

Getting a lift: ski posters

♦ Fit for winter

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Collectors vie for vintage images of Alpine holidays and winter sports

VINTAGE SKI POSTERS illustrated their appeal at the annual Christie's sale in London last week.

The Ski Sale reached 94% of its total estimated value, and 87% of its 340 lots were sold. "People were in a skiing mood," says Nicolette Tomkinson, the specialist in charge of the sale. The room was full and the telephones busy with calls from

Collecting MARGARET STUDER

bidders across Europe and the U.S., some ringing directly from the ski slopes, she says.

These popular posters show bronzed and happy people relaxing at resorts, and athletes in retro sports attire competing for trophies in past Olympic Games.

This year, collectors fought most fiercely for posters from the famous Swiss resorts of Davos, Wengen and St. Moritz. The poster "Wengen" (circa 1925) by an anonymous artist, fetched more than twice its estimate, selling for £16,800 (\$30,000). The village of Wengen in the Bernese Oberland is at the foot of three of the world's most imposing peaks, the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau, and this poster showed fashionably dressed holiday makers in a café sitting in front of a window that looks onto the mountains.

"Davos" (1918) by Emil Cardinaux, showing people watching a bobsled competition with the town in the background, went for £13,200, higher than its estimate of £5,000-£7,000. Cardinaux, a Swiss artist, holds the record for a winter resort poster. In 2004, his "Palace Hotel, St. Moritz" (1920), a drawing of elegant visitors at a skating rink, sold for £22,000. In last week's sale, this same image (though not the same poster) fetched £13,200. Ms. Tomkinson says the two posters were of equal quality, but in 2004 the price was buoyed by two bidders competing with one another. "That's auction," she says.

The most valuable ski posters come from the 1920s, 1930s and earlier. And the most sought after are Swiss and French. The price of a winter poster is very much tied to the resort, with famous resorts bringing high prices. "Ski posters are collected by the rich and famous for their chalets, and they are willing to pay top dollar," says dealer Bruce Skilbeck of Poster Classics (www.posterclassics.com) in the French town of Saint-Jorioz. Jack Rennert of the International Poster Center in New York says ski posters have become a fast-growing area of the vintage poster market in his part of the world. "People have a nostalgia for where they have been," Mr. Rennert explains.

The market is also being pushed by a supply shortage, Ms. Tomkinson says. Posters are an advertising vehicle, and many were destroyed. Ms. Tomkinson says it takes an entire year to put together the



Two posters from the 1928 Olympics in St. Moritz were auctioned last week: one by Hugo Laubi, above, for £2,880; one by Carl Moos, below, for £9,600

Christie's sale.

Apart from the fame of the resort, there are other determining factors in price.

Rarity: A piece that is rarely seen is desirable—but it must also be an attractive image.

Image: Striking, colorful pictures attract collectors.

Artist: Famous artists such as Switzerland's Cardinaux or Alex Walter Diggelmann, known for his St. Moritz image of a rabbit skiing down the slopes, attract high prices. In last week's Christie's sale, a Diggelmann poster from 1955 with his skiing rabbit went for £3,840, over its estimate of £1,500-£2,000. Another of his white rabbit standing in the snow from 1930 sold for £4,200 (estimate: £2,000-£3,000).

Condition: The posters, once used to advertise, aren't expected to be perfect, but the image should be intact and the colors bright. Condition plays less of a role with a very rare poster, but if there are a number of a certain poster around, collectors will wait for a piece in the best condition.



2^{ème} Jeux Olympiques d'Hiver 11-19 Février 1928
2nd Olympic Winter Games 11-19 February 1928

Auction houses should provide information on the condition of a piece if you aren't able to see it in person and intend to bid over the telephone. Posters given an "A" in the catalog should be in excellent condition. A "B" means good condition, though there may be some tears at edges. A "C" means the poster has seen better days.

A respectable auction house or dealer will not deal in reproductions. Posters are an art form in themselves, and to reproduce one is like reproducing a painting. The painting is the collector's item, and the reproduction is worthless. There are endless offers of reproductions on the Internet which should be avoided.

The genuine vintage poster market offers enough opportunities for interesting buys at an affordable price. In the Christie's sale last week, for example, a lively image of a skier in Montana, Switzerland, from 1947 sold for £600. And for those with the budget to go higher, a super 1946 image by one of the most famous Swiss graphic artists, Martin Peikert—an exuberant and beautiful woman riding on the back of a snowman—sold for £3,200 (estimate: £1,800-£2,200). These post-World War II images are not only attractive but have a story behind them, symbolizing the joy of a Europe at peace—a combination that could help their value rise.

Although ski posters are a niche field in the auction world, their varied images appeals to different collecting tastes. Some like skiers dashing down a mountain or horses pounding through the snow at St. Moritz's famous horse races (a scene from 1924 by Hugo Laubi last week fetched £5,760, against an estimate of £2,000-£3,000). Other collectors prefer resort café scenes or views of the mountains without people. Other scenes include railways against mountain backgrounds or planes flying in the Alps.

Posters from the Olympic Games come up for sale regularly, but they aren't plentiful. Nevertheless, Mr. Skilbeck says, there are people who collect only Olympic posters. The early ones are the most valuable, such as those from the first Winter Olympics in Chamonix, France, in 1924.

The Christie's sale last week included a few Olympic posters. An image of hardworking cross-country skiers from the Winter Olympic Games in St. Moritz in 1928 by Carl Moos exceeded its top estimate of £7,700, selling for £9,600.

Others sold within or below the expected range: A poster from the 1948 Olympic Games in St. Moritz with two fashionable skiers watching a rising sun, went for £1,020 (estimate: £800-£1,200); one by Hugo Laubi, showing the flags of Switzerland and the Olympics for the 1928 Games, sold for £2,880 (estimate: £2,500-£3,500); and a poster from the 1932 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York, went for £960 (estimate: £1,000-£1,500).



The poster "Davos," 1918, by Emil Cardinaux, last week sold for £13,200, above its estimate of £5,000-£7,000.