

# HERITAGE AUCTIONS TRUSTS & ESTATES JOURNAL

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## CRUISE SHIP CAUTIONS

BY ROBERTA KRAMER, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF HERITAGE AUCTIONS CHICAGO

LOOKING OUT OVER THE RAILING, A BALMY OCEAN BREEZE IN YOUR HAIR, AND A DRINK WITH AN UMBRELLA IN YOUR HAND – WHAT COULD BE BETTER? CRUISING CAN BE A WONDERFUL, FUN AND RELAXING WAY TO TAKE TIME OFF, SEE NEW PLACES (OR NOT) AND UNWIND FROM THE DAILY GRIND. WITH THE GROWTH OF THE CRUISE INDUSTRY, NUMEROUS ART PURCHASE OFFERINGS HAVE BEEN ADDED TO ENTICE PASSENGERS.



"Though this original movie poster from 1933 that sold for \$5,000 at Heritage pre-dates cruise ship auctions – be wary of reproductions and inflated prices during onboard auctions."

The golden days of cruising conjures elegant images of gentlemen in black tie, ladies in their best finery, sipping cocktails before a formal dinner, with dancing and live entertainment to round out the evening. Today, you can still drink, dine, and dance on board, true formal dress is no longer required, but you can also take classes on everything

from computers to meditation. You can gamble on most cruises, often with very large casinos. Many of the new megaships have waterparks, zip lines, and other physical activities besides the traditional pool. "Retail therapy" is also to be found on most ships, some with shopping areas the size of small malls. A couple of decades ago a new offering was introduced to cruise goers; art auctions at sea.

From the start, these auctions were very popular and quickly were offered on all the major cruise lines. Big name artists such as Chagall, Dali and Picasso were featured along with many contemporary, lesser known, names. Promises of massive appreciation in value were made to potential buyers; they were told the works would appraise for much more when the passengers returned home with their new treasures.

As it was true in Roman times, it is still true today: Caveat Emptor! In 2008 the lawsuits started rolling into courts with buyers who found out their acquisitions were not what they were led to believe, or were worth far, far less than the prices paid. One might assume that following so much bad press, litigation, and trouble, that these auctions would

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"Works by popular artists such as Peter Max can significantly vary in value depending if an original by the artist, a print or even a hand-embellished multiple. This hand-painted bronze from 1990 of an edition of 250 sold for \$6,000 recently."

be discontinued on cruise lines. Indeed, some lines did eliminate these auctions, replacing them with art appreciation and education events. Other lines still continue hosting these auctions today. The lack of access to good research options on board make it very difficult for a novice art buyer to vet potential purchases before bidding and buying art on these ships.

Be wary of seemingly really good deals on "original" artworks or even authorized editions of prints. Many of the works sold to tipsy bidders (the free champagne offered is always a draw for cruisers!) may be far from the original treasure that it is purported to be. Some artists such as Peter Max and Itzhak Tarkay produce multitudes of originals,

prints and "hand embellished" works that often blur the line between originals and reproductions. Avoid overpaying even for an original. The highest auction records from auction databases of well-recognized auction houses show original paintings by Max topping out at under \$20,000 and Tarkay at under \$10,000. The prints and hand-embellished works are much, much less.

Heritage held an on-line only auction of works by Peter Max on March 2, 2017, which saw more of a real picture of the prices for the artists' works. Sales ranged from signed posters for less than \$100 to originals and hand-painted multiples up to \$8,000. One only wonders what artificial prices might be generated by novice buyers on a cruise ship.

Also be aware of the certificates of authenticity and appraisals you may receive from a cruise ship auction purchase. We often see prints by the biggest name artists, such as Picasso, with the certificates stating that they are "hand signed" or "pencil signed". To the uninitiated, that may seem all well and good, but it is a sly phrasing that actually doesn't state that the piece is signed

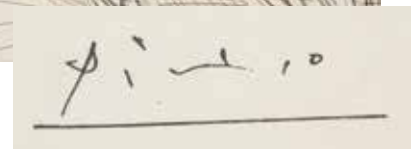
by the hand of the artist – only has a signature. Picasso may not have ever been in the same country when it was signed – if he was even still alive when it was printed!

Vacations are great, but probably not the best time to make major purchase decisions. It's not just cruise ship passengers that often make big mistakes. Many travellers buy antiques and art abroad, only to encounter difficulty and huge expense shipping their purchases back to the USA. Again, lack of access to proper, reliable research and qualified expert advice, coupled with the trust of the ship's auctioneers, make a vacationer easy prey.

When art and other valuables purchased on cruises or vacations are put into trusts we can encounter big issues if these items are not properly vetted and appraised by qualified appraisers BEFORE they end up in trust. You cannot rely on purchase price invoices and appraisals from these cruise ship auctioneers. Nothing could be worse than finding out years down the road that these assumed assets are not at all valuable, and therefore, the trust is



"Prints by Picasso can have actual pencil or pen signatures by the artist, authorized stamps of the artists signature (as this etching from 1971 does) or fraudulent pencil signatures that can be deceptively described as "hand signed".



## NORMAN ROCKWELL STUDY SETS WORLD RECORD AT HERITAGE



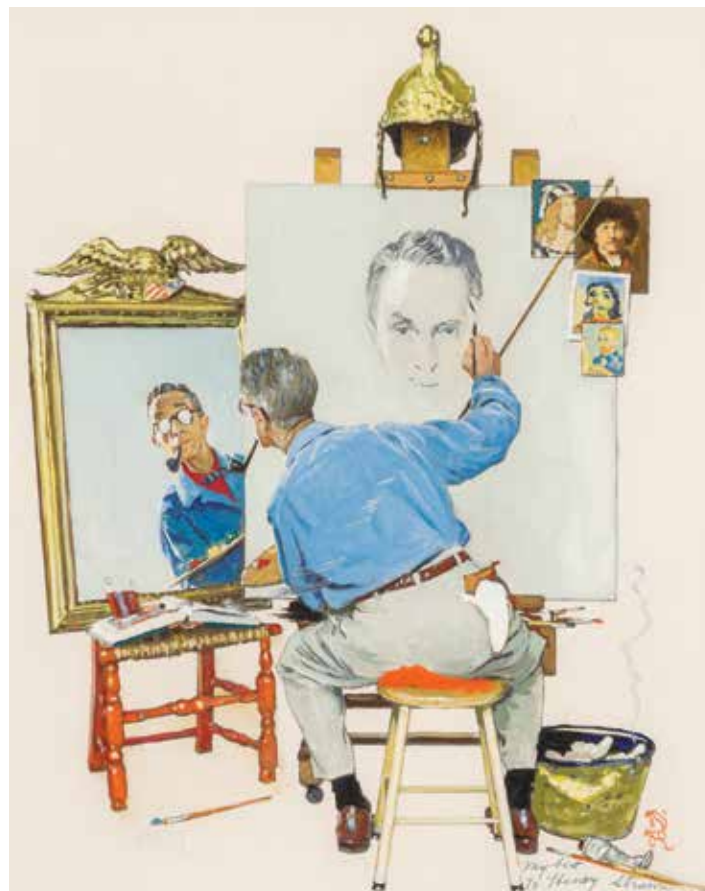
A stunning 99% sell-through rate showed the international interest in fine wine during Heritage's April Fine & Rare Wine Auction in Beverly Hills and Hong Kong. Standing room-only bidders bought over 1,400 lots totaling some \$2,800,00.

worthless to the intended beneficiaries. Similarly, bequests of art to heirs may not be equitably distributed (as was a decedent's intent), if not properly appraised and evaluated by a qualified appraiser.

The best thing to do on vacation or a cruise is to relax and have fun. By all means bring home souvenirs, but art from such dubious sources may not be a good idea. Remember, if you see that Picasso etching you want, it can be purchased from a reputable auctioneer or dealer elsewhere, after doing your homework or seeking consulting from qualified, reputable professionals. As always, if the deal seems too good to be true – it probably is.



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Norman Rockwell (American, 1894-1978)  
*Study for Triple Self Portrait, 1960*  
Oil on photographic paper laid on panel  
11-1/2 x 9-1/4 inches  
Sold for: \$1,332,500 | May 2017

Scholars have variously interpreted the *Triple Self-Portrait* as Rockwell's presentation of his multiple selves as an artist. Rockwell's son writes that the portrait, in capturing his father's different personas, embodied the very essence of his realist art, simultaneously innocent and sophisticated: "the slightly awkward figure almost crouched in front of the painting with a touch of the comic; the intensely serious face looking in the mirror with eyes obscured by the reflection of light on his glasses; and the outgoing, confident and friendly face of the drawing on the canvas. . . . We are not allowed to see the artist in one simple image, but fractured into a sequence of figure, mirror image, and slightly artificial self-image. . . . On the one hand, the picture is straightforward, showing the artist painting in his studio. On the other hand, the painting is a careful construct made up of a gradually developed idea followed by meticulous execution" (P. Rockwell in M. Hennessey, *Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People*, Atlanta, 1999, pp. 76-8).

The record-setting Rockwell led a \$4.5 million auction of diverse American art pieces that realized a 96 percent sell-through rate by value saw spirited bidding across all Heritage Auctions bidding platforms.

Norman Rockwell's *Study for Triple Self Portrait*, an oil study for the artist's self-described 1960 *Saturday Evening Post* "masterpiece", sold for \$1,332,500, a new world record for an oil study by the artist during Heritage Auctions' American Art Auction in Dallas on May 3rd, 2017. With a pre-auction estimate of \$150,000 to \$250,000 and Heritage's cross-category marketing prowess, the work attracted a multitude of bidders including known collectors who previously concentrated on such items as coins and comic art.