Art For Art’s sake

This week saw the sale of a long-lost Leonardo DaVinci painting, At $450m it wasn't exactly a snip and caused gasps of excitement, no astonishment, in the auction room as phone-bidders wrestled tooth and nail down the line to get their hands on what they believe is Leonardo's last painting. Until the next one turns up I would guess.

Sorry Leo, I think your brushwork is damn good, but at $450m I just don't get it. As for the unseen, unknown and secrecy-seeking telephone bidders, well I hope they know that they've just forked out as much for a painting as would fund more than a few hospitals or even art colleges around the world. They won't of course because they rarely emerge from their bomb proof, fire proof, panic room where they store their acquired masterpieces and where they sit and stare at their conquests and.... well that's about it really.

The art world never ceases to amaze me. Not because I'm an art lover, far from it. Drag me kicking and screaming to an art gallery full of 'supposed' masterpieces, usually on loan from some far-flung overseas museum set up by a generous benefactor who themselves is a collector, and I would rather make for the in-house cafe while you walk around open-mouthed at the displays on show.  It's not that I don't like art or paintings as such, just that my preference is for much more modest and meaningful works by local artists near me, such as Jolomo or Jack Vettriano.

I suppose I shouldn't be surprised. Art lovers are a breed of their own. They see what they say lies behind the paintwork, marvel at the brushstrokes and the style of the master, the materials used and god only knows what else. Me, I just see a nice portrait, landscape, sea- view or perhaps a city scene I know recreated on canvas. Anything else is just, well just in the heads of a fairly small and yet to be understood band of art experts. I don't know who these people are or where they hang out. I have never been in the company of anyone who has shown the remotest speck of interest in this world of make-believe, and that says it all.

I can only assume that the investment potential of these masterpieces is a big draw. All that profit and you don't even have to set up a company in some sun-drenched tax haven and transfer the proceeds through several other sun-drenched tax havens and finally back to the UK. Or do you?  Hence the need for a telephone call and the secrecy?  Someone hack those auction phone records now please!

Tom Kelly

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