

Culture

Top-end art auctions take new digital path

LONDON

Venture will combine live and Internet bidding, but without print catalog

BY SCOTT REYBURN

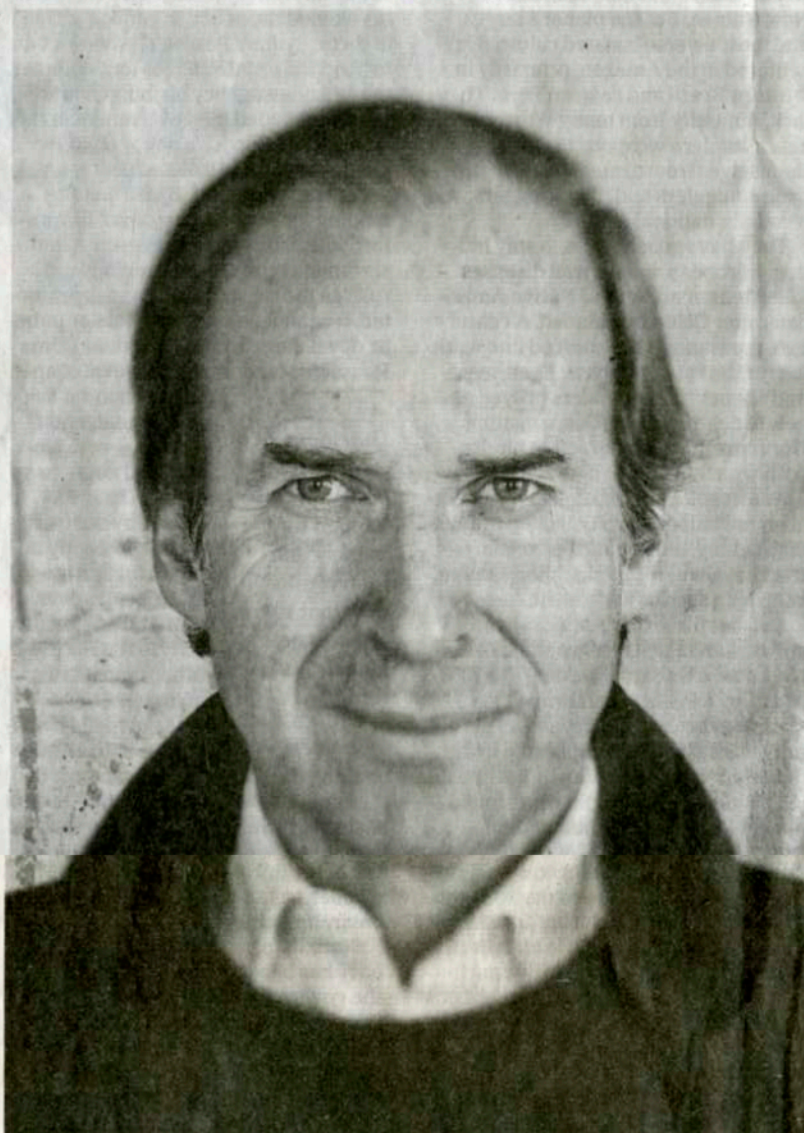
Autumn, particularly the week of the Frieze Art Fair in October, has become a period when international wealth descends on London and flows toward contemporary art. Traders have been busy devising new ventures to attract the elite's attention, and their cash.

One of those is Simon de Pury, the Swiss former chairman and chief auctioneer of Phillips de Pury & Co. before it became Phillips in 2013, who is returning to the rostrum through a new enterprise. But with a twist.

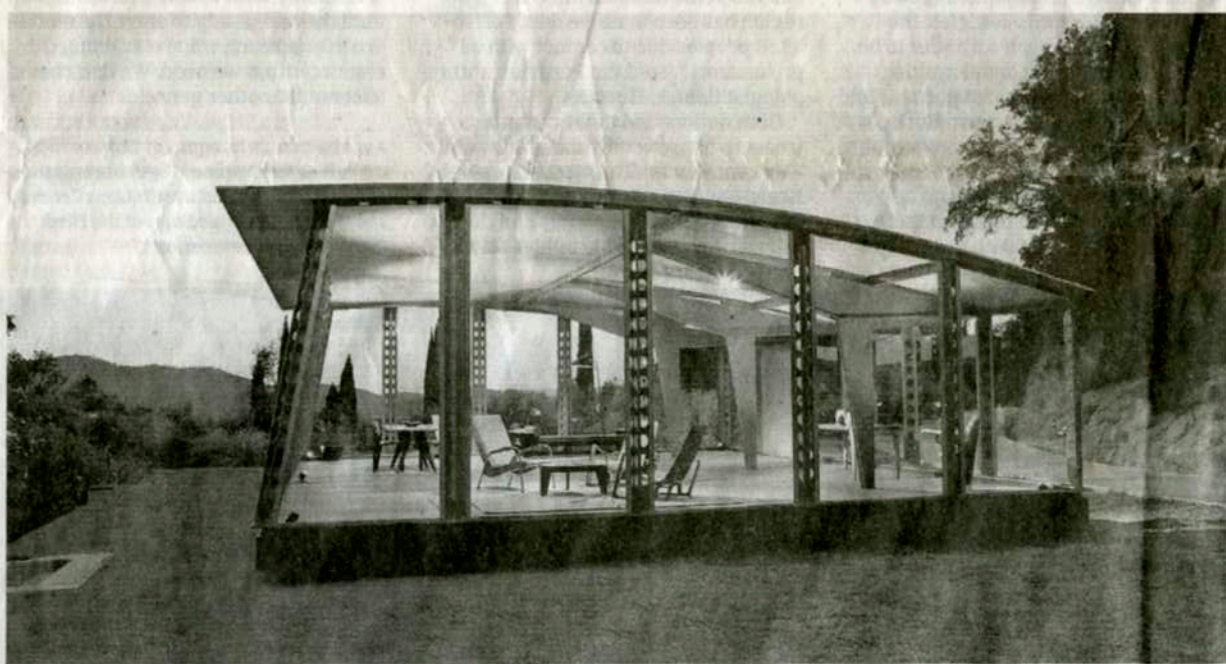
On Oct. 12, the day before Frieze previews in Regent's Park, Mr. de Pury will auction about 350 pieces of contemporary art, modern design and earlier objects owned by Baroness Marion Lambert, a collector in Geneva. Valued at as much as \$20 million, the material will be on view and sold live in the 18th-century Mayfair showrooms of the antiques dealer Mallett, which in 2014 was acquired by Dreweatts & Bloomsbury Auctions.

There will be no printed catalog. Would-be buyers will obtain detailed information online and will be able to bid at the Internet-streamed auction on tablets and cellphones — as well as in the room.

The new enterprise, De Pury, has been backed by Klaus Hommels, a Swiss venture capitalist who has invested in Spotify and Facebook. Arnaud Massenet, co-founder of Net-a-Porter, is a partner.



SIMON DE PURY



NICOLAS BERGEROT FOR GALERIE PATRICK SEGUIN, COPYRIGHT 2015 ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK/ADAGP, PARIS

Mr. de Pury, who is renowned for his flamboyant auctioneering style, expects to hold two or three of these high-end sales per year in partnership with Mallett, either in London or New York.

"Nowadays there are collectors who look at everything on the Internet," said Mr. de Pury, who has about 130,000 followers on Instagram. "The sale should appeal to a wider audience."

Estimates at this eclectic October auction, at which the French designer Jacques Grange will mix contemporary art by international names such as Thomas Schutte, Cindy Sherman and Ugo Rondinone with 18th-century French furniture, will range from 1,000 pounds to as much as £6 million, or about \$1,550 to \$9.3 million.

The latter will be the upper valuation

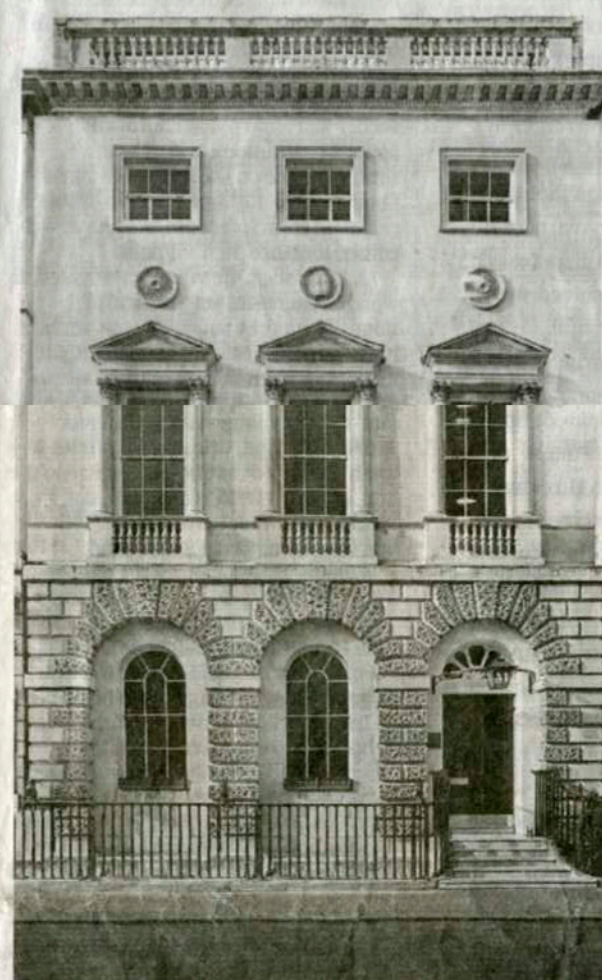
on "Untitled (241)," a 1995 black-and-white abstract overlaid with yellow pigment by Christopher Wool that was included in his retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in New York from October 2013 to January 2014. Mr. de Pury said Baroness Lambert had not been guaranteed a minimum price for any of the works in the sale.

