

JEWELRY

How Christie's marketed its record-setting royal auction

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An Art Deco emerald, sapphire and diamond belt-buckle brooch by Cartier fetched \$1.545 million (estimate \$500,000 to \$700,000) in Christie's Maharajas & Mughal Magnificence auction held in New York June 19. Image credit: Christie's

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK Auction house Christie's used global multichannel, multisensory outreach to engage clients for its recent \$109 million Maharajas & Mughal Magnificence sale.

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At LuxeCX/AMCX 2019, two Christie's executives charted the lead-up to the record auction, which included international exhibitions, client dinners, print advertising and digital storytelling. The narrative built across channels surrounding the sale helped Christie's achieve its second most lucrative auction of a private jewelry collection and entice new registrations and clients.

"With having 250 years of experience, we do have a very dedicated client base that we will reach out to and engage before this collection ever comes to auction," said Daphne Lingon, head of jewelry at [Christie's Americas](#).

"This was also meant to engage different clients across multiple categories maybe it wasn't someone who normally collects jewelry or Islamic objects and was a way to reach out to those clients as well," she said. "So that was sort of the thrust of the marketing campaign and the collection."

LuxeCX/AMCX 2019 was produced by Luxury Daily and sister title American Marketer, with venue sponsor UBS

International outreach

This exhibit marked a unique crossover between Islamic artifacts and jewelry, enabling Christie's to speak to collectors across both categories. The almost 400 lots also spanned 500 years, further differentiating the storytelling behind the sale.

Because of this, Christie's strategized its exhibits and messaging to take advantage of the existing auction calendar and international foot traffic. A Geneva preview was held during Christie's jewelry sales in May, while a London exhibition coincided with Islamic Art Week.

While Christie's has been entrusted with other large collections, including those of Elizabeth Taylor and the Rockefellers, this sale stood out since the collector and client was still living and active. The owner of the objects

therefore played a large role in guiding how the sale was promoted.

One key influence for the design of exhibition spaces was the client's love of an Art Deco Indian palace. Fittingly, Christie's spaces at Rockefeller Center in New York and in Shanghai on the Bund are situated in Art Deco buildings.

Spaces ranging from a Four Seasons hotel suite in Geneva to a convention center in Hong Kong were transformed with architectural details such as wrapped columns, gold curtains and custom cases. Christie's typically white galleries in New York were also given a makeover, with carpeting to create a quieter atmosphere and a suspended garden.



Christie's Maharajas & Mughal Magnificence auction objects were on public display June 14-18 at 20 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10020, ahead of the auction on June 19, 2019. Image credit: Christie's

Across the physical exhibit spaces, another common element was scent courtesy of seasonal flowers, enabling the showcases to transport visitors and VIPs.

While the previews attracted visitors as well as potential buyers, Christie's hosted special engagements for clients. In Hong Kong, potential buyers could have a handling session to get a better feel for the scale of pieces.

Along with a catalog and print advertising that ran during the exhibits around the globe, Christie's used new digital marketing tactics for this sale.

The online catalog launched at the same time as the print version, with added ways to explore the lots. To capture the translucence in the gemstones, Christie's developed holograms of the items so they could be viewed in 360 degrees.

Drawing traffic to the Web site, Christie's handed out cards with links to the site at the Venice Biennale.

Christie's also worked with influencers to get the word out. The auction house tapped Claiborne Swanson Frank to style and shoot personalities including Aerin Lauder, Lauren Santo Domingo, Erika Bearman and Marina Rust wearing jewelry pieces.



Maya Haile Samuelsson was among the women featured in the portraits. Image credit: Christie's

Since many of the jewelry lots were originally made for men, this was an opportunity to show the wearability of the pieces for women.

Other touchpoints included a cover position on Christie's magazine, which goes out to clients, and press placements.

Marking the occasion, Christie's also created branded paddles and tote bags.

Record results

Christie's global outreach paid off, with sale registrants from 45 countries. The June 19 auction of Indian jewelry, paintings, arms and objects netted \$109,271,875 in total sales including the buyer's premium second only to the 2011 jewelry auction of actress Elizabeth Taylor's nearly \$116 million haul.

While jewels with diamonds in them fetched the highest prices, the other stars of the auction were the numerous emeralds, both stones and in sets and objects made of jade such as bowls and sword and dagger hilts.

Christie's claims this sale recorded the highest total for any auction of Indian art and Mughal objects, with 93 percent sold by lot and 92 percent sold by value in itself astounding sell-through rates ([see story](#)).

"It was a really global effort in terms of the company, and multi-departmental effort with staggering results," said Ms. Lingon said.

Online has become an increasingly important channel for auction houses, enabling them to reach an international audience.

Christie's has seen its online auctions grow, and it recently sold its highest number of watches in a digital auction.

The Christie's Watches Online: Winter Holiday Sale in 2018 sold 100 percent of its inventory by value and 83 percent by lot. It achieved a total of \$2,514,375, making it the highest sale total achieved and highest number of registrants, bidders and buyers for a Christie's luxury online sale ([see story](#)).

"[We'll be] continuing to pursue what we can do digitally in terms of storytelling," said Marissa Wilcox, global marketing director at Christie's.

"The level of engagement and the narratives that are created reverberate beyond the sale, so it's a way of creating almost evergreen content for some of these categories," she said. "From an SEO and SEM standpoint, it's a way of aggregating that many more clients or potential clients to us."

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