

international events

Prices to warm winter in Paris

■ €450,000 Cressent commode and a record for de Stael in the busy run-up to Christmas



Anne Crane reports

£1 = €1.1

PARIS, like London, is very busy in the run-up to Christmas, both at Drouot and at auction houses that sell independently on their own premises. Here is a soupçon of Paris's recent sale highlights. A further round-up will follow later in the New Year.

FURNITURE

A Louis XV commode by Charles Cressent produced one of the top furniture prices of the Paris autumn/winter season when it sold at €450,000 (£409,010) at **Piasa** on December 9

The 4ft 3in (1.3m) wide, two-drawer commode, veneered in satinwood and amaranth with its rococo scrolling gilt-bronze mounts featuring chinoiserie and rocaille motifs set on lion paw feet, is linked to a small group of commodes attributable to Cressent c 1740-5

Many of these are in major public collections including the Getty Museum, the Louvre, the Metropolitan Museum and Waddesdon Manor

The commode had a market-fresh and notable private provenance, having been in the collection of the comtes de Vallin at the beginning of the 19th century and then passed by descent to the vendor. The piece sold at €450,000 (£409,010) against a €350,000-500,000 estimate

Back on November 10 at **Europ**

Auction a Louis XVI ebony bureau plat decorated with panels of 18th century Japanese lacquer work to the drawer fronts and to the sides and applied with restrained neoclassical ormolu mounts

realised €910,000 (£827,270)

The bureau was stamped by Philippe Claude Montigny (received Maître in 1766), an ebeniste whose work can be found in major French and foreign collections from the Louvre and Musée des Arts Decoratifs to the Getty Museum and Woburn Abbey

The following month, on December 14, a sale of just over 200 lots of furnishings, works of art and paintings was led by a 2ft 5in (74cm) high imari covered baluster vase of Genroku period (late 17th/early 18th century date)

It had been set in elaborate Louis XV gilt-bronze mounts attributed to Jean

Claude Duplessis (1699-1774) and applied to the front with a circular clock signed to the enamel dial *Le Roy a Paris*. The price for this showcase of Franco-Japanese skills was €150,000 (£136,365) against an estimate of €200,000-300,000

HISTORICAL SOUVENIRS

Napoleonic history was in the news, too, in Paris in the winter season

First **Osenat** obtained an impressive €100,000 (£90,910) for the Empress Josephine's jewelled white satin robe from the house of Picot Brocard (previewed in *ATG* No 2018) in their auction in Fontainebleau on December 4

Then on December 9 in a dedicated sale of autograph letters at Drouot, **Marc Delvaux** offered a collection of 130 letters written by Josephine's daughter, Hortense de Beauharnais, to her lifelong friend Egle Augue, who married Napoleon's general, Marshal Ney

The correspondence had passed down through Eglé's descendants via her sister Antoinette

The two first met as pupils in Madame Campan's *Maison d'Education* in St Germain-en-Laye and remained lifelong friends, corresponding throughout

Hortense's letters to her friend, closely written in a neat hand, span a period of around 40 years, taking in her marriage to Louis Bonaparte and the birth of her children and are a mix of personal and quotidian details with more momentous events in history. The correspondence was catalogued as 98 lots, but with the option of being sold as a single unit –

which they duly did, making €85,000 (£77,270)

PHOTOGRAPHICA

A luxurious Italian viewing apparatus from the early days of photography topped a dedicated photographic sale at **Binoche et Giquello** on December 12

Known as a Megaleoscopio, it was patented in 1859 by the Venetian photographer Carlo Ponti (1823-1893), the key innovation being that it allowed the viewer to see coloured images before the invention of colour film

A wet plate photograph is hand-coloured on the reserve and backlit by an oil lamp so that when the viewer looks through the lens they see a richly coloured scene often accompanied by dramatic scenic effects

Ponti made several of these instruments in plain or carved wood but Binoche et Giquello's version, which had come from the American photographic collection of Jack Naylor, was a de luxe version, made as a special commission for a wealthy Neapolitan family, constructed from teak and elaborately inlaid with detailed ivory decoration over the entire surface

It came with a storage case similarly inlaid containing 36 views some of which had been painted to give a night effect

It sold for €160,000 (£145,455) getting on for double the estimate

MODERN ART

A new auction high for Nicholas de Stael was established in Paris on December 6 when **Artcurial** sold the artist's *Nu Couche*, an oil on canvas painted in 1954, a year before the artist's death in Menerbes

De Stael only painted around 20 nudes and this one shows Jeanne Mathieu, whom he met in 1953 and for whom he

developed an all-consuming passion

The market-fresh work was consigned from a French collection where it had been since 1954, acquired from De Stael's French dealer, Jacques Dubourg

Estimated at €3m-3.5m, six bidders in the room and on the phone from France, Britain and the US contested it to double that figure before the hammer fell to an American collector at €6.1m (£5.5m)

The price is well in excess of the previous high for the artist of €2.15m (£1.97m) set this year at Sotheby's Paris rooms for his *Agrigento* painted in the same year

The loan of the work has been requested for an exhibition of de Stael's *Nudes* to be held at the Musée Picasso Antibes in 2014

Above left. *Nu Couche* by Nicholas de Stael sold for €6.1m (£5.5m) at Artcurial on December 6

Above a sale of Modern art at **Aguttes** on December 14 included this 3ft x 2ft (92 x 61cm) Cubist oil on canvas of 1918 by August Herbin

(1882-1960) which led the 155 lot auction when it sold for €200,000 (£181,820). The work entitled *La creole* had come from a French private collection having been bought from the Galerie Simone Hérisson in 1963





Above: the Charles Cressent commode which took one of the season's highest prices for furniture when it sold at Piasa for €450,000 (£409,010).



Left: a Megaietoscopio, a 19th century Italian invention producing the illusion of coloured photographs, €160,000 (£145,455) at Binoche et Giquello.



Right: Genroko period Imari vase with gilt bronze mounts attributed to Jean-Claude Duplessis, €150,000 (£136,365) at Europ Auction.