Priceless: The Value of the Invaluable (London, 14 - 15 Jul 16)

London, Christie's, Jul 14–15, 2016
Deadline: Dec 7, 2015

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Session at the 2016 Conference: Creating Markets, Collecting Art - Celebrating 250 years of Christie's

PRICELESS: THE VALUE OF THE INVALUABLE

Priceless is the invaluable, the object that is beyond any price. Priceless is, paradoxically, also the very costly object, which more than any other object is defined by its price. In a sense, therefore, the priceless or the invaluable seems to equal the pricy or the valuable.

Ever since Pierre Bourdieu's seminal analysis of the 'field of cultural production', the denial of art's commercial dimension that lies at the heart of the cultural field's auto-rhetoric has been explored by many scholars of the art market. Their studies have demonstrated that the notion of pricelessness, i.e. the (alleged) impossibility to translate a work of art's artistic merits to commercial value, is central to the paradox of many market strategies and, perhaps, even to the market itself. Indeed the construction, by the art market's various agents, of the artistic sphere as autonomous and beyond economic value, whence commerce is radically banished, typically results in precisely the opposite: the creation of commercial value. Yet the strategies to create commercial value by means of its denial are many and diverse: different actors (artists, dealers and other middlemen, curators, auctioneers, collectors, critics) engage in the discourse of 'the valuable invaluable' in many different ways and media (journals, newspapers, catalogues, other publications, ego documents, personal exchanges, exhibition displays, social rituals, the artistic object itself) and in many different temporal and geographical contexts. Other strategies and contexts are at odds with the logic of 'the valuable invaluable', thus clearly showing that this logic is a cultural construction which is both time- and site-specific. This session aims to bring together case studies from a wide array of different temporal, geographical and artistic contexts, in order to explore the myriad ways in which the notion of the invaluable has been, and is, construed and translated to commercial value, as well as case studies of alternative or subdominant discourses and strategies that run counter to this (il)logic.

Please send your proposal to Jan Dirk Baetens (J.Baetens@let.ru.nl) and/or Helleke van den Braber (h.v.d.braber@let.ru.nl) by 7 December 2015.

Papers should be 20-25 minutes in length and there will be 3-4 in each session, with time for discussion. Proposals (250 words) should be accompanied by a brief biography.

Reference:

CFP: Priceless: The Value of the Invaluable (London, 14 - 15 Jul 16). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 19, 2015 (accessed Nov 12, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/11259>.