

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Contemporary art sees rising returns in H1

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Jean-Michel Basquiat's *Untitled* sold for \$110.5 million. Image credit: Sotheby's

By STAFF REPORTS

The art market is showing signs of stabilization, according to sales made in the first half of this year.

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Sotheby's Mei Moses Art Indices, which take a look at sales from Christie's and Sotheby's, show the compound annual return for pieces sold at auction remained steady from the first half of 2016 to the same period in 2017. This is the first period of consistent returns since 2011, which Sotheby's takes as proof for the growing feeling of confidence surrounding fine art auctions.

Confidence boost

The Mei Moses database, acquired by Sotheby's last fall, can calculate the compound annual return of pieces of art sold within the past year if they were previously auctioned by Sotheby's or Christie's. The indices look at both the mean and median returns to prevent outlier sales from impacting averages.

While the return for art by Old Masters fell to 0.1 percent from 0.3 percent in 2016, other categories saw improvement.

On average, Impressionist and Modern art pieces saw their returns grow from 3.8 percent in 2016 to 4 percent this year. However, this seems to have been driven by certain big-ticket art pieces, as this category's median return was down from 3 percent to 2.4 percent.

Contemporary art also saw increases, with returns showing a growth from 7.4 percent last year to 9 percent in the first half of 2017.



Sotheby's Contemporary Art Evening Sale in London in June 2017. Image credit: Sotheby's

Among the works that helped boost the Contemporary market was Sotheby's record sale of a Jean-Michel Basquiat painting.

At the auction house's Contemporary Art Evening Sale on May 18 in New York, interest in the piece led to a 10-minute battle for the artwork. Finally, the Brooklyn-born artist's "Untitled" painting from 1982 was sold for \$110.5 million, fetching the highest price for any work post-1980 at auction ([see story](#)).

"Sotheby's Mei Moses provides us with proprietary data that clarifies anecdotal 'hunches' about how the overall market is performing and the level of specific artists' markets," said Amy Cappellazzo, chairman of Sotheby's fine art division, in a statement. "The stabilization of returns for all art and the acceleration in those for contemporary art affirms the increasing confidence we have felt in the marketplace in recent sales, which is good news for those looking for additional data to factor into their decision to consign."

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