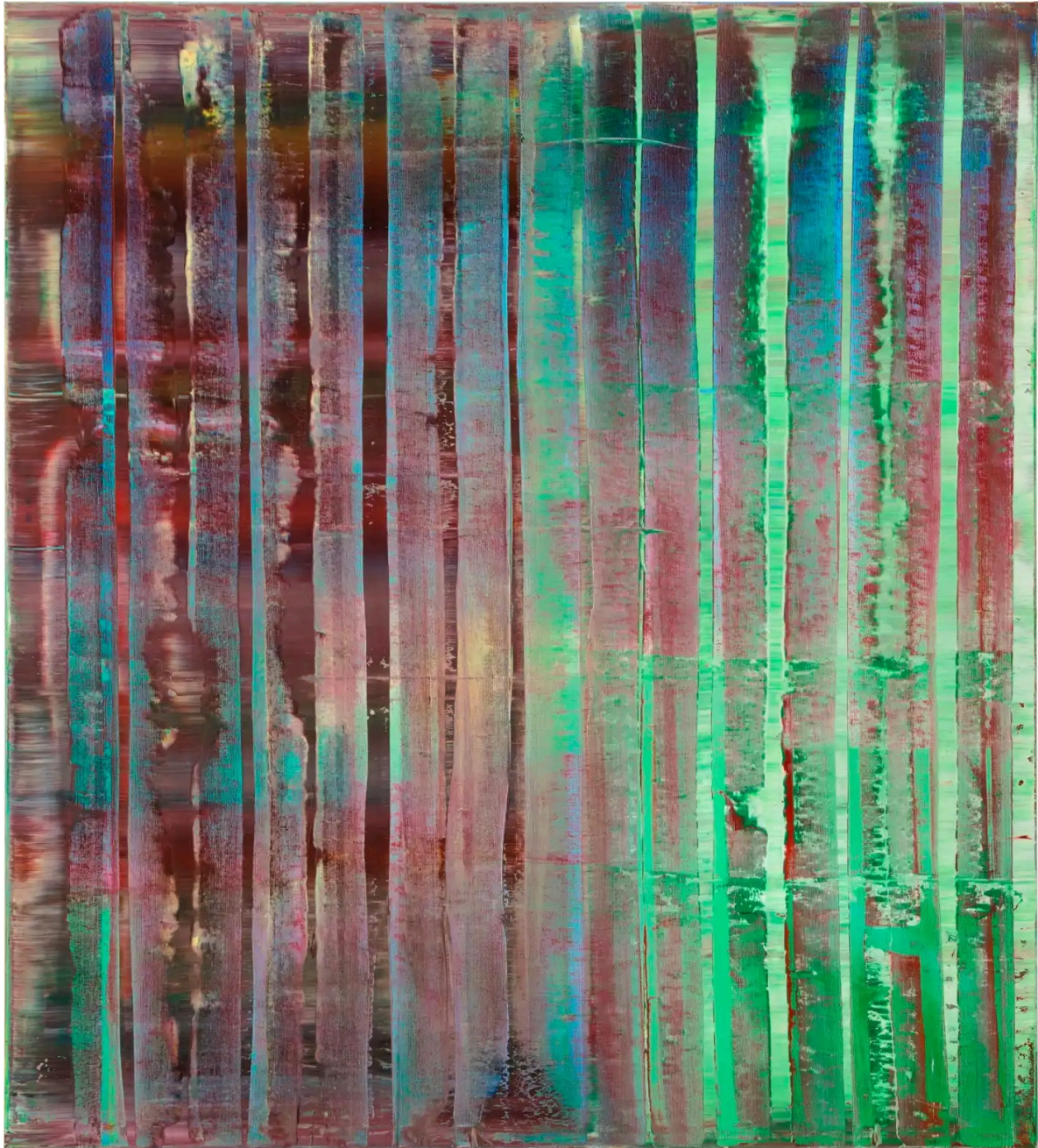


**The Art Market**

## Auction sales slide in Hong Kong

Asia stalwart Patti Wong leaves Sotheby's; Frank Auerbach on the rise; Danish hidden gem at Christie's



Gerhard Richter's 'Abstraktes Bild (774-1)' (1992) fetched HK\$75mn at auction in Hong Kong last week

**Melanie Gerlis** 6 HOURS AGO

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Six-monthly auction sales in Hong Kong have had their worst results since 2018, with this season marking the third consecutive drop, according to ArtTactic. Its analysis finds that the October-to-December evening sales made a total of HK\$1.7bn (\$220mn, before fees), a fall of 34 per cent since the equivalent sales last year and more than 50 per cent down from their peak in spring 2021. (Sotheby's has a sale outstanding on December 13, which could change the figures slightly.) Anders Petterson, managing director of ArtTactic, says there is a "supply issue", noting the reduced number of works valued above HK\$10mn (\$1.3mn) this season. The economic impact of China's zero-Covid policy to date is likely denting confidence on the demand side, he adds.

