

◀ FROM PAGE 32

Woodhead's appointment and growing power, Kristen van Riel, managing director of Sotheby's France, resigned from his post in July [see *Art & Auction*, September 7, 1998]. There are no plans to fill that vacancy, says a Sotheby's spokesperson.)

Declining to give specifics on Sotheby's investment in Europe or statistics on the profitability of European

operations, Woodhead also rejects the notion that Sotheby's is beefing up its European presence as a result of the recent financial downturn in Asia. "Not at all," he says. "What we're taking advantage of is the economic growth of Europe, with or without a great booming economy. The demographics are in our favor and the potential for us is enor-

mous." As for the competition of well-established local auction houses in Europe, Woodhead responds: "Our niche in the business is at the very top end and the part just below that. So what we're seeking to do is to make sure that we get as much of that share in the business as we possibly can, and we'll do whatever we need to do to get that." **JUDD TULLY**

L.A. Story: Auctions Expand

LOS ANGELES—L.A.'s economic boom has breathed fresh life into the auction houses, which are hiring new experts and holding more sales. Christie's has gained the lead over rival Sotheby's, in part because, since last year, it has been staging auctions of fine art, including modern and contemporary works, at its Neoclassical Beverly Hills office. At Sotheby's, exhibitions and lectures relating to its worldwide sales are held at the firm's businesslike offices, also in Beverly Hills, but its auctions are, at this point, restricted to wine, memorabilia and fine jewelry.

On October 14, Christie's kicks off the fall season with its first L.A. sale of 20th-century and contemporary art, featuring 30 lots of prints and multiples, including three prints by Richard Diebenkorn. One highlight is the 1984 Ed Ruscha painting, *Honey...I Twisted Through More Damned Traffic to Get Here*, with an estimate of \$70,000 to \$90,000. "We're nudging toward a \$6 million sale with international appeal, including a 1975 Marc Chagall painting, *Les mariés au bouquet de fleurs*, with an estimate of \$500,000 to \$700,000," says Deborah McLoud, 20th-century art specialist at Christie's L.A. Also on the block: a 1960 three-panel butterfly screen by Andy Warhol, estimated at \$80,000 to \$120,000, and Willem de Kooning's 1949 work on paper, *Untitled*, which is expected to bring \$250,000 to \$350,000.

Andrea Fiuczynski, director of business development and principal auctioneer at Christie's L.A., who was with the firm for 10 years in New York and in Berlin from 1995 through 1997, points out that Christie's is clearly concentrating its U.S. efforts in New York and L.A. The firm's sale of furniture and ceramics by modern Italian designer Piero Fornasetti was previewed in March in New York, for example, but the auction was held in L.A. on May 16, making a record \$823,451, including \$140,000 for a 1952 *Architettura trompe l'oeil* bureau. Still more records were set at the April 29 sale of California, western and American paintings, drawings and sculpture, which more than doubled its estimate of \$1 million, bringing a \$2.5 million total. One surprise was the \$706,500 achieved for Charles Caryl Coleman's 1878 decorative flower panel, which had been estimated at \$40,000 to \$60,000. (In the first half of 1998, Christie's L.A. made 40 percent over the projected estimates of its sales, with an overall 92 percent of lots sold.)

For its part, to further solidify its position in L.A., last year Sotheby's imported Geneva-based jewelry expert Brett Sherlock, who has been with the firm for 12 years, to develop its client services. "We felt it was critical to have a trained, senior client-service person in the same time zone as our clients," says Richard Wolf, senior vice president and managing director for West Coast operations.

But Sotheby's has no plans for fine art sales in L.A. "We are not going to step into an L.A. sale unless we are certain that it is the best for our consignors," says Wolf. "Obviously, we have a lot of



Butterfield & Butterfield's October 29 sale in L.A. includes Philip Guston's *Late Fall, 1963*.

serious collectors in L.A. Whether they prefer to shop here or not is a question we have not answered. People seem to like to shop in New York, London and Hong Kong." Referring to contemporary art in L.A., Wolf points out, "One financial implication is that only California has the artists' royalty resale act, wherein works by living artists sold in California are subject to a 5 percent royalty, on top of the sales price, which goes back to the artist."

