

international events

Now it's the Cape of good hope

Trade and auctioneers take a more modern approach to promoting their treasures



Ivan Macquisten reports

TO an outsider, the most notable feature of the South African art and antiques scene at the moment is just how quickly some of those involved in it are catching on – at last – to new technology and the world of social networking.

A couple of years ago, beyond the main auction houses and one or two leading dealers, you would have been hard pressed to find a website between the rest and, on the dealer front, at least, this is still true to an extent.

So it makes it all the more remarkable that it is the **South African Antique Dealers' Association (www.saada.co.za)** which is pioneering a very forward-thinking experiment in marketing, namely video features of each dealer and their stand at the SAADA fair. The October fair provided the pilot for this scheme, and the 19 dealers at the February 11 and 12

fixture in the Kirstenbosch Gardens in Cape Town are expected to follow suit.

The exercise has several purposes: it introduces each dealer and their stock to a wider audience; it provides existing clients and visitors to the fair with a reminder of what was on offer, which they can browse at leisure from their armchair, with a view to after-sales; and it gives a reassuring overview of the event and SAADA itself. What's more, the videos provide readymade footage for broadcast news and feature bulletins, should national or international networks need it.

Key to their success is the clear, open and friendly presentation by antique dealer **Paul Mrkusic** and SAADA's **Marylou Bawden**.

"We must be one of the first associations to put videos of each dealer on the web to show what they had on their stands," says silver dealer and SAADA chairman **Jeremy Astfalk**.

"We've already had an incidence of an existing client trying to trace something they saw at the fair but not being able to remember which stand they saw it on. They looked at the videos and found it, so that's another sale that might not have happened otherwise," he told ATG.

It's not the only technological progression at SAADA. It has also just linked up to Facebook.

Campaigns on Portobello (Facebook)

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Strauss & Co will be offering a trophy Irma Stern (1894-1966) at their February 6 sale at the Vineyard Hotel, Newlands, Cape Town. *Portrait of a Woman Wearing a Pink Hijab*, a signed and dated Zanzibar period oil on canvas from 1941, measuring 2ft 3in x 2ft 3in (69 x 69cm), which has never appeared on the open market before, comes with an estimate of R8m-12m. The auctioneers will also offer another Stern, *Two Seated Arabs*, at R2.5m-3m.

The sale starts with the dispersal of the Professor Walter Beck Collection of glass, Chinese porcelain and Japanese cloisonné. Beck, a prominent cardiologist, who formed part of Christiaan Barnard's first heart transplant team, died last year at the age of 85. The glass in his collection focused on European designs from 1890 to 1960 and the sale includes this 8in (20cm) high, Italian black and red glass vase, **right**, signed *Occhi*, designed by Tobia Scarpa for Venini in the 1960s, which comes with an estimate of R30,000-40,000.

Beck's collection also includes this painted Tang dynasty horse, **above**, which stands around 19½in (50cm) tall and is guided at R70,000-80,000.



Left: new auction house Provenance, in Cape Town's museum district, is using social media, such as Twitter to promote mid-20th century design and other works.

Above: this early Louis Vuitton travelling trunk will be offered in their February 22 sale with an estimate of R50,000-80,000.



Above: at the SAADA Fair from February 11-12, **The Old Corkscrew** will be asking a mid four-figure sum for this pair of George III travelling chambersticks, known as Brighton Buns, by Joseph Guest dated London 1812. The sconces, once unscrewed, fit into the two halves which are then screwed together to form a circular box.



SAADA Fair
Kirstenbosch
Gardens
Cape Town
February
11-12,
10am to 5pm

Above: Jeremy Stephens Antiques specialise in 20th century design, decorative glass and fine art and will be displaying a range at the SAADA Fair. Among the art they will be offering is this work by Belgian-born artist **Maurice van Essche (1906-77)**. He studied in Brussels and France, including, in 1933, under Henri Matisse, before ending up in South Africa, where he spent almost half his life. *Lady with Beret*, a signed oil on canvas measuring 2ft 6in x 2ft (75 x 62cm), comes with a ticket price of R420,000.

"We must be one of the first associations to put videos of each dealer on the web to show what they had on their stands"

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and Burlington Arcade (Twitter) in London have clearly demonstrated the power of social media in not only getting the message across but also winning the debate in the face of powerful opposition. I suspect that it will be the opening of a new auction house in the museum district of Cape Town last year, **The Provenance Boutique Auction House**, that will make auction and dealer professionals look again at their online credentials.

Launched by **Paul Myson**, who previously ran **Ashbey's Auction Galleries** for a decade, Provenance has already established a presence on

Facebook and a following on Twitter, where it previews individual lots with links back to its own website.

Mr Myson has a couple of other advantages up his sleeve. The first is that he is the great nephew of the late Roger Warner, whose double-fronted shop was a dominant feature of Burford High Street for 50 years. When Warner died, well into his nineties, in 2008, his stock was largely split between a two-day sale at Christie's South Kensington, and three separate sales at Brightwells of Leominster.

Residual works by the likes of Lynn Chadwick and Henry Moore were later shipped out to South Africa for Mr Myson to dispose of and he found that they did rather well.

"People out here don't really get the chance to buy such works and there was quite a demand," he says.

His other great advantage is having Denmark's former ambassador to South Africa as his best friend, one who is having

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south africa

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considerable success sourcing Danish works of art for sale in Cape Town.

Provenance's first sale on November 23 could hardly have come at a more difficult time, marketwise, but as an established figure on the local auction scene anyway, Myson says: "If I can make it work now I can make it work during the better times."

He intends to offer a broad range of art and antiques, but is interested in focusing on mid 20th century design, modern British, American and European artists and themed sales. His next, on February 22, is a Safari and Travel sale, which will offer maps and campaign furniture from around the world, among other items.

"I am trying to get younger people interested in auctions. South Africa doesn't really have a tradition of the young coming to auctions except for property. But our last sale, with some of the Danish furniture we had, started to bring them in. We will also be holding

talks and lectures to create further interest and get rid of that intimidating atmosphere that can be associated with auctions."

Myson is also exploring the potential of South African and African artists beyond the cream of Stern, Pierneef and the rest, whose increasingly rarefied market, he acknowledges, has been cornered by Bonhams, Strauss & Co and Stephan Welz & Co.

Names to watch include photographer and painter Zwelethu Mthethwa (b.1960), whose powerful images of township life have already appeared at the *Venice Biennale*. Rumour has it that Oprah Winfrey has already bought several of his works.

Sam Nhelengethwa (b.1955), with his jazz-obsessed collages, is also seen as a rising star and, like Mthethwa, is admired by German and Dutch collectors.

The past year has been challenging for dealers, according to Jeremy Astfalck, but the market has proved remarkably resilient.

"The market is holding up well out



here, we have been busy," he says. "More than half of our members are doing well, with perhaps the exception of those dealing in brown furniture. The health of the domestic brown furniture market tends to reflect the health of the property market, which has not been easy."

Areas that have prospered include glass and Mr Astfalck's own area of expertise, silver, has also fared better than expected in some areas. "Big flashy pieces have been following melt prices, and even smaller pieces have held up well, although we have not really been selling those to new clients. The top end in small collectables has really been going to existing collectors."

Interestingly, he says, trends seem to follow the British version of the *Antiques Roadshow*, which goes out on the pay channel about two weeks after showing in the UK.

"Whatever gets highlighted as something special on the *Roadshow*, all of a sudden we have people buying them in the shops," he says.

Mr Astfalck believes that there will be fewer Europeans visiting this year because of what is happening to the euro at the moment, even though dealers and collectors who do make the journey often remark on the value for money they get in Cape Town and Johannesburg. The current exchange rates for both the pound and euro are more favourable for visitors to South Africa than they were for the fair and sales last year, so things may not prove as bad as feared.

"For the year ahead we will all be focusing on what the market wants," Mr Astfalck pledged.



"Trends seem to follow the British version of the *Antiques Roadshow*, which goes out on the pay channel about two weeks after showing in the UK"

STEPHAN Welz & Co will hold their Cape Town sale on February 21 and 22, offering a broad range of fine art and antiques. A promising picture section is headlined by **Irma Stern's (1894-1966)**

Still Life with Lilies, an oil on canvas dated 1957 and measuring 2ft 2in x 21in (67.5 x 55cm). It last sold in 2004 for R330,000, also at Stephan Welz & Co, and reappears here with an estimate of R3m-5m, which gives an idea of the soaring values for the artist in the intervening years.

Also on offer is this signed oil on canvas portrait of *Mrs Wilmot of Carolina*, by **Ruth Everard-Haden (1904-92)**, left. It comes with an estimate of R800,000-1m.

The artist was part of the Everard Group, comprising Edith King, Bertha Everard and her daughters Ruth and Rosamund, as well as Ruth's daughter Leonora and Leonora's daughter Nichola.

Ruth, who painted landscapes and still lifes as well as portraits, moved to Paris in 1923 and came under the influence of Matisse and the Fauvist movement among others. Deteriorating eyesight forced her to stop painting in 1956 and this was one of the last works she completed.



Laubser, Maria Magdalena (Maggie) [1886 - 1973] 'Figure of a Girl and Ducks in a Landscape' Oil on Canvas on Board, 58 x 51 cm. Signed: 'M. Laubser' [Lower/Right] Circa: 1940 - 1945

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RUDD's auctioneers of Cape Town will be offering an interesting mix of fine antique furniture, silver, paintings, works of art and militaria on February 28. "We have a policy of offering for auction only items that have been sourced from estates and private residences," says auction principal **Charles Rudd**, a man with more than 30 years' experience in the business.

Among the 400-plus lots will be memorabilia relating to Nelson and Captain Cook, as well as an interesting selection of English silver dating from the early 18th century onwards, including a William IV four-piece teaset, London 1836 by the Barnard family (estimate: R17,000-20,000).

Another piece of international interest is this mid-19th century ship's doctor's mahogany medicine chest, **left**, which comes with an estimate of R5000-7000.

"You have to remain positive and work every single person in front of you."

Interestingly, there seems to be less of a divide between dealers and auctioneers in the Cape than in the UK.

"The momentum of auctioneers and dealers together is taking the market forward," says Mr Astfalck, "and it's nice to see that the launch of Provenance has brought a bit more spark in the market."

For their part, he notes dealers often provide visiting collectors with the opportunity to buy something that they can't find in the salerooms, so there's a good balance to trade.

In the end, though, he acknowledges that those who keep their businesses up to date are the ones who will prosper in 2012.

"If you're fit you're going to survive. It's about ingenuity in presenting yourself and stock to your client. There are a lot of opportunities."

Having had a great time at Olympia last year, he is already planning his stand for June.

And, along with other dealers at the February 11-12 fair in South Africa, he expects to be displaying some of those sought-after heirlooms that overseas dealers look for.

"I've turned up some really interesting things in the last month," he told ATG.

London continues to compete and take emerging African artists seriously

BONHAMS have cut a swathe through the South African pictures market in the past few years and they continue their challenge to the domestic auction scene on March 20 and 21 with their next South Africa sale in London, featuring a number of noteworthy works by **Irma Stern (1894-1966)**.

Zulu woman, shown **right**, a signed oil on canvas dated 1935, and measuring 23 x 19in (58 x 48cm), carries an estimate of £400,000-600,000.

Two slightly larger oil-on-canvas works are each estimated at £500,000-800,000. *Still life with irises*, signed and dated 1939, is 2ft 6in x 2ft 7in (78 x 79cm), while *Indian woman*, from 1941, measures 2ft 9in x 2ft 6in (85 x 77cm). Other Sterns also feature.

Other fine art highlights include *Bosveld*, by **Jacob Hendrik Pierneef (1886-1957)**, an oil on composition board measuring 21½in x 2ft 2½in (55 x 67cm), estimated at £120,000-180,000, and **Gerard Sekoto's (1913-93)** signed oil on canvasboard, titled *Portrait of the artist's Mother*, measuring 18 x 14in (46 x 35.5cm), guided at £80,000-120,000.

Bonhams have also noted that increasing competition at the top end of the South African art market has had a ripple effect, leading to interest further down and beyond South Africa's borders.

One highly successful artist the auction house believe is garnering an even wider following is the Ghanaian sculptor **El Anatsui (b.1944)**, who has also been featured at the *Venice Biennale*, and whose *New World Map*, shown **below**, will feature in Bonhams' May 23 *Africa Now* sale in London,



Above: *Zulu woman* by Irma Stern, from 1935, estimated at £400,000-600,000 at Bonhams.

with an estimate of around £300,000-500,000.

"The biggest single change in African art these last three years is what has happened to prices. Previously to speak of £1m lots was unheard of until we got into the act," says specialist **Lucy Gregory**. **Ivan Macquisten**



Above: **El Anatsui's (b.1944)** *New World Map*, estimated at £300,000-500,000 for Bonhams' May 23 *Africa Now* sale in London.

Auctioneers of Fine Art, Antiques, Design and Home Luxury



167. A Chinese carved polychrome altar, Qianlong 1736-1795. Estimate R25 000 - R35 000 (hammer price R38,000)



106. A pair of Bruno Mathsson Jøtson armchairs, R12 000 - R14 000 (hammer price R16, 000)



308. Marlene Dumas (b.1953) Ecco Pier Paolo Pasolini, Maria Chailoux, Amsterdam, 1988, set of three lithographs and linocuts and linocuts R120 000 - R160 000 (hammer price R320, 000)



285. A pair of Stuart Devlin four branch silver candelabra, London 1975. Estimate R25 000 - R35 000 (hammer price R68, 000)

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