Several works were withdrawn prior to sales, including — at Christie's—Sanyu's "Potted Prunus" (1940), its November 30 cover lot, estimated at HK\$85mn-HK\$100mn. But "it's not all doom and gloom", says Jonathan Crockett, chair of Asia at Phillips. His auction house had the highest percentage of lots sold this season and topped last week with Gerhard Richter's "Abstraktes Bild (774-1)" (1992) at HK\$75mn (HK\$89mn with fees), though this was below its low estimate of HK\$80mn. Phillips also fielded the work that performed best against its estimate, unsurprisingly an "ultra-contemporary" work, defined by ArtTactic as by artists under the age of 45. "Off Duty" (2020) by the India-born Raghav Babbar was estimated at HK\$150,000-HK\$250,000 and sold for HK\$4mn (HK\$5mn with fees).



Patti Wong is leaving Sotheby's after more than 30 years

**The other news out of Hong Kong** is that the dynamic Patti Wong is leaving Sotheby's after more than 30 years, most recently as its senior international chair. The news came as a surprise to many outside of the business, though an email to staff from Charles Stewart, Sotheby's chief executive, says that the decision was "planned for some time". He notes that under her leadership, Sotheby's business in Hong Kong has grown significantly, with a year-to-date auction turnover of \$1bn in Asia.



Wong leaves at the end of this year and has not said what she will do next, having exclusively worked at Sotheby's, starting out as an intern in Hong Kong. The auction house has not mentioned a replacement but has a large team on the continent, including long-timer Nicolas Chow, chair of Sotheby's Asia, and Nathan Drahi, son of the auction house's owner Patrick Drahi and who was appointed as managing director in Asia in 2021.

In another major art-world move, artist Gerhard Richter has left Marian Goodman, who represented him for nearly 40 years, for David Zwirner, who will show him in New York in March 2023. Zwirner said Richter "has single-handedly opened up the medium to entirely new possibilities and investigations".



'Head of Gerda Boehm' (1965) by Frank Auerbach © Courtesy Piano Nobile

**It's the last chance to see an exhibition** of expressive portrait heads by Frank Auerbach, on view at Piano Nobile gallery in west London until December 16. Among their 40-plus works, dating from 1956 to 2020, is "Head of Gerda Boehm" (1965), a painting of one of Auerbach's regular models. This loaned work was sold from the collection of the musician David Bowie in 2016 and, more recently, at Sotheby's again for £4.1mn. Other works, including a 1980-81 oil of Boehm, are for sale, with prices up to about £1mn. Eight black and white photographs of the artist at work, taken by Nicola Bensley, are on view and available at £2,400 each (editions of 25).

Auerbach, now 91, was an associate of Francis Bacon and is a contemporary of Lucian Freud and David Hockney. Prices for his work have yet to reach the stratospheric heights of his British peers, though Auerbach's values are certainly on the rise. In October Sotheby's set an auction record for his 1984-85 portrait of another favourite subject — Juliet Yardley Mills, known as "JYM" — at \$5.6mn (with fees). Robert Travers, founder and chair of Piano Nobile, notes a more international interest in Auerbach and says that the gallery recently sold his large-scale "Mornington Crescent IV" (1966-67) for "substantially more" than the artist's public record.

Also in London, Auerbach features in Gagosian's sweeping *Friends and Relations* exhibition, alongside work by Freud, Bacon and Michael Andrews (until January 28 2023). A new book, *Frank Auerbach: Drawings of People*, edited by Mark Hallett and Catherine Lampert, the latter an art historian and another longtime sitter for the artist, was published in the US last week.

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'Dandelions' (c1880) by Bertha Wegmann

**Christie's is selling a painting by** Bertha Wegmann (1847-1926), an artist recently described as one of Denmark's "best-kept secrets" by curators of her solo show at the Hirschsprung Collection in Copenhagen. Like many female artists in the 19th-century (and since), Wegmann forged a successful career then fell into relative obscurity during her lifetime. The Christie's work, "Dandelions" (1880s), was the artist's contribution to the successful *Women's Exhibition*, a large-scale show held in Copenhagen in 1895 and modelled on the contemporaneous Great Exhibitions.

The subject matter, a “stubborn weed that resists all attempts at repression”, reflects some of the political struggle between the “conservative and modern camps among the women sitting on the exhibition’s committee and subcommittees”, writes the art historian Lene Bøgh Rønberg, quoted in Christie’s catalogue entry. The work is offered for between £15,000 and £25,000 (December 1-15, online only).

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**The independent curator Fatos Üstek** has replaced Clare Lilley at the helm of Frieze’s annual selling sculpture show in Regent’s Park. Lilley, who became director of Yorkshire Sculpture Park earlier this year, recently stepped down from Frieze Sculpture, which she had curated since 2012. Üstek previously directed the Liverpool Biennial, though resigned midway, with other board members in her wake, after reported disagreements with the event’s trustees. Before she left, she co-commissioned Nathan Coley’s light sculpture, “From Here” (2020), now a permanent fixture on St George’s Dock Pumping Station.

Üstek describes herself as a “concept-driven curator” and says she plans more experiential sculptures, including performance and sound pieces for the park. She would like to include more emerging and lesser-known artists and says she is investigating ways to help fund the production of their work. Frieze Sculpture will run from September 20 to October 29 2023.

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