

Pop-up auctions – the latest way to sell art and antiques

■ TOM DERBYSHIRE looks at a new concept that aims to provide dealers with a more competitive way of selling stock

AT a time when salerooms are often said to be increasingly moving into dealers' 'territory', a new format of 'pop-up auctions' could be seen as a step in the other direction.

New firm **The Cabinet Rooms** are holding a sale in a one-off venue in Notting Hill, west London, on July 9, specialising in "affordable, modern design", and further auctions are envisaged across the capital and eventually beyond.

It is the brainchild of dealers Philip Thomas and Christian Quinlain, and partly a response to the debate over whether dealers actually need premises to display their goods or can work solely online these days. While online-only means costs can, of course, be kept down, it does have the disadvantage of buyers not being able to see works first-hand.

The new pop-up auctions aim to combine the best of both worlds – temporary venues and online catalogues to reduce overheads, but with objects on view and the opportunity to ask questions, in this case at a former post sorting office in Westbourne Grove, and keep the atmosphere of a live sale but also give the opportunity for online bidding.

Mr Thomas, who used to have a 20th century design shop in nearby Notting Hill Gate, said: "I believe people should be able to see antiques. When somebody says something is scratched, or has a nice patina, well one man's nice patina is another man's 'very dirty', so with these things you need to look at them, touch them, feel them. If you can get past all the effects of age on that piece, and still want to have it, then you have done so in full knowledge."

He said he also wanted to "create a bit of life because a lot of antiques shops now are very quiet" and give dealers an alternative to fairs, whose expense meant that they were forced to put up prices to unaffordable levels. "That's why things are so quiet at the moment," he said.

"I'm trying to create this idea where dealers, be it those who no longer have shops or still have shops, can put things in a central London venue but offer



Above: the venue for the pop-up auction at the former post sorting office in Westbourne Grove, with, inset, the Verner Pantone sitting wheel once owned by Vidal Sassoon, which is estimated at £15,000-20,000 for the July 9 sale.

them at much lower prices because they don't have the overheads. The key to this auction is going to be that people look at the catalogue and think 'wow these things are not all telephone numbers'."

July 9 will see about 150 lots, but 100 or so will be up on the website straightaway, while the others will be added gradually, right up to the auction.

"It is to keep people interested but also provide dealers with quick turnover which is why they can put in lower prices," said Mr Thomas.

"You can put something in our auction the week before if you want to. We're going to keep it dynamic and much more vibrant."

Buyer's premium is 20% (but there will be no extra charge for online buying via the-saleroom.com).

The lowest estimate is £300-400 and the majority is in the £1000-2000 range, with a bit more in the £2000-4000 range. The star lot is guided at £15,000-20,000: a prototype Verner Pantone sitting wheel, bought by Vidal Sassoon, who had it in his private collection for about 15 years. It came from his widow.

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Above: Aaron Dean of Halls.

Work experience lad makes return to Halls 18 years later

EARLIER this year when we chatted to the *Homes & Antiques Awards* Young Gun of the year, Timothy Medhurst, he told us how important he thought it was to get people involved in antiques at an early age.

He told ATG about starting as a work experience lad at Reeman Dansie of Colchester, which eventually led to a full-time job there.

Well, here is another encouraging tale of a stint of early involvement (hopefully including the making of tea, of course) that kicked off a career in the business.

Eighteen years after a placement inspired him to follow a career as a fine art auctioneer, Aaron Dean (pictured above) is back at Halls to take up a new post as the Shrewsbury auction house become the latest to adapt to the increasingly popular 'interiors' sale format.

He was just 15 when he spent time working with Halls' late fine art director Richard Allen and recalls telling his parents that he had held an antique worth £4000.

That experience encouraged him to seek out a course in fine art valuation at Southampton Institute, where one of his fellow students was Christina Trevanion, who now also works for Halls as the company jewellery specialist.

After ten years working for auctioneers Gorrings in Sussex, Aaron, 33, is now back home in Shropshire as Halls' interiors saleroom valuer and auctioneer. The bi-monthly interiors auctions have replaced weekly general sales held at the company's former Welsh Bridge premises.

On the rostrum will be a familiar face to many in the auctions world – Pippa Stockdale, formerly of Bonhams, who set up *Vision 21*, their modern design sale. Mr Thomas believes that with the large London salerooms backing away from lower-priced 20th century design items, "we have filled the gap left by *Vision 21* – the only modern design sale and with it affordable prices".

Others have realised the potential of such a market, with regional salerooms going for 'interiors'-style auctions and 20th century design sales springing up.

Further valuable help comes from Sean Berg, whose experience includes being chairman of the vetting committee at *Masterpiece* and the Olympia fairs.

They hope to hold four to six pop-up sales a year, with areas such as Marylebone, Hampstead and Highgate, maybe Bond Street/Mayfair and East London in the frame. Such venues show the market he is hoping to tap into – a 'trendy' crowd, with buyers possibly new to auctions. With that in mind, the viewings aim to be sleek and include other traders running stalls selling things such as coffee and cake, flowers and books.

If it all works, it is a format that could be rolled out more or less anywhere and Mr Thomas said they had talked to dealers in France, Netherlands, Italy and Germany.

The preview is July 5-9. See www.thecabinetrooms.com