Dynamics of auction: social interaction and new technology in sales of fine art and antiques.

As part of a more general interest in markets and finance, we are undertaking research on sales by auction, in particular sales of fine art, antiques and objet d’art. The research is concerned with the social and interactional accomplishment of auctions and the practices, techniques and technologies that feature in the valuation and exchange of merchandise. Auctions are becoming an increasingly pervasive method of valuation and exchange and the widespread deployment of the internet is providing new opportunities for people to participate in sales by auction.

THE APPROACH

The project consists of five key strands:

- video-based, field studies of auctions in the UK and abroad including mainland Europe and the USA;
- analysis of the talk and visible conduct of participants, auctioneers, buyers, sale assistants and others that inform the interactional production of sales;
- studies of the viewing of sales with special reference to the ways in which material artefacts such as catalogues inform the inspection and assessment of objects;
- studies of the valuation of objects and artefacts and the ways in which estimated, predicted and reserve values feature in auctions;
- analysis of the ways in which new technologies provide new and distinctive resources for accessing information about objects and participating in sales by auction;
- the design, development and assessment of new technologies to enhance participation in live auctions.

Aside from its academic contribution, the project is also concerned with exploring the ways new technologies might enhance and transform sales at auction. For example, we have examined the ways in which paper-digital technologies may provide new and distinctive ways of accessing information concerning merchandise. We have also contributed to the design and evaluation of new technologies that enhance remote participation in live auctions, namely an ‘intelligent gavel’ and support the integration of remote bidding into the interaction between auctioneer and buyers. These developments resonate with our research on media spaces and technologies to support distributed collaboration.

The project is undertaken in close collaboration with saleroom managers, auctioneers, experts, and buyers. It involves close collaboration with Christie’s London/New York, Peter Wilson Fine Art, and the Department of Computer Science, University of Saitama.

RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS


