

ARTS

## Sotheby's doubles-down on mobile with AR functionality, digital gallery experience for app

June 22, 2020



*Potential bidders can virtually visit Sotheby's pre-sale exhibitions. Image courtesy of Sotheby's*

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

Adapting to COVID-19 restrictions limiting physical gatherings, British auction house Sotheby's has boosted its app's capability with augmented reality and other digital features that reimagine its June 29 live auction event.

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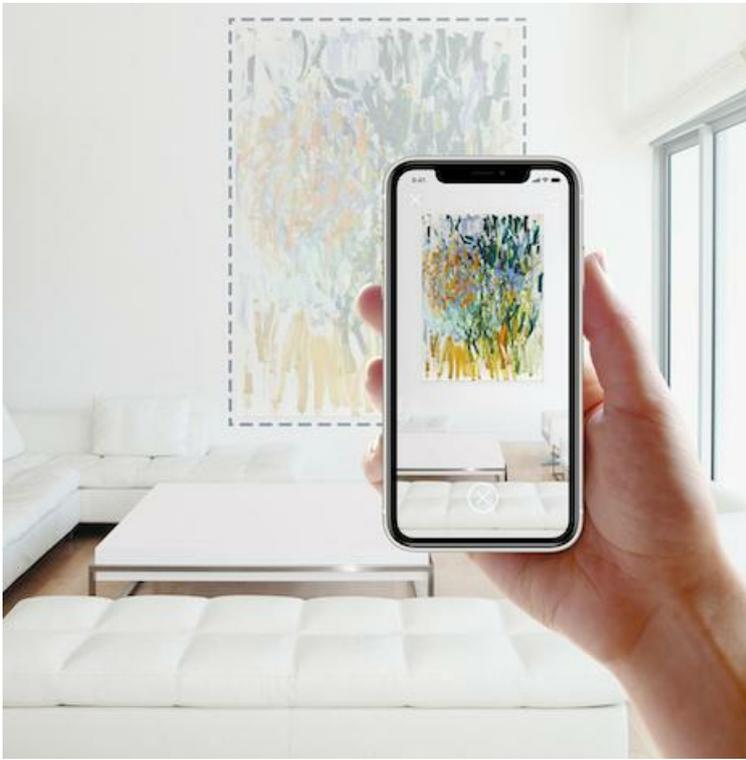
Besides AR, Sotheby's New York office is relying on a virtual exhibition tour and multimedia catalogs to ensure the effectiveness of its marquee June sales and exhibitions of contemporary, impressionist and modern art.

### New reality

The AR function, in particular, lets app users view artwork in their homes alongside existing collections before placing a bid.

The AR tool maps to a user's wall and furniture and displays a high-resolution image of the work that is similar to its unframed dimensions, offering an opportunity to virtually live with the work before buying.

This feature is currently available on iOS devices, with plans to soon debut an Android version.



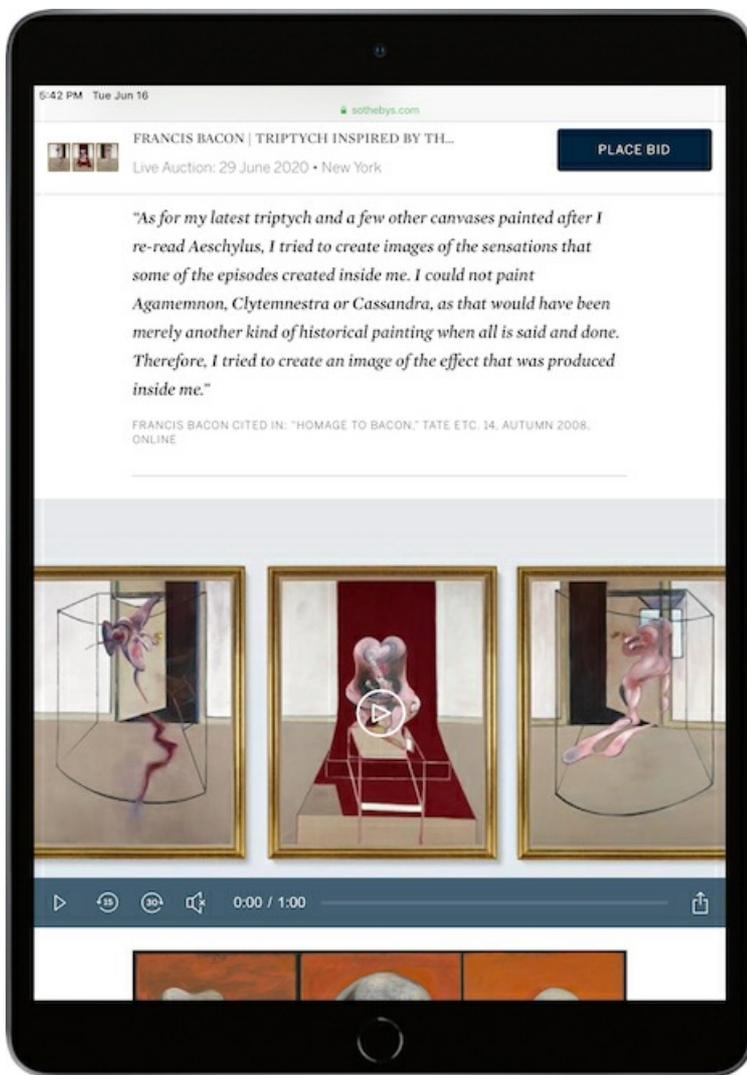
*Shoppers can imagine how the art will look on their walls pre-auction with the augmented reality function on Sotheby's app. Image courtesy of Sotheby's*

"While Sotheby's New York galleries are currently open to a limited number of in-person visitors, our new virtual gallery experience brings the exhibitions online," Sotheby's said in a statement.

"Users from around the world can move through our York Avenue galleries [in New York] and experience our exhibitions and artworks as they are installed with the added ability to learn more about specific works through associated videos, audio commentary and informational wall texts.

"This new exhibition experience also is integrated with our digital catalogues, so users can read full catalogue notes for works of interest, browse the rest of the sale, or bid on a specific work of art.

"Carefully curated by our specialists for a seamless, full-service experience, our virtual galleries are the next best thing to visiting our exhibitions in person."



*Sotheby's new digital catalog on its app. Image courtesy of Sotheby's*

## New book

Sotheby's new digital catalogue experience boasts a digital-first design that emphasizes visual storytelling through video, interactive media and other rich content formats that are a step removed from print media.

By presenting the objects featured in its sales in such a modern way, the digital catalog encourages deeper engagement with each sale across all collecting categories, Sotheby's claimed.

"Since launching in mid-April, the digital catalog has seen tremendous engagement with clients, with a 74 percent increase in overall page views at Sothebys.com and a 73 percent increase in the number of pages visited per user, when compared to the period from January to mid-April," Sotheby's claimed.

"The growth in page views and the increase in number of pages visited per user is a clear sign that visitors and clients are more engaged with the dynamic content produced for the digital catalog, and they are spending more time interacting with Sotheby's."

Sotheby's chairman and auctioneer Oliver Barker will remotely conduct the live auction format for the June 29 evening sales event from London. It will be livestreamed worldwide via real-time video streams from a command center-style studio.

Bidders will be able to place bids with Sotheby's specialists in New York, Hong Kong and London through phone or via Sotheby's proprietary online bidding platform.

"By uniting the best of the live auction format with the latest technology and all the necessary health and safety precautions, Sotheby's will transform the evening auction to both fit our current circumstances and the needs of our clients, as well as our vision for the future," Sotheby's said.

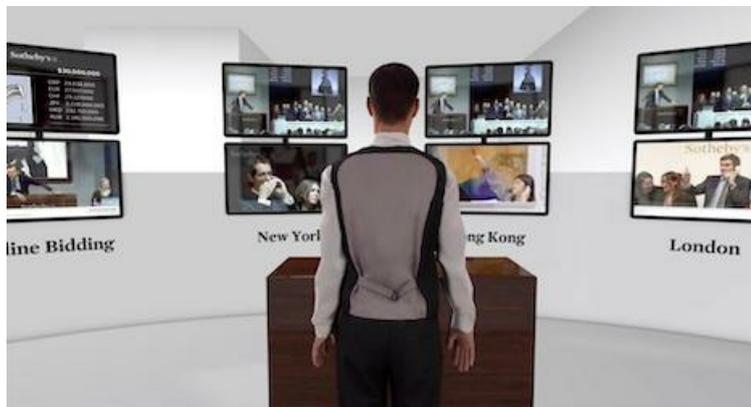
Both **Christie's** and **Sotheby's** are seeing record online sales as they have adapted their business for pandemic times, not expecting this momentum to end any time soon.

Following bumper revenue during coronavirus lockdowns, both firms have announced new summer sales and are

making it easier than ever to bid from the world over through live streaming and online bidding ([see story](#)).

"We have seen an increase in online participation and the value threshold for transacting online and client interests that culminated since March with exceptional results," said Aline Sylla-Walbaum, global managing director of luxury at Christie's, London.

"Recognizing greater client confidence, we are proud to announce the robust sale calendar for June and July to include a strategic blend of online and live auctions across all of our operating regions," she said.



*The app allows live tune-in to Sotheby's auctions. Image courtesy of Sotheby's*

### Luxury at Christie's

London-based Christie's has experienced unprecedented online engagement during the coronavirus lockdowns.

The auction house registered clients from 70 countries and new bidders are generating as much as 80 percent of sales for select events.

The company specifically noted strong sell-through rates in the luxury categories, ranging from 89 percent to 99 percent of lots sold. Overall, items earned beyond their pre-sale estimates. Thirty-five percent of buyers in the category were new to Christie's.

The firm has rescheduled Geneva, Hong Kong and New York Luxury Weeks, and is offering a wider range of live and online sales across its global bidding site with origins in Paris, Hong Kong, Geneva, New York and London.

Between June and July, Christie's will host 22 live and online luxury sales featuring more than 1,500 lots.

A wide range of collectible objects will be for sale including jewels, watches, handbags and accessories, and fine wine. Estimates for these items range from \$500 to \$4 million.

In June, the company will host three online sales leading into the 19 distinct auctions hosted in July.

Christie's first offered online auctions in 2011, when the Christie's Jewels department offered more than 900 lots from the collection of Elizabeth Taylor. The lots sold out.

Since then, the company has been growing its digital business. The pandemic is only escalating these plans.

"Over the past decade, we have developed our online offering to encompass thoughtfully curated sales across all selling categories and our client experience has been enhanced to make online buying a convenient yet reliable option," Ms. Sylla-Walbaum said.

[Please click here to see how the AR functionality works on Sotheby's app](#)

### Old Masters at Sotheby's

Sotheby's has also experienced record sales this year, as the auction house has gone online as the pandemic shuttered bricks-and-mortar sale rooms.

Spring auctions have drawn new buyers and now Sotheby's has extended its digital auction program with collections ranging from jewelry and Old Masters to Contemporary Art and design.

Live evening auctions of Contemporary Art and Modern Impressionist & Modern Art in New York will take place the evening of June 29. The evening opens with a dedicated auction of works from The Ginny Williams Collection.

Sotheby's chairman and auctioneer Oliver Barker will livestream the events around the globe from his home in London.

Bidders will be able to place bids online or via phone. Phone banks in New York, Hong Kong and London will be available live. Consumers can register in advance through the auction house's Web site and app, as well as place absentee bids through the platform.

"The most obvious way we've pivoted our sales approach to adapt to the coronavirus is through online sales. Since mid-March when live auctions were no longer an option for us, we've either transitioned existing live sales to an online format or successfully added new online sales to our sales calendar to meet the demand from collectors and needs of our clients," said Stefan Pepe, chief product and technology officer at Sotheby's, New York.

In total, Sotheby's has hosted 71 online sales for a total of \$127 million. To put that in context, that's a 500 percent increase over the same period in 2019.

"The prevailing effect of the coronavirus on our approach to online sales is that it has accelerated our existing digital strategy and approach to online sales," Mr. Pepe said.

"Meaning that we'd already recognized the need to offer to a growing number of online sales across categories, and had a very strong presence in online sales," he said. "But the pandemic caused us to radically shift our strategy, and the results have been extremely promising."

*Sotheby's digital press conference June 22, 2020*

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