The hybrid combination of a physical



SIMON DE PURY

Far left, Simon de Pury plans a live and digital auction of about 350 pieces of contemporary art, modern design and earlier objects valued at up to \$20 million. Above, an acrylic painting by Emily Noelle Lambert, whose work will be shown in London by Elizabeth Denny, a New York dealer. Left, exterior of the antiques dealer Mallett, where pieces from Mr. de Pury's auction will be displayed. Below far left, "Temporary School of Villejuif, 1956," by Jean Prouvé, which will be on view in London at Galerie Patrick Seguin.



MALLET ANTQUES, VIA DE PURY

"Nowadays there are collectors who look at everything on the Internet."

view, online catalog, live auction and high levels of Internet bidding has become a routine feature of regional sales in America and Britain, particularly for lower-value collectibles. It remains to be seen if this pattern will be repeated in the market for unique, high-value contemporary works, where bidding in the room and on the telephone dominates auctions.

"This kind of multichannel buying is growing at the bottom end of the market," said Robert Read, head of fine art at the London insurer Hiscox, which published its second Online Art Trade Report in April. "I'm not so sure about it at the top end. At that level there's a raft of advisers and other people involved." That said, 86 percent of a sample of 519 art buyers surveyed for the Hiscox re-

port said an inability to physically inspect works was the major disadvantage of acquiring art at pure online-only platforms, where sales, according to Hiscox, reached an estimated \$2.6 billion last year, up from \$1.6 billion in 2013. Eighty-four percent of those surveyed said they had bought art online at prices of less than £10,000.

"Art is sold by seeing art, and by having human relationships," said Elizabeth Denny, a New York dealer, "but once someone has seen an artist at a fair, they might buy another work by that same artist they've seen on Instagram."

An independent fair

Ms. Denny is one of 47 emerging galleries from 25 cities showing in the second annual edition of the Start contemporary art fair, which previews at the Saatchi Gallery in London on Sept. 9. Last year's five-day event, founded by the British collectors David and Se-

renella Ciclitira, was held in June after the Art Basel fair and attracted 11,000 people. The organizers have now decided to hold Start in a stand-alone slot a month before the logjam of the Frieze Art Fair, which opens to the public from Oct. 14 to 17, and its satellite events.

"I think they've been brave to keep it an independent fair — the art world wakes up in the second week of September," said Carl E. Smith, who founded the CES Gallery in Los Angeles and, like Ms. Denny, is a debut exhibitor at the London fair.

Last year, Instagram-savvy speculators were prepared to pay tens of thousands of dollars for "process-based" abstract paintings by hot young artists they hoped to "flip" for hundreds of thousands at auction. That sector of the market has cooled dramatically this year and dealers are adjusting to a more risk-averse climate.

Ms. Denny will be showing recent acrylic paintings by the widely exhibited New York artist Emily Noelle Lambert (born 1975), while Mr. Smith will be introducing JR Doty and Joe Glasco, the Los Angeles husband-and-wife team known as Doty/Glasco (born 1981/born 1988), who transform photographs of natural motifs using collage and sculptural elements.

In tune with a recent shift in some buyers' tastes from hard-edged abstraction to images with more color and figurative elements, these works are priced at around \$9,000 and \$6,000, respectively, a level at which collectors are still prepared to take a risk.

A market for Prouvé

The prefabricated architecture of Jean Prouvé (1901-1984), a great pioneer of 20th-century design, is at an altogether different price point. The Paris dealer Patrick Seguin has over the last quarter-century made a particular specialty out of buying, restoring and selling surviving examples of the elegant temporary structures Prouvé manufactured in France during the 1940s, '50 and '60s.

Mr. Seguin's current Prouvé property portfolio contains about 20 of these survivors. His latest acquisition is the designer's former drawing office at Maxéville, near Nancy, France, which had been converted into "Le Bounty," a swingers' club. For each structure, he charges 1.25 million euros to €8 million, or about \$1,365 million to \$8.7 million, depending on the size and the design.

Galerie Patrick Seguin sold a 6-meter-by-6-meter "demountable" house this year for \$1.5 million in New York at a joint exhibition, "Chamberlain/Prouvé," in collaboration with Gagosian Gallery.

The Paris dealership is seeking new customers in London by taking over Phillips's former Mayfair space at 45-47 Brook Street, next to Claridge's hotel. Mr. Seguin will inaugurate his 65-square-meter gallery on Oct. 11 with a museum-style show devoted to a section from Prouvé's 1956 demountable school house at Villejuif, a southern Paris suburb, and to a contemporary updating of a 6-by-6 demountable house from 1944 by the British architect Richard Rogers, who is an admirer of Prouvé. The Rogers adaptation is not for sale (it will be kept by Mr. Seguin), but the 100-square-meter school house, notable for its graceful asymmetrical red girders, is priced at €3.5 million.