

“OUR FOCUS IS ON EVER-HIGHER QUALITY”

Interview with Robert Ketterer, auctioneer and owner of KettererKunst

KettererKunst started as a gallery in Stuttgart in 1954, and later became an auction house. How did that transition come about?

My uncle Roman Norbert Ketterer founded the Stuttgarter Kunstkabinett in 1946. He was supported in the company by my father and his brother Wolfgang. September that same year saw the publication of their first auction featuring drawings and prints by Max Slevogt. Despite the hardships of those post-war years, the auction was a complete success. It was followed by more successes and, within the space of just a few years, the Stuttgarter Kunstkabinett became established as a leading auction house for Modern Art. It represented a meeting place for great artists, art lovers and distinguished representatives of cultural affairs, business and politics. In 1954 the two brothers decided to go separate ways professionally. My uncle Roman not only took care of the Ernst Ludwig Kirchner estate but also built the Kirchner Museum in Switzerland and is now buried next to the artist he so admired.

My father, Wolfgang, opened a gallery of his own in Stuttgart which in 1965 moved to Munich where in 1968 he also staged his first fine art auction – of course focusing on German Expressionism, which became KettererKunst.

How and why did KettererKunst begin specializing in German Expressionism?

Our whole family has always had very close ties to these artists. I grew up surrounded by Expressionist paintings. They were everywhere and their vivid colors were just as fascinating as the courage of the artists taking bold new approaches.

The early German Expressionists were not particularly well understood. Later, the Nazi regime

specifically targeted these artists as “degenerates.” What was the market for German Expressionism like in the Post WWII period?

The Kunstkabinett’s second auction of Expressionist prints, held in 1948, had works from Max Beckmann, Oskar Kokoschka, Erich Heckel and Karl Schmidt-Rottluffand. This was the first time in post-war Germany the art that the Third Reich had deemed as “degenerate” was on offer. It was a bold step indeed. The results confirmed what the two brothers had long suspected: Even in hard times like the early years following the Second World War, not only the body but the soul too needed nourishment. Fulfilling this profoundly felt human desire became their mission, one which would help numerous artists who had until then been outlawed to

Robert Ketterer, auctioneer, CEO and owner of KettererKunst.



renewed esteem and world renown to an extent then entirely unexpected.

German Expressionist artists are very much sought after now. How is the market?

A shortage of high-quality pieces often leads to great auction results with sharp increases and record prices. Works on paper are also very much in demand right now. For example, we recently achieved an auction record for a watercolor by Erich Heckel, which more than doubled its estimate of €90,000, selling for €243,750.

How has the auction house expanded its sales in the last year or so?

We had proceeds of €23.6 million (not including online and direct sales) for our seven auctions in the first part of 2018. That will allow us to even exceed last year's high performance by more than €2.5 million.

In what sales categories have you seen the most expansion in the last year or so?

Generally we have noted great interest in art from the 19th century to the 21st century. However, what I find particularly remarkable is the fact that artists with strong ties to Germany sell extremely well in German auctions. Good examples are Tony Cragg, Katharina Grosse, Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Gerhard Richter and, of course, Günther Uecker.

Is there any progress with your stated plans to open up a sales room in Los Angeles? Is that still in the works?

Originally we were indeed thinking of Los Angeles as a base for our U.S. activities. However, we realized that a representation in just one city is not necessarily the

right solution. It's important to be proactive and to be where our clients are. This involves extensive travelling. So we have instead hired Melanie Puff, a cosmopolitan and very knowledgeable art expert, as our new representative for the U.S..

In recent years you've been exploring plans to expand into the European market because of growing uncertainty in Germany. How is the German market now and what's the status of those plans?

Being an expert in fine art that is made in Germany, our home country still has our primary focus, especially when it comes to consignments. However, Germany is part of Europe and it is important for us to maintain and strengthen relations with our neighbors. This is why we are putting strong emphasis on countries such as France, Italy, the Benelux region and Switzerland.

Do you have any other big changes planned for the next year or so?

Our focus is on ever-higher quality even if this means that we'll be offering fewer lots. It is very important to me to convey our very successful strategy of moderate and realistic estimates. We will continue to increase our focus on the many innovations we have introduced on our online platform (www.ketterer-internet-auctions.com). Also we're very excited about our 1-Euro sales, offering all lots with a starting price of 1 Euro, regardless of the artist's top reputation and the high quality of their works offered. These are becoming a worldwide magnet, especially for first-time online art buyers.

— Nina Siegal



Benedicto Cabrera, "Isadora in Motion," 1998, acrylic on canvas, 244 x 198 cm. The Magnificent September Auction 2016, Sold for P37,376,000.

LEÓN GALLERY

León Gallery first opened in 2010, specializing in Philippine art and estate antiques from the Pre-Spanish period to the 19th century, spanning furniture, ivory, ceramics, porcelain, carpets and jewelry. Its first auction in 2013 led to quarterly auctions since, with ascending and record prices for Filipino Old Masters – such as Juan Luna y Novicio, Félix Resurrección Hidalgo y Padilla, and Fernando Amorsolo y Cueto – as well as Modern and Contemporary artists, including Fernando Zóbel de Ayala y Montojo, Federico Aguilar Alcuaz, Diosdado Lorenzo and Romeo Tabuena. For the 2018 edition of Art Fair Philippines, the gallery organized "Elsewhere: 100 Years of Filipino Artists Abroad," featuring Miguel Zaragoza, Fabian de la Rosa, Nena Saguil, Macario Vitalis, Cesar F. Legaspi, and Napoleon Abueva. At León Gallery's Asian Cultural Council Auction in March 2018, a new world record was set for the Philippine abstract artist José Joya: his "Space Transfiguration" (1959) sold for P112 million (or \$2.16 million, inclusive of buyer's premium). León Gallery, in fact, holds the record of auctioning the six top-selling artworks in the country, in addition to auctioning the most expensive piece of furniture: the Gabaldon cabinet at P15 million. During its most recent auction, in June 2018, Fernando C. Amorsolo's "Under the Mango Tree" sold for P46.7 million, almost doubling its previous value.

— Sarah Moroz