

## Market News: fishermen and forgeries

*The work of the late Cornish artist Alfred Wallis is the subject of debate, and a bag decorated by Warhol and Basquiat goes up for sale*



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A Regatta on the Grand Canal by Michele Marieschi (1710-1744)

An art dealer in Cornwall pleaded guilty last week to seven charges of fraud in which he offered and sold fake paintings purporting to be by the “primitive” self-taught artist Alfred Wallis. Wallis, a retired fisherman, was discovered by artists

Ben Nicholson and Christopher Wood in the 1920s painting ships on scraps of cardboard in St Ives. His naïve style then became an influence on modern art in Britain.

He died, impoverished, in 1942, but his paintings have sold for as much as £145,000 at auction.

Because of its childlike simplicity, Wallis’s work has often been forged, and as there is no established authority or catalogue raisonné on his work, opinions are heavily dependent on a provable history of ownership going back to the artist and on the scientific analysis of materials. But, Truro Crown Court heard, David Carter of the Hayle Gallery in Cornwall bought cheap imitations of Wallis’s work using modern materials for as little as £300 from “unreliable sources” such as eBay seller “creditcrunchmyarss”, and then offered them for sale as genuine and for as much as £65,000. An investigation was launched by Cornwall Council Trading Standards when a customer told them the “Alfred Wallis” she bought from Carter had been dismissed as a fake.

Last week Carter was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment (suspended for two years), ordered to undertake 200 hours of community service and to pay £50,000 towards the prosecution costs. An exhibition of 39 genuine Alfred Wallis paintings from the Kettle’s Yard gallery in Cambridge, which were collected by its founder, Jim Ede, who met Wallis in the 1930s when he was an assistant curator at the Tate Gallery, is currently on view at [Stuart Shave’s Modern Art](#) gallery in Shoreditch, London.

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A handbag, signed with dollar signs by Andy Warhol and trademark crown drawings by Jean-Michel Basquiat, is for sale at the [Antiques for Everyone fair](#) in Birmingham this week. Priced at £10,000, the bag belonged to Joy “Joystick” Bouldin, who worked in the New York club scene in the early Eighties and would get artists and musicians to draw on her clothes as they came in or out of a club. Bouldin sat for Basquiat several times, one painting of her, Big Joy, selling for £2.6 million at auction in 2012.

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As a follow-up to my review of the London Old Master sales last week, I am including here an observation that was edited out for lack of space that the market for 18th-century Italian view paintings is by no means in trouble just because one overpriced Bernardo Bellotto failed to sell at Christie's. At Sotheby's, another Bellotto, half the size and of Venice, sold to London dealer, Fabrizzio Moretti, for £2.6 million. At Christie's, a view of the Grand Canal in Venice by Francesco Guardi was sensibly estimated and sold after some competition for £2 million; and a view of Frascati by Vanvitelli sold to art advisor, Hugo Nathan, above estimate for £482,500. At the Masterpiece fair in London, dealers Robilant + Voena sold a view of the Bay of Naples by Antonio Joli for approximately \$2 million, while during London Art Week, two paintings of Venice by Michele Marieschi sold for over £1 million each, one through Trinity Fine Art in association with Carlo Orsi and Walter Padovani, and another through dealer, Charles Beddington.

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The last auctions of the summer season devoted to British art were held in London last week and saw a healthy 76 per cent of lots sell at Sotheby's Victorian and British Impressionist art sale and an even healthier 86 per cent at Christie's modern British art sale in South Kensington. Highlights were the record £90,000 and £167,000 given respectively for drawings by Sir John Everett Millais and Frederic Lord Leighton at Sotheby's, as well as the demand for the intense, late head and shoulder portraits of Glyn Philpot from the 1930s which continued to surprise Christie's when a painting of a coal merchant, estimated at £20,000, sold to a private collector for £278,500. In March, Philpot's Portrait of a Negro, from the Noël Coward collection was similarly estimated and sold for more than £300,000.

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Christie's announced its sales figures for the first six months of the year last night which were up by 8 per cent to £2.9 billion, when calculated in pounds sterling, but when calculated in dollars showed no growth at \$4.5 billion. Taken regionally and calculated in dollars, there was an 8 per cent growth in sales in Asia, and a 26 per cent growth in the Americas chiefly due to record Impressionist, Modern and Contemporary art sales in New York in May, but a decline of 11 per cent in the EMERI region (Europe, the Middle East, Russia and India.) Spending by Chinese buyers across all categories increased by 47 per cent. Taken overall, the figures underline the lop-sided growth in the art market maintained by the high value modern and contemporary art sales in New York. Sales of Old Masters, 19th-century European art and Russian art fell by 37 per cent.