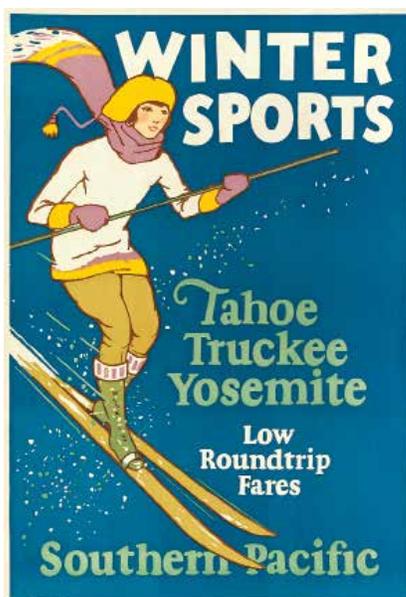


Fits and Starts

While a few blue-chip posters fetched high prices, others failed to raise interest from the audience at Swann's annual auction. **BY EVERETT POTTER**



Left to right: Ludwig Hohlwein's 1935 Garmisch poster sold for \$715, at the low end of its estimate range; a 1926 Tahoe poster by an unknown designer went for the expected price of \$3,750; and Lou Hechenberger's 1939 New Hampshire poster sold for \$5,250, well over its \$3,000 to \$4,000 estimate.

The annual sale of ski posters at Swann Auction Galleries in New York City on February 11 was all fits and starts. After a number of posters failed to raise any interest from the audience, the bidding was suddenly fast and furious for a few rarities and a handful of blue-chip images that seem to be in perennial demand. Yet many other posters were non-starters and failed to sell.

"I see it as a confluence of events," said Swann president Nicholas Lowry, the poster expert for PBS' *Antiques Roadshow* and the auctioneer for the sale. "The economic situation is rather precarious at the moment, and while the money needed to buy a nice poster is not the kind of money one might spend on a Modigliani painting, I think it is safe to say that the world has the jitters. Another factor is poster fatigue. Between recent sales at Christie's in London and Rennert's in New York, as well as two big online poster auctions in Barcelona and France, there have been too many posters on the market of late. I guess we are a victim of our own success, with

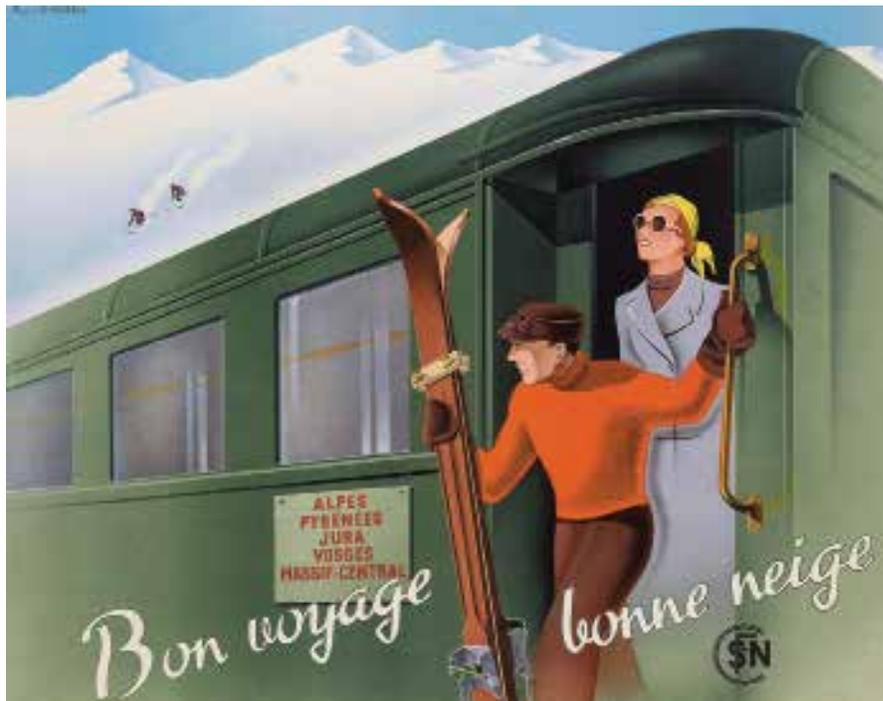
so many other players joining the game as sellers."

Many lots did go unsold, with nary a bid to budge them from their reserved price. Others went for a low price. Any budding or opportunistic collector might have done very well at this auction, where a poster for Garmisch Partenkirchen by the lauded artist Ludwig Hohlwein sold for \$715 (all prices include the 25 percent buyer's premium), barely into its estimated range of \$700 to \$1,000. Another Hohlwein, *Winter in Germany*, depicting a fashionable skier holding a pair of wooden skis, sold for \$375, far below its \$500 to \$700 estimate.

That said, there were a handful of real stars at this auction. *Winter Sports Tahoe, Truckee, Yosemite*, a brilliantly colored poster for Southern Pacific Railroad of a woman on skis holding a single pole, is an anonymous work from 1926 and went for \$3,750, within its \$3,000 to \$4,000 estimate.

Artist Lou Hechenberger's *New Hampshire* poster from 1939, a somewhat abstract composition of a skier racing in Tuckerman Ravine, went for \$5,250, well over its \$3,000 to \$4,000 estimate. The same was true for

(continued on page 14)



Clockwise from top left: A 1935 poster for the Swiss ski area of Schuls-Tarasp (\$1,375); a 1938 poster for the French national railway (\$5,720); a 1938 advertisement for Arosa in Switzerland (\$2,000); a 1935 poster for Snowhaven in New York (\$1,875); and a classic 1937 Dartmouth Winter Carnival poster (\$4,000).



Schuls Tarasp, a 1935 poster for a little-known Swiss ski area, which went for \$1,375, higher than its anticipated \$700 to \$1,000 forecast.

As usual, there was a selection of Dartmouth Winter Carnival posters, which have tended to do well at auction for the past decade. While a striking 1937 poster by Ruth Storck of a woman with her gloved hand raised failed to get any interest at all (the estimate was \$2,000 to \$3,000), another by Ted Hunter from the same year exceeded its top estimate of \$3,000 and sold for \$4,000. Depicting a ski racer with a pine tree in the foreground and a mountain behind him, it was classic of the genre. Yet in 2015 at the same auction, it brought \$6,000.

Hugo Laubi's playful poster for *Arosa*, with cast of winter sports enthusiasts perched on the outsize letters of the resort and waving to a skier ascending the mountain on a surface lift, is a 1938 gem. It sold for \$2,000,

its low estimate. A rather different image was created by artist Pierre Fix-Masseau for SNCF, France's national railway company. A fashionably attired pair of skiers descend from a passenger car at the foot of the slopes. On the side of the car is the destination board, in this case listing "Alpes Pyrenees Jura Visges Massif Central," not train stations per se but the French mountain ranges served by the railway. It's a bold and simple design, and its \$5,720 price soared well above its \$4,000 top end estimate.

While Sascha Maurer is best known for iconic images for New England resorts, one of his lesser-known posters, *Snowhaven Altamont, NY*, of a smiling woman holding a pair of Splitkein skis, sold for \$1,875, just shy of its top estimate of \$2,000. "Prices for the blue-chip posters—which by and large, are doing well—is a basic sign that the market is inherently sound," said Lowry.

Visit swanngalleries.com for information about next year's sale. ❄️