

Hockney sells for \$90.3m, smashes living artist record

“Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)” was snapped up after more than nine minutes of bidding, dominated by two rival telephone bidders



A woman looks at David Hockney's "Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)" during a press preview at Christie's New York.

AFP | New York, United States

A masterful swimming pool painting by British legend David Hockney sold for \$90.3 million in New York on Thursday, smashing a new auction record for a living artist.

“Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)” was snapped up after more than nine minutes of bidding, dominated by two rival telephone bidders.

It left for dust the previous record held by American artist Jeff Koons and his “Balloon Dog (Orange),” which sold for \$58.4 million at Christie's in 2013.

It was standing room only to watch history in the making in the packed sales room at Christie's, where applause broke out when the epic sale concluded, the painting hammering for \$80 million. The buyer's premium and commission took the final price for the canvas, which adorned the wall of the bidding room, to \$90,312,500, the auction house announced.

The \$90 million price tag was all the more astonishing given the roughly \$20,000 that Hockney told CNN his dealer originally sold the painting for in 1972, subsequently believing it had been undervalued.

Hockney told the network he thought that was “a lot of money at the time, but within six months it was sold again for \$50,000.”



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DAVID HOCKNEY

Thursday's price was more than three times the 81-year-old's previous auction record -- \$28.4 million for “Pacific Coast Highway and Santa Monica” from 1990 at Christie's great rival, Sotheby's, in May.

“I hope he's not upset that we sold it for so much money,” Alex Rotter, Christie's co-chairman of post-war and contemporary art, said when asked what he thought Hockney's reaction would be to the colossal price tag. “I'm a big fan of his,” he added.

Trophy piece

“I hope he's happy and pleased but he's an artist, he doesn't need us to tell him that he's great. He knows.”

Christie's had estimated the painting pre-sale at \$80 million and insisted it was “one of the great masterpieces of the modern era.”

“Absolutely!” Christie's Alex Rotter told AFP when asked if the picture was really worth \$90 million.

“We weren't the only ones going after this painting,” he said. “This is the trophy piece by one of the greatest living artists currently, if not the greatest living artist,” he added.

Swimming pools have long held a fascination for Hockney.

One of Hockney's most celebrated works, it has featured on the cover of a number of monographs about the artist and was part of an international retrospective that celebrated his 80th birthday in 2017.

In the picture, a smartly dressed man, standing on the edge of the pool, looks pensively at another figure swimming toward him in glistening waters, with an idyllic mountain view in the background.

The observer depicts Hockney's former lover and muse, Peter Schlesinger, one of his students at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Their affair ended the year that the picture was finished and experts have suggested that the swimmer could be Peter's new lover.

Anonymous buyer

Christie's declined to reveal the identity of the seller nor any information about the buyer, insisting they wanted to remain anonymous.

But Bloomberg and the Artnet website reported that it was put up for sale by British billionaire Joe Lewis, who owns the Tavistock Group, London Premier League soccer team Tottenham Hotspur, and whom Forbes estimates to be worth \$5 billion.

Thursday's sale at Christie's flagship post-war and contemporary evening art was part of marquee art auctions held every year in New York in November.

Last November's season was distinguished by the single most expensive piece of art ever sold at auction -- the eye-watering \$450.3 million paid for Leonardo da Vinci's “Salvator Mundi” at Christie's.

A prolific artist who has continued to work well into old age, Hockney told Britain's Channel 4 television in an interview in 2015 that painting was “all I want to do now at my age. That's all I care about.”

“When I paint, I feel I'm 30. It's only when I stop I feel my age,” he added.

China ups cash rewards for citizens who report porn

AFP | Beijing, China

China is raising the cash rewards paid to citizens for reporting pornographic and “illegal” publications to authorities, government regulators said yesterday.

Starting December 1, people can rake in up to 600,000 yuan (\$86,000) for reporting illegal content, online or otherwise, double the 300,000 yuan under previous guidelines.

What counts as “illegal” content in China is broadly defined, but includes work that “endangers national unity”, “leaks state secrets”, and “disturbs social order” -- umbrella terms that are also sometimes used when authorities punish or silence Chinese dissidents and rights campaigners.

The new rules, published by a bureau under the top media regulator, come as Beijing ramps up controls on content.

Earlier this week the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) said it had “cleaned up”

9,800 accounts on Chinese social media platforms which it accused of spreading “politically harmful” information and rumours.

The internet regulator also chastised popular social media platforms WeChat and Weibo for negligence and “irresponsibility”. And on Thursday CAC published new rules requiring online platforms to save a plethora of user data, including chat logs, network addresses, and device type, by the end of the month.

The new requirements are part of CAC's efforts to tighten control over sites that influence public opinion, such as chat groups, blogs, and Twitter-like Weibo, which was forced to roll out real-name registration in 2012.

Oversight of social media has ramped up in recent years as part of the government's push to “promote the healthy, orderly development of the Internet, protect state security and public interest”.

Indonesian jet crash victim's family sues Boeing



Investigators examine engine parts from the ill-fated Lion Air flight JT 610 at a port in Jakarta

AFP | Jakarta, Indonesia

The family of an Indonesian man killed in a Lion Air jet crash is suing Boeing, alleging that the accident may have been caused by a problem with the flight-control system in its newest 737 plane.

The father of Rio Nanda Pratama filed the lawsuit Wednesday in the US state of Illinois, where the plane manufacturer is headquartered, over the death of the young doctor who was to have married his high-school sweetheart this week.

Pratama's fiance Intan Syari, 26, has made headlines after she posed alone for photos in a wedding gown that she was to have worn at the couple's nuptials in Indonesia.

Syari said her husband-to-be had asked in jest that she

carry on with the photo shoot if he did not return from what turned out to be a fatal trip.

The 26-year-old man was among the 189 people killed when the Boeing 737-MAX plunged into the Java Sea on October 29, less than 20 minutes after leaving Jakarta on a routine flight to Pangkal Pinang city. There were no survivors.

The 737-MAX in question had only begun service for budget carrier Lion Air in August.

Questions have swirled about Boeing's alleged failure to tell airlines and pilots about changes to an anti-stall system that is being investigated for its possible links to the crash.

The jet's engines are heavier than those installed on prior versions, meaning the plane can stall under different conditions.

Indonesia woman gets jail after exposing philandering boss

AFP | Lombok, Indonesia

An Indonesian woman who exposed her cheating boss has been slapped with a six-month jail term for her trouble.

The supreme court's shock ruling overturned an earlier court decision that had cleared the woman, Baiq Nuril Mak-

nun, of breaking a controversial law against spreading indecent material.

“I'm saddened and shocked by this sentence,” Maknun's husband Lalu Muhammad Isnaini said Friday in reaction to the ruling, which was issued last week.

The odd case stretches back to

2012 when Maknun recorded a conversation in which the principal of the school where she worked on the island of Lombok revealed graphic sexual details about an affair he was having with another colleague.

Co-workers of the school administrator -- who herself had

rebuffed the principal's repeated advances -- later convinced Maknun to release the recording in a bid to expose the man's history of lecherous behaviour, according to her lawyer Joko Jumadi.

“The principal shared very graphic details about his affair

with the school's treasurer in the recording,” he told AFP.

In response, the principal fired Maknun and filed a complaint with authorities.

Maknun was initially cleared of the charges by a local court in Lombok, next to holiday hotspot Bali. But, last Friday, Indonesia's

top court reversed that decision, finding her guilty of violating the electronic information law and sentencing her to six months' jail along with a 500 million rupiah (\$34,000) fine.

The 36-year-old Maknun told local reporters that the ruling was unfair.