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Louise MacBain makes two more acquisitions

Louise MacBain's investment holding company LTB has announced two new acquisitions. It has bought Somogy, the second largest art publisher in France, founded in 1937, and whose turnover in 2003 was €3.7 million (£2.59 million), with profits of €60,000 (£252,000). The editor, Nicolas Neumann, will remain in his position. Hard on the heels of this announcement, LTB then revealed it had bought Gordon's Art Reference, a group that includes various price annuals in the prints and photography fields. This is Ms MacBain's first step into arts information and data, and is part of its strategy of becoming a "neutral platform for the arts". She has said that she is working on a "list of 25 possible acquisitions" to add to LTB's portfolio which, according to the company, now comprises over 165 publications and CD ROMs.

Pre-Columbian art sales, New York: eight-inch Mayan jade pendant sells for \$1.5 million

Christie's sold an European collection in the US and reaped the rewards of a revival of interest in this field

By Charmaine Picard

Exhibitions of pre-Columbian art are in fashion these days with the Aztec show at the Guggenheim, West Mexican tomb sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a landmark show of Tiwanaku artefacts at the Denver Art Museum. This recent interest in Central and South American antiquities may have helped to bolster sales at Christie's pre-Columbian auction on 12 November which was an exceptional success.

The auction, "Important Pre-Columbian Art: An European Private Collection" offered a first-rate selection of 90 lots with the majority coming from Mexico and a few choice pieces from Costa Rica and Peru. According to Fatima Turkkán-Wille, a consultant for Christie's sale, the European owner of the collection requested that the auction take place in the US where the majority of the works were originally acquired. This was significant, since the last time Christie's held a pre-Columbian sale in the US was in 1996. Christie's pre-Columbian sales have taken place in Europe since then, with noted success at their Paris branch which holds its next pre-Columbian auction on 8 December in conjunction with its African and Oceanic sales.

A world auction record was set for a Mayan jade regal belt pendant (lot 47, est. \$800/1.2 million) which sold for \$1,575,500 (£856,250) to an unidentified US dealer. The ceremonial belt plaque, dating from the Early Classic period, about AD 400-500, measures just over 9 inches and displays a detailed full-length portrait of a Mayan ruler incised with cinnabar on the recto, and a glyphic text describing the ruler, date and action of the scene on the verso. Another notable Mayan piece, a ritual container from the Late Postclassic period, about AD 1100-1300 (est. \$100/150,000) sold to a US dealer for \$186,700.

Several of the most interesting lots came from the Carlo Gray Collection of Mezcala and Chontal masks, figures and architectural models from Guerrero, Mexico. The bulk of the auction's top-selling lots came from this group, the foremost of which was a notable Guerrero-Puebla stone figure (est. \$30/40,000) which sold for \$74,090. A large Mezcala stone figure (est. \$20/30,000) brought \$59,750, and a Chontal stone mask (est. \$15/20,000) sold for \$31,070. Approximately 73% of the material offered at Christie's sold, for a combined total of \$3,229,091 million.

A somewhat less successful showing took place at Sotheby's 11 November sale which comprised 101 lots and made \$1.14 million. In general, objects from Mexico seemed to earn higher prices. The day's top lot was a Mayan codex vessel about AD 550-950 (est. \$100/150,000) coming in well over estimate at \$299,200 (£162,010). The cylindrical vase depicts two scenes with the aged Maya diety Pawahtuun and formed part of The Charles Pankow Collection of predominantly Mayan ceramics and Jaina figures. Approximately 30 lots from this collection were included in the sale, a number of which surprisingly failed to sell. Among the other notable sales of the day was a Chinesco seated figure from West Mexico about 100 BC-AD 250 (est. \$15/20,000) for \$33,000, and a Guerrero stone figural sceptre from about 300-100 BC (est. \$12/18,000) at \$36,000.



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The auction offered a larger selection of Andean material than its competitor and included several rare textiles, Inca silver objects and successful sales of a South Coast wood ceremonial paddle about AD 1000-1400 (est. \$8,000/12,000) at \$19,200, and a Chimú wood figure and an Inca/early colonial wood kero about AD 1300-1500 (est. \$5,000-7,000) for \$12,000. With the recent spate of pre-Columbian shows and the generally positive results for the November sales, it seems a renewed interest in pre-Columbian antiquities may be developing.



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