

The Telegraph

Sleeping with the enemy? Dealers and galleries work with Sotheby's to shine light on under-recognised artists

The age-old rivalry between art dealers and auctioneers is beginning to thaw as Sotheby's embarks on a new series of exhibitions at its private sales gallery, S/2 in London. Many of the exhibitions are being made with the active involvement of the galleries which represent the artists or their estates, something which was inconceivable a decade ago.

Darren Leak of Sotheby's emphasises that the idea is to "work together" with dealers "to stage compelling exhibitions with a particular focus on artists who have been celebrated art historically but are under-recognised by the market".



Maria Lassnig, *Selfportrait with Hare*, 2003 CREDIT: © MARIA LASSNIG FOUNDATION

Saltoun specialises in neglected but interesting artists of the recent past, many of whom, like Bertlmann, have never been sold at auction before. However, Sotheby's did make some private sales in the £3,000 to £140,000 range. The Cactus sculpture has been reserved by a potential buyer.

The second S/2 show, which has just opened, features another Saltoun artist, Li Yuan-Chia, who died in 1994, and was featured on this page last September as an artist to watch. Sotheby's



Renate Bertlmann, *KAKTUS (CACTUS)*, 1999 CREDIT: SOTHEBY'S

For its first show, S/2 focussed on the work of two artists. Maria Lassnig is an Austrian self-portraitist and painter of the body who died in 2014 and whose estate is handled by the heavyweight international gallery, Hauser & Wirth. Renate Bertlmann is a living Austrian artist whose work from the late 1960s onwards is unmistakably feminist in content. While Lassnig's works were found independently of Hauser & Wirth, the Bertlmann works were provided by London gallerist Richard Saltoun, who has been working with the artist for four years.



Li Yuan-chia, artist sketchbook with clippings CREDIT: SOTHEBY'S



John Latham, *Great Noit*, 1962 CREDIT: SOTHEBY'S

approached Saltoun, and he agreed. "I know that many dealers think galleries like S/2 represent the 'Amazoning' of the art world by the auction houses, but I think they are actually stimulating interest and introducing a new client base for Feminist and other hitherto esoteric corners," he says.

Showing with Li is the late British conceptual artist, John Latham, whose career and estate has been handled by the Lisson Gallery. The gallery's founder, Nicholas Logsdail, has always preferred his clients to give him first option to re-sell rather than go to an auction, and so does not always see eye-to-eye with the auctioneers. Nothing, therefore, in the Sotheby's show came from him. At the S/2 opening he was heard to say: "I came here expecting not to like it, but actually it's ok".

Coming soon at S/2 will be a pairing of 86-year-old Sudanese artist Ibrahim el-Salahi, represented by Toby Clarke's Vigo Gallery and now enjoying museum recognition worldwide, and the late William Turnbull, whose estate is represented by dealer Offer Waterman.

"A gallery our size needs to be nimble in the face of the rapid growth of the mega galleries," says Clarke. "We are often the ones to champion artists who may otherwise not have visibility, and we have to think about the best strategies to represent them. Of course the auction houses want a slice of the bigger market, but I don't think I'm sleeping with the enemy, just using relationships to do a good job for Ibrahim."

In Waterman's case, he made the first move, approaching Sotheby's, and he is providing all the sculptures. For him, the sale and branding potential outweigh any objections. "Dealers used to have a sort of 'us' and 'them' view of the salerooms. But now I see them like any other dealer, except they have a bigger retail operation and client reach. That has to be good for my artists."

Another pairing lined up is Kim Lim, Turnbull's Singaporean wife who died in 1997, with Japanese artist, Yuko Nasaka who is 79. Neither have a high auction profile. Nasaka, who was one of the lesser-known members of the vaunted Gutai group of post-war Japanese artists, is represented by the Axel Vervoordt gallery in Belgium.

Gallery director Boris Vervoordt says "this is the first time our gallery has collaborated with a big international auction house. A lot of collectors go to the salerooms. It's a reality we as dealers have to come to terms with."



Yuko Nasaka, *Untitled*, 1964 CREDIT: SOTHEBY'S

It's also a reality some dealers are resisting. Cork Street dealer James Mayor has been showing a succession of under-recognised artists from the post-war era such as Tadaaki Kuwayama, whose minimal abstractions from the 1960s are currently on view. Asked if he would enter a similar arrangement with Sotheby's he replied: "Basically not, as they are undermining what I have been doing with some success for over 40 years. All they want as usual is a one-way street."