

Ahead of the

Curve

BY BOBBIE LEIGH

Prominent dealers divulge where they see their markets heading, which genres appear to be making breakthroughs and which artists should be on your wish lists.

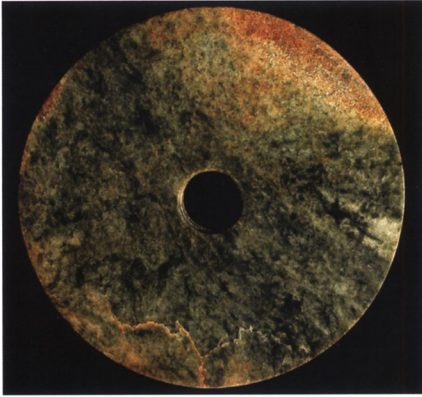
Christine McHorse, "Untitled," 2006, micaceous clay.

FACING: Nathan Slate Joseph, "Bee Bop," 2000, pigment on galvanized steel.

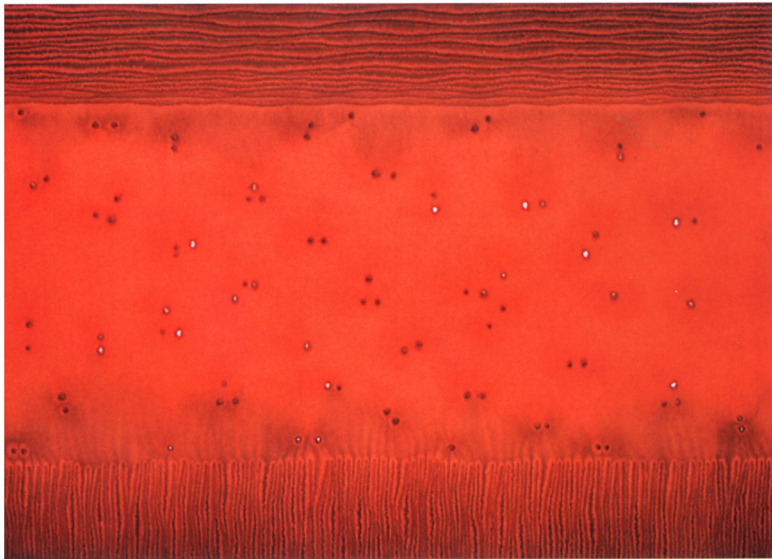
Last June, Gustav Klimt's 1907 "Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer" was sold for \$135 million to cosmetics magnate Ronald Lauder, a record price for any painting. There was a time you couldn't give a Klimt work away. At Sotheby's highly successful May sale of contemporary art, Willem de Kooning's 1975 "Untitled XVI" broke records when it sold for \$15,696,000—far surpassing its pre-sale estimate of \$6.5 million to \$8.5 million. Just a decade ago, you could buy a Roy Lichtenstein work for less than six figures. Last May at the Sotheby's sale, his iconic pop painting "Sinking Sun," 1964, fetched \$15,696,000. [Editor's note: Yes, the same price as the de Kooning.]

Such headline-grabbing figures have collectors anticipating who will be the next Klimt, de Kooning or Lichtenstein. *Art & Antiques* polled specialists to identify market "sleepers"—exciting voices not yet heard or worthy works still waiting for greater recognition.

At auctions and in galleries, contemporary Chinese art is setting record prices. In discussing this rapidly expanding market, where price levels have tripled in the last 18 months, Michael Goedhuis, owner of Goedhuis Contemporary in New York, predicts that the market is going to become expensive, fueled by the great wealth of a handful of ambitious and competitive Chinese buyers. "The whole price level will be driven up by the wealth in China," he says, explaining that this explosive growth reflects a cultural renaissance similar to the early years of the 20th century. "The Chinese artists are endeavoring to create a new language—not unlike Cézanne or Debussy—that expresses what is going on in this



Bi disk, Neolithic period, Liangzhu culture, 3400-2200 B.C., brown and green jade. Faris McReynolds, "The Intruders" (right), 2006, oil on canvas. Adelaide Paul, "Orso-madre" (below, right), 2006, mixed media and porcelain. Sohan Qadri, "Fall" (below), 2004, ink and dye on paper.



Nathan Slate Joseph, "Bee Bop," 2000, pigment on galvanized steel.

convulsed new society that is China in the 21st century." Despite the fact that "everybody wants to collect Chinese contemporary art," Goedhuis mentions three artists who have not received their full due: Gu Gan, Wang Dongling and Yang Jiechang. Their visually complex works range roughly from \$20,000–\$80,000. Gu and Wang, both of whom live in China, are primarily painters who blend audacious calligraphic strokes with abstract imagery, while Paris-based Yang works mostly in oil painting, calligraphy and installation.

Several dealers suggest that Old Master paintings are among the most undervalued works in the art market today. (For more on this topic, see *Art & Antiques*, June 2006, page 52.) "Great Baroque works, beautifully painted, illustrating a level of craftsmanship and skill not usually found in contemporary works, are still available," says Gregory Hedberg, director of European art at Hirschl & Adler Galleries in New York. "Take off the old gilt frames, replace them with modern ones and they will look fantastic in a downtown loft," he says, citing in particular the works of Sir Peter Lely (1618–80), a Dutch-born English Baroque-era painter of primarily mythological scenes and portraits set in landscapes. Another appealing Old Master, according to Hedberg, is Allan Ramