

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

## Christie's, Sotheby's leverage digital to reach younger collectors

November 3, 2021



*Christie's introduced new augmented reality features to its mobile app. Image credit: Christie's*

By KATIE TAMOLA

Auction houses are increasingly stepping into the future with fun and innovative technology features to highlight their offerings.

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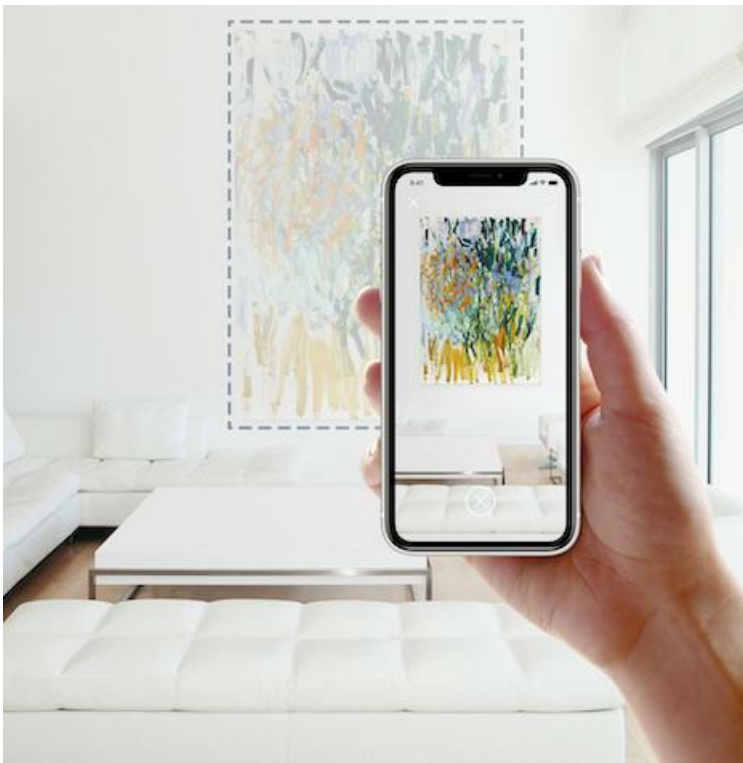
From mobile apps and NFTs to virtual try-ons, auction houses are continuously melding their traditional business models with technology. By embracing these avenues, firms such as Christie's and Sotheby's are making their auctions accessible to a younger generation of affluents.

"Art and collectibles are now available to a broader group of collectors and technology has also improved how auction houses communicate with their existing customers," said Michele Barbone, president of marketing at [ARTful Communication](#), New York.

### Traditional with a technology twist

With a world and consumer landscape that seems increasingly techno-centric, auction houses have been fostering offerings to keep up with the times for several years. For instance, Christie's launched its mobile apps more than a decade ago.

In September, the auction firm revamped its iOS app and introduced more features that are accessible without requiring users to sign in. Thanks to augmented reality, lots marked with AR icons, such as artwork or artifacts, can now be virtually placed in a buyer's home for an immersive experience.



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

Rival Sotheby's introduced similar functionality last year when it increased its app's capacity for augmented reality and other digital features.

The Sotheby's app's AR function 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 ([see story](#)).

Sotheby's has also previously dabbled in virtual reality.

In 2017, Sotheby's created a 360-degree virtual reality film, viewable on YouTube and heightened through Google Cardboard, that brought viewers within the surrealist paintings included in an auction that March ([see story](#)).



Auctioneers are introducing virtual tours to serve as auction previews. Image credit: Christie's

The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated the adoption of VR, as well as virtual auction previews and tours, as firms pivoted to digital and online sales when lockdowns began. Similarly, global art platform Artsy and online gallery ArtLogic more earnestly embraced digital tools in 2020 ([see story](#)).

In some instances, digital tools are more about consumer engagement and less about sales.

This April, Sotheby's invited consumers to feel like royalty with an Instagram AR filter that allowed users to virtually try on the magnificent tiara. Sotheby's created an interactive effect to bolster consumer excitement.

The Instagram filter was available through the handle @Sothebys and jewelry account @Sothebysjewels and allowed

users to take a photo of themselves wearing the headpiece against a 360-degree background of the Palazzina di Caccia di Stupinigi, an Italian palace ([see story](#)).

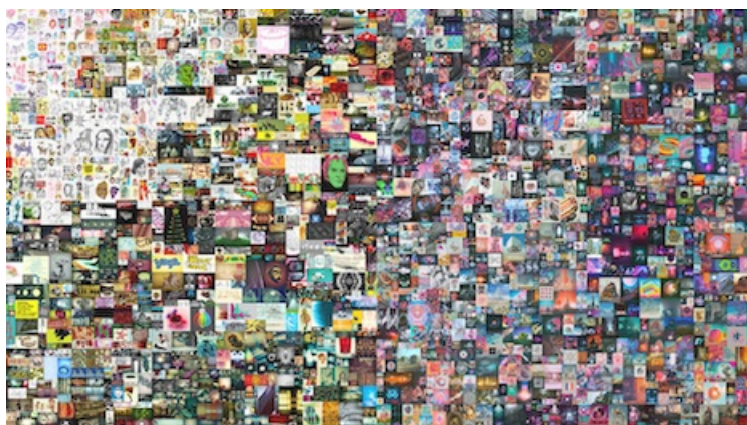


Sotheby's invited consumers to wear a virtual tiara that emulates a magnificent piece that can be traced back to one of the oldest royal families in the world. Image credit: Sotheby's

Top-tier auction houses are now expanding into the digital art space with NFT auctions.

Before the exponential growth of cryptocurrencies and NFTs, Christie's laid the groundwork when it leveraged blockchain technology to provide buyers with secure certifications of their art investments in 2018. Christie's claimed to be the first major auction house to use blockchain in this manner ([see story](#)).

In March, Christie's became the first international auction house to sell a purely digital artwork. Minted exclusively for Christie's, Beeple's *Everydays: The First 5000 Days*, ultimately sold for \$69.3 million in a single lot sale ([see story](#)).



Christie's set a new global record when it sold *The First 5,000 Days* digital artwork for \$69.3 million in March. Image credit: Christie's

By September, the auction house surpassed \$100 million in worldwide NFT sales following its first NFT auction in Asia.

Sotheby's is also experimenting in the digital art space. In June, the auction house held a sale featuring the first intelligent NFT ([see story](#)).

In October, the firm took its reverence for NFTs even further in unveiling Sotheby's Metaverse, a dedicated platform for collectors of digital art offering a specially curated selection of NFTs.

Sotheby's Metaverse is the first proprietary, custom NFT marketplace within the auction house community, and will serve as the sole destination for NFT sales at Sotheby's. As part of the launch, Sotheby's unveiled a new Twitter handle dedicated to the Metaverse platform as well as a Metaverse Discord channel ([see story](#)).

Both Christie's and Sotheby's now accept cryptocurrencies for payment, including bitcoin and ether, though policies and terms differ.

Looking to the future

Auction houses are constantly evolving how they implement technological capabilities.

During a panel at the FT Business of Luxury Summit on May 20, executives from the auction industry discussed how the industry has evolved along in recent years. Beyond experimenting with new types of assets, auction houses are

focusing on improving digital and cross-channel offerings ([see story](#)).

Embracing technology benefits auction houses, as well as buyers and sellers and the proof is in the numbers.

In 2020, Christie's set 136 records across multiple sectors including jewelry, watches, wine and handbags. With a 41 percent increase in lots sold online, digital opportunities allowed auction participation to remain strong amid the global crisis ([see story](#)).

Sotheby's more than tripled its 2019 sales in 2020 by successfully adapting to last year's challenging economic and social climate with online and livestream auctions ([see story](#)).

"By adopting new technology, auction houses are mitigating risk of revenue loss and the larger audience exposure puts them in a position to actually increase sales," Ms. Barbone said.

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