

Rare Poster Sells for \$30,000

Led by a 1934 poster from Gstaad by artist Alex Diggelman, prices at the annual Swann Galleries auction are on the rise. **BY EVERETT POTTER**

It's a rare day at any poster auction when a sale price can draw gasps and nervous laughter from a roomful of savvy collectors and seasoned dealers. But that's exactly what happened on February 12, 2015, at the annual "Vintage Posters" sale at Swann Galleries in Manhattan.

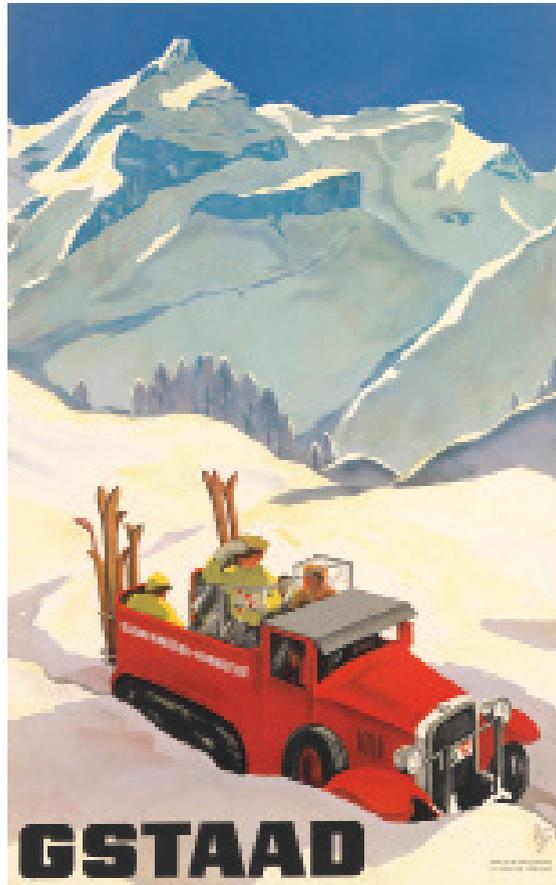
A 1934 poster by Swiss artist Alex Diggelman called "Gstaad" came up for sale early in the auction. Depicting a primitive version of a snow cat, bright red and filled with skis and skiers in a mountain setting, it was estimated to sell for between \$2,000 and \$3,000. Within seconds, the bidding price shot up quickly, thanks to a roomful of paddle-waving auction-goers competing against online and telephone bidders. The price vaulted upwards until a few minutes later, when the bidding ceased and auctioneer Nicholas Lowry banged his gavel. The winning bid was \$30,000, which included Swann's buyer's premium. The buyer was a private collector.

"It is an early poster and quite a rare one," said Lowry afterwards. The auctioneer, who is the president of Swann and serves as the poster expert on PBS' *Antiques Roadshow*, added that "Gstaad is now a hot spot for collectors. But nothing prepared me for the price it actually achieved. That is what tends to happen at Christie's," he said, referring to the international auction house where sky-high prices are not uncommon.

Vintage ski posters, which managed to hold their value during the recent recession, are on the ascendancy once again. At Swann's February auction, 102 ski posters came up for auction and sold very well, occasionally sailing way past their estimates.

For example, "Up Where Winter Calls to Play," a brilliant Art Deco style poster from 1938 that shows a very stylized Olympic Bobsled Run at Lake Placid, went for \$7,500, well over its \$4,000 limit. The classic "Win-

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Left: The 1934 poster *Gstaad* by Alex Diggelman sold for \$30,000 to a private collector. "It's an early poster and a rare one," says Swann Galleries president Nicholas Lowry. Above: This 1938 Art Deco poster went for \$7,500, well over its \$4,000 estimate.

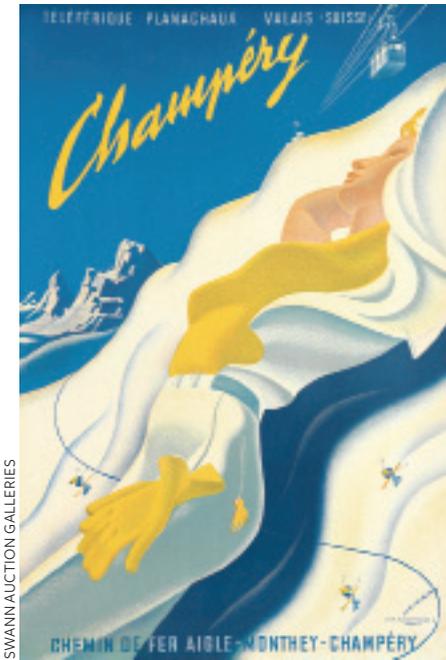
ter in Switzerland," created by Erich Hermes in 1936, of bronzed skier in a deck chair, glacier goggles around his neck and a cigarette lodged in his mouth, went for \$5,750, well above its \$3,000 top estimate. Another surprise was a 1955 poster for Champéry, depicting a female skier reclining on the snow in a pose that echoes the undulations of the slope. In the pantheon of ski posters, it must be one of the more erotic examples ever created. Buyers clearly thought so as well, quickly passing the \$1,200 top estimate until it sold for \$11,875.

"This is one of the sexiest ski posters out there," Lowry said.

There were rarities in the auction as well. An early poster by Herbet Matter, called "Engelberg 1925," shows a female skier dressed in classic mid-1920s alpine fashion. Matter was a master of photomontage, but this

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Clockwise from top left: *Engelberg* (1925) sold for \$3,000; *Hanase Eizan Kurama* (1925) sold for \$2,000; and *Champéry* (1955) sold for \$11,875, well above its \$1,200 estimate. “This is one of the sexiest ski posters out there,” says Lowry.

was early in his career and is a typical ski poster of the period, well-executed but standard in its composition. It went for \$3,000, the low end of its estimate.

Much rarer was a 1925 image titled “Hanase Eizan Kurama,” by an unknown Japanese artist, of a stylized female skier in motion. It sold for \$2,000, above its \$1,000 to \$1,500 estimate.

The auction performance of Dartmouth Winter Carnival Posters from the late 1930s to the early 1960s continues to slow down, with some failing to attract a single bid. One exception was a stylized poster of a skier in the New Hampshire mountains from 1937 by Ted Hunter, which went for \$6,000, double its estimate.

“Maybe the Dartmouth posters have finally run out of steam?” Lowry speculated. “The Ted Hunter poster sold well because it is one of the earliest Winter Carnivals, the second one in fact. It’s rarer than the others and it’s a darn good ski image.”

Plenty of blue-chip posters sold for prices at or above Swann’s estimate range. Herbert Bayer’s “Ski in Aspen,” a masterpiece of photomontage from 1946, went for \$7,250 (the poster was featured on the cover of the March-April 2011 issue of *Skiing History*). Franz Lenhart’s “Dolomiti/Cortina” brought \$8,125, well above its \$6,000 estimate. Pre-auction estimates are highly educated guesses, made by Lowry and his team and determined by the artist, the desirability of the image and the rarity of the poster. The estimate also accounts for the poster’s past auction performance and current condition, with repairs and minor tears noted. Most posters have already been backed on linen, a standard archival practice.

Swann’s annual February Vintage Posters auction remains the benchmark for prices and collecting trends for original ski posters in the United States. Visit swanngalleries.com for more information about ski posters and next year’s sale. ❄️

SKI LIFE



SNOW COUNTRY (AUGUST 15)