

Ski Posters on the Rise

Prices perk up at Swann's annual vintage posters sale.

BY EVERETT POTTER

After a few years of modest gains, the value of ski posters, like the economy, seems to be ascendant once again. That was the takeaway at the annual "Vintage Posters" sale at Swann Galleries in Manhattan on February 25, where numbered paddles were furiously waving during bidding for classic 20th century ski posters.

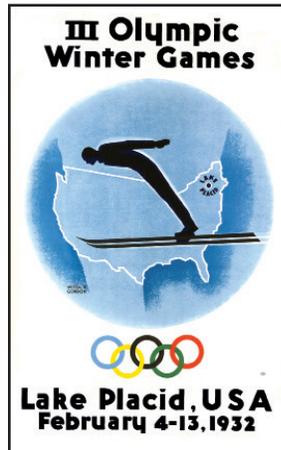
When the first of 38 available ski posters came up for auction, the room of 40 or so bidders seemed to shake off a certain somnolence. That poster was Albert Steiner's *Wintersport in der Schweiz*, a photographic poster circa 1930, which sailed past its top estimate of \$400 and sold for \$750 (all prices include a 25% buyer's premium). The frenzy began again when Walter Koch's *Zuger-Beg Wintersport* from 1910 sold for \$4,250, way above its \$2,000 estimate.

The Steiner was "a surprise to me," said Swann Galleries president Nicholas Lowry after the auction. "Generally speaking, photographic posters do not command a premium price. I guess it's a pure tribute to the subject matter."

Lowry conducted the auction at a brisk pace in his theatrical baritone, adding touches of dry wit to keep the proceedings lively. A half dozen assistants fielded bids by telephone and Internet, in addition to the bidders in the room, surrounded by posters hung double-height everywhere.

The iconic *Winter in Switzerland*, designed by Erich Hermes in 1936, depicts a skier relaxing in a deck chair, his glacier goggles around his neck, a coffee beside him and a cigarette stuck in his mouth. A high estimate of \$4,000 was topped with a winning bid of \$4,750.

One could credit ongoing Olympic spirit for the frenetic paddle-raising brought on by item 216, Witold



Gordon's poster for the III Olympic Games at Lake Placid in 1932. The high bidder paid \$8,125, far above its \$4,000 estimate, for the poster of a ski jumper in silhouette superimposed over a map of the United States.

Seven posters from the Dartmouth Winter Carnival, long a staple of these winter sales, came up for auction, but most barely made their low estimates. A 1942 poster by John Bowers, an overhead depiction of a skier in red and blue against a black background, did as well as any and sold for \$1,125, just above its \$1,000 low estimate.

"Dartmouth posters have been on the wane for the past few auctions," said Lowry, "and perhaps the public is losing some of their fascination with them. But like all things, it will be cyclical."

The star of the afternoon auction was the very rare *Pontresina*, a brilliantly constructed image of ski jumper soaring overhead against a blue sky streaked with clouds. It was designed circa 1930 by Alex Walter Diggelmann, one of Switzerland's best-known graphic and poster artists, who also designed the official poster for the 1948 Winter Olympics in St. Moritz. The bidding sailed as high as the skier, past its \$3,000 high estimate to land at \$6,750. ❄️

Clockwise from top right: Steiner's poster sold for \$750; Diggelmann's rare *Pontresina* fetched \$6,750, more than double its estimate; the iconic *Winter in Switzerland* had a winning bid of \$4,750; and Witold Gordon's 1932 Olympic poster was expected to sell for \$4,000 but went for \$8,125.

SKI POSTERS AT CHRISTIE'S

Swann's annual ski auction has its English counterpart at Christie's in London. "The Ski Sale, Travel in Style" this past January marked Christie's 15th annual sale of ski posters. As usual, there were both more lots (125 this year) at Christie's than at Swann's, and prices that tended to be higher. The most extreme example was Edouard Elzingre's *The Golden Pass Route*, which went for \$4,750 in New York but a whopping \$13,834 in London. The sale is mostly comprised of European ski posters, with just a handful of American examples. The catalog and results are online at www.Christies.com.