any work of art executed since 1750.

Many others among the international collectors mentioned were Mr. Wilson are Americans, a fact that may also have bearing on another statistic: Important art works and antiques with middle-class buyers who, for example, he has this advice: "Buy the best impres-

spect to make a good profit on it over the next decade or two, but don't hang on it for more than 20 years."

A Hedge on the Market

The heavy trend toward investment buying of art was noted recently by the American of London, in an article headed "Art is Safer Than Stock Market." The article touched on stockbrokers who were advising clients to buy art works, and mentioned that a former counselor, Robin Sanderson, advised his clients "to invest in art or a third of their assets in carefully-chosen works of art as a hedge against inflation or future devaluation of the pound."

The increasing market awareness of United States collectors was noted by a leading New York dealer.

"Last fall we saw a great number of new young buyers in the market for $4,000- to $6,000 paintings," said Stephen Well, manager of Marlborough-Geffen, New York branch of the world's biggest art dealer, Marlborough Fine Art, said "They're people who haven't been buyers before. When the market went down last summer, they took their money out to buy paintings."

For the Average Man

While the trend is for high-income collectors to put their investment money in art, stronger attempts are being made to enlist collecting fever in less affluent buyers.

Last fall Macy's joined the long list of art mass-merchants — a list that included other department stores, discount houses, dime stores and assorted chain outlets.

Macy's gallery, a concession, is aimed "primarily at dealing with middle-class buyers who know something about art but who haven't really collected before," according to Paul Schuster, the gallery's 30-year-old director.

Sears, Roebuck, flushed with the success of the low-budget, traveling art shows it has been staging in stores since 1962 — some 30,000 paintings, sculptures and prints have been sold for more than $22 million — has opened its first big art gallery in Chicago two months ago.

"We seek to show that original art is not luxury, but something that is the ultimate in home furnishings," said Harold Patton, the new gallery's manager.

Membership Plan

New art promotion schemes included the formation of several art collectors' societies. The operation is the Society of Artists, which began to circulateize prospective members last year.

Organized by David C. Quinn, a former New York State assistant attorney general, the society has as its president Amy Vanderbilt, the writer on etchings.

For a $15 annual membership fee, subscribers are promised a monthly choice of original paintings and sculptures "by recognized masters," as well as signed lithographs and etchings, rare books and manuscripts and other works. Prices range from $40 to $400 — "and higher," notes the advance flyer.

Last fall retailers got a feel for the trend by developing lessons from a surprising source — an artist, who urged them to develop and expand the public for low-budget art. The advice came from the Wray, printermaker and director of the enterprising Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles, which is supported by the Ford Foundation.

Speaking on "The Art of Selling Art" at a conference of the National Retail Merchants Association in New York, Miss Wayne charged that merchants had not even begun to tap the tremendous art-buying potential of the country's middle-income population.

Studies made by Tamarind had found there were more than 4 million families in the $15,000-to-$50,000 bracket, who could easily afford $120 a year for original art. "This creates more than a billion-dollar annual potential," she said.

Conceding that art could not be produced in mass quantities, she urged the merchant to "stimulate actual creation, to commission his own product as it were." Retailers were advised to watch young artists develop, to invest in them early, and to develop a new breed of art salesmen.

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