While Christie's may be the current front-runner in L.A., some observers are watching Sotheby's closely. "I think that Christie's recently has had a higher profile with the opening of its new office and its strong commitment to local sales," says one industry insider, "but behind the scenes, Sotheby's is a powerful force, especially because of the broad, deep and longstanding connections of Andrea Van de Kamp [chairman of Sotheby's West Coast division] in the community. I wouldn't underestimate Sotheby's ability to do both serious business and to expand its public presence in L.A."

On November 3, Sotheby's is holding a fine jewelry auction, featuring the high-carat diamond rings and earrings collected by the acid-tongued Mr. Blackwell, creator of the annual list of "Worst Dressed Women." Important jewelry from the estate of philanthropist Virginia Burns Oppenheimer and actress Linda Cristal is also to be included in the 400-lot sale, which is valued at \$3 million.

But Christie's and Sotheby's are not the only game in town. Butterfield & Butterfield, with main offices in San Francisco, is in expansion mode (it recently joined forces with the family-owned auction house Dunning's, based in Elgin, Illinois, and the firm has hired Los Angeles contemporary art dealer ▶



THE SAM FRANCIS CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ

The Sam Francis Estate is documenting paintings by the artist Sam Francis in preparation for a catalogue raisonné.

We request if you own any painting by the artist to please contact us as soon as possible.

Please send a photograph of the painting with title, date and size.

Attention:
Debra Burchett-Lere
c/o Sam Francis Estate
589 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, CA 90291
Tel: 310-452-7155 Fax: 310-452-7154

Decorative Arts
& Textiles
Antiques Show

September 25-26-27

Friday & Saturday 11-7, Sunday 11-5 • Admission \$10

100 EXHIBITS of Unique & Unusual Vintage Textiles, Tapestries & Trimmings, Furniture, Lamps, Rugs, Paintings, Pottery & Architectural Artifacts. PLUS DECORATOR & RESTORATION SUPPLIES

Vintage Hardware, Tiles, Stoves, Bath Fixtures, Lighting & More. All for sale. Open to the public.

Gramercy Park Armory
Lexington Avenue & 26th Street, New York City
Stella Show Mgmt. Co. 212-255-0020 • www.antiquet.com/stella

◀ FROM PAGE 34

Michael Maloney to head its department of modern, contemporary and Latin American art in L.A., headquartered in renovated Mediterranean-style offices on Sunset Boulevard.

Gregory Ghent, who oversees modern, contemporary and Latin American art for all Butterfield's operations, points to the success of L.A.'s sale of 298 lots of modern and contemporary art last spring. "The April modern and contemporary sale achieved a record \$2.8 million," he says. "Sales are simulcast in L.A. and San Francisco, so audiences bid against each other in real time. It's a great marketing tool and accounts for more competitive bidding."

In the June 25 sale of California and American paintings, Butterfield's L.A. logged seven world records and made a total of \$4,180,565. The highest price was paid for Guy Rose's painting *On Point Lobos*, which sold for \$508,500. The firm's fall sale of modern, contemporary and Latin American art, on October 29, includes Philip Guston's *Late Fall*, a 1963 oil on canvas estimated at \$350,000 to \$450,000, which Ghent calls "perhaps his most fully realized transition from abstract to representational work."

For the last year, meanwhile, Santa Monica dealer Robert Berman has held occasional auctions of contemporary art at Bergamot Station's Space D-5. This summer, his Santa Monica Auctions formed a one-time alliance with Peter Loughrey of L.A. Modern Auctions, a specialist in postwar decorative arts and furniture by architects and designers. Together on October 25, they are offering five light-fixture sculptures by L.A.'s preeminent architect, Frank Gehry, at the I.M. Chait Gallery in Beverly Hills. Shaped like fish or crocodiles, the lamps were made by Gehry as part of his 1983 design for Rebecca's restaurant in Venice, California. Also on the block is a 22-foot glass chandelier shaped like an octopus. "Gehry's octopus is an important piece of 20th-century sculpture and belongs in a museum, where his genius can be appreciated," says Berman.

Also part of Rebecca's interior, and up for bidding, are works by L.A. contemporary artists: Tony Berlant's tin-covered front doors and Ed Moses's spider-patterned windows, as well as furniture by architects associated with Southern California, such as Charles Eames, Paul Laszlo and K.E.M. Weber. From September 16 through October 8, the highlights are on view at Berman's Santa Monica Auctions, with a full preview at the I.M. Chait Gallery from October 19 through 24.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP