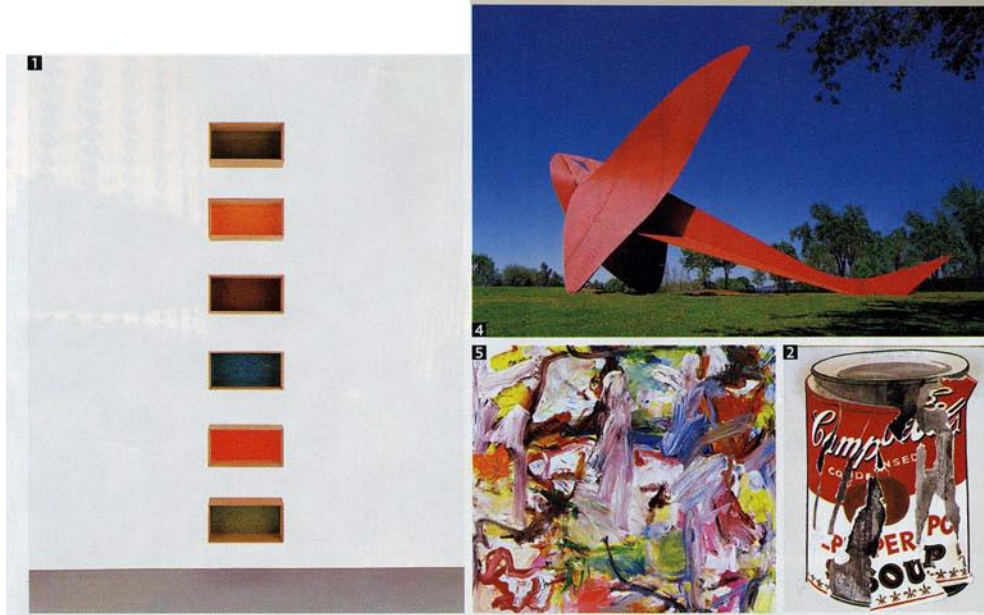


NEW YORK



AUCTIONS

Boxing Day Buyers continue to gravitate toward contemporary art—and Donald Judd's the hottest ticket.

BY CARLY BERWICK

AT THE POSTWAR- and contemporary-art auctions this year, the grown-ups will get plenty of respect. Collectors and dealers may be plucking kids out of art-school classrooms, but prices look solid for fortysomething German painters and eighties survivors like Jeff Koons, and the big money is on mid-century masters like de Kooning. Both Christie's and Sotheby's have made concerted efforts to win works by these heavy hitters while building street cred with work by conceptualists like Mike Kelley.

Donald Judd—the late minimalist sculptor, designer,

critic, and seer-philosopher—dominates Christie's May 9 Post-War & Contemporary sale, expected to reach \$160 million. Twenty-six works from the Judd Foundation are in the evening sale, about \$15 million worth.

BIG PRIZES: The top Judd lot is a stacked tier of six plywood boxes backed with colored Plexiglas [1]. Exemplifying Judd's philosophy that an object is about space transformed—not the inner psyche that the Abstract Expressionists championed—the 1993 work is estimated to sell for \$2 million to \$3 million.

A tiny soup-can canvas, hand-painted by Andy

Warhol, is estimated to bring a hefty \$10 million to \$15 million. But the subject of *Small Torn Campbell's Soup Can (Pepper Pot)* (1962; [2]) is uncommonly vulnerable for an inanimate object; battered and bewildered, it points the way to the artist's death-and-disaster works.

Francis Bacon has gone from the market's odd man out—too angsty, not conceptual enough—to its unlikely rebounder, with prices soaring to \$10 million. *Man Carrying a Child* (1956) is an unusually approachable Bacon—no meat, no screaming popes. Depicting a North African man carrying a baby, it's estimated at \$8 million to \$12 million.

LIKELY BARGAINS: Clearly positioned to warm up the room, the first Judd of the night, *Untitled* (1978), a red parallelogram, is a relative steal at \$30,000 to \$40,000; similar works have sold recently for around \$60,000. The dirty paper plate in the corner of Robert Rauschenberg's *Cage (Combine Drawing)* (1958)

NEW YORK



PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LTD. (JUDD AND WARHOL) AND SOTHEBY'S (CALDER, LICHTENSTEIN, AND DE KOONING)
PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LTD. (VAN GOGH) AND SOTHEBY'S (PICASSO AND MATISSE)

conjures an image of John Cage and Rauschenberg sharing ideas at some late-night greasy spoon—a sizable snack, at \$400,000 to \$600,000.

AT THIS PRICE? The appearance of Yves Klein's *ANT 127* (1960) at auction heralds a resurgence of interest in mid-century European conceptualists. But the \$3.5 million-to-\$4.5 million estimate is a reach for his "Anthropometrie" series, for which naked women covered in paint pressed themselves onto paper (his blue sponge paintings sell for more). The chirpy anomie of David Hockney's *A Neat Lawn* (1967) is crisp indeed, but even the low estimate (\$3.5 million) tops Hockney's auction record of \$3.3 million, set in London last June.

AT SOTHEBY'S the following night, the undisputed star is Roy Lichtenstein's *Sinking Sun* (1964; [3]), estimated in the region of \$20 million. The simple comix-dot sunset evokes the last frame of a

romantic movie and the waning days of the frontier. Plus, it was once owned by Dennis Hopper, who sold it in 1974 (reportedly for \$75,000) to the current owner.

BIG PRIZES: The sale, which could top \$126 million, includes Alexander Calder's *Flying Dragon* (1975; [4]), a private-jet-size sculpture being sold by the ExxonMobil Foundation for \$6 million to \$8 million, as well as de Kooning's *Untitled XVI* (1975; [5]). The unbridled pastels of the man-high painting, estimated at \$6.5 million to \$8.5 million, make it the painter's own *Rite of Spring*. In the top portion, two pale human figures seem to be cavorting in sunny East Hampton, where the artist had retreated from the downtown art-world clamor.

LIKELY BARGAINS: At \$150,000 to \$200,000, Neo Rauch's *Stunde* (1999) is probably attractive to the unappointed many who failed to get new work at his sold-out New York gallery show last year. (The painter's auction record of \$452,800 was set last fall at Phillips de

Pury for a painting that was just a year old.) In Elizabeth Peyton's portrait of her artistic predecessor David Hockney—a little like a Picasso of Matisse—she's measuring herself up: *David Hockney, Age 32* (1997–98) was painted when Peyton herself was 32. The estimate's less than half her auction record, at \$300,000 to \$400,000.

AT THIS PRICE? Andreas Gursky's *99 Cent* (1999), a vivid digitally enhanced image of kudzulike consumer culture, is estimated at \$1 million to \$1.5 million. Ironic or optimistic? The price would be well above his current auction record of \$632,000. De Koonings from the eighties, when the artist was beginning his descent into Alzheimer's, are either spacious and lyrical or the evidence of a mind emptying out; they are especially controversial, as some were rumored to be helped along by assistants. The sinuous *Garden in Delft* (1987), estimated at \$2.5 million to \$3.5 million, was painted three years before he gave it all up for good. ■