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Auction round-up: Roll up, roll up for stars of the shows

By Simon de Burton

The growing importance of the Asian watch auction market has been further emphasised in recent weeks by two high-level appointments in the watch divisions of Sotheby's and Antiquorum.

Sotheby's has announced that its watch department has a new, worldwide head in the form of Tim Bourne, an industry veteran with 20 years experience who previously worked for Christie's in the US. Prior to that, in 1997, he led Sotheby's watch department into the Asian market by directing the first, pioneering sales in the region.

International Watch Auctions

Antiquorum September 14, New York. September 23, Monaco (Only Watch). October 23, Hong Kong

Bonhams September 13, London (Knightsbridge)

Sotheby's October 6, Hong Kong

Mr Bourne will be based in Hong Kong from where he will oversee the house's Hong Kong watch auctions as well as those in Geneva, London and New York.

A fortnight ago, meanwhile, Antiquorum appointed Charles Tearle, one of its most effective specialists, head of the Asian division with a remit to oversee the company's offices in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing and Tokyo. He, too, will be Hong Kong based, despite also remaining in charge of Antiquorum's New York department.

Mr Tearle began his career at the age of 16 with Somlo Antiques, the leading London antique watch dealer, before becoming head of Bonhams Knightsbridge watch department in 2004. He then established a watch department for Bonhams in the US before joining Antiquorum in 2008.

But while Mr Tearle will have a few weeks to prepare for Antiquorum's next Hong Kong sale on October 23, Mr Bourne finds himself thrown in at the deep end with a Sotheby's sale on October 6 that promises to offer the largest selection of watches ever offered by the house in Hong Kong.

Featuring more than 470 lots and estimated to gross up to \$13m, the event will be highlighted by a 1951 Patek Philippe perpetual calendar chronograph in pink gold expected to fetch between \$410,000 and \$610,000. The watch will be sold alongside an impressive array of other historic Pateks and a selection of more modern complicated models, such as a 1990s Reference 3939J minute repeater, the first of just 70 yellow gold versions (\$300,000-\$440,000) and a year-old Reference 5102PR Celestial estimated to bring up to \$230,000.

The strong appeal of contemporary pieces to Asian buyers is further emphasised by the inclusion of several gem-set, complicated pieces such as a Cartier Santos Triple Tiger, a fully diamond pavéd watch with three rotatable dials; a diamond encrusted Breguet tourbillon from 2008 and a Vacheron Constantin tourbillon, also heavily gem set, from 2004. Again, each of the three watches is expected to change hands for about \$230,000.

Before all this, however, buyers will have the chance to bid on 319 lots with estimates ranging from as little as \$1,000 to about \$400,000 when Antiquorum kicks off the autumn sale season with an auction in New York on Wednesday. The star of the show is expected to be a Patek Philippe Reference 2499 – a model that is regarded as an important component of any serious watch collection. This one is a “third series” example from 1980 in a yellow gold case and is estimated at \$300,000 to \$400,000.

Rolex collectors are expected to be attracted to a 1967 Cosmograph Daytona in yellow gold that features a rare dial marked with the name of the original retailer, Tiffany. It is set to fetch \$40,000-\$60,000, while one of the elite maker’s James Bond Submariner dive watches from 1956 carries a pre-sale estimate of \$35,000 to \$65,000.

Military watch enthusiasts, meanwhile, are likely to battle for a selection of five wartime pilot watches highlighted by a 1940 IWC B-Uhr made for the Luftwaffe. The imposing, 55mm diameter watch is being sold complete with an IWC service certificate from 1989 and could make \$50,000.

But perhaps the highest profile watch auction scheduled for the coming weeks is set to be Only Watch, the fourth in a series of biennial charity sales that this year takes place on September 23 in Monaco.

Inaugurated in 2005 and overseen until 2009 by Osvaldo Patrizzi, the veteran watch auctioneer, the event, now run by Antiquorum, has so far raised more than €5m (\$7m) to help fund research into Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a neuromuscular illness that affects 250,000 young people around the world. This year, 40 leading

brands have donated unique wristwatches to the event, each one of which will be sold to the highest bidder with all proceeds going to the charity.

No pre-sale estimates have been made, but some of the highest prices are expected to be achieved by a Richard Mille RM 027 that was worn by Rafael Nadal during his victory in the 2011 Monte Carlo tennis championships and a superb Patek Philippe minute repeater tourbillon.

Undoubtedly the most unusual creation, however, is that provided by Maximillian Busser's avant garde MB and F brand. The HM4 Thunderbolt could easily be mistaken for a miniature pair of binoculars, thanks to its extraordinary case that comprises two tapering tubes that lie perpendicular to the wrist. Mr Busser has topped it off with a small, demountable panda in 18 carat gold which appears to be driving the Thunderbolt via a pair of reins made from gold filaments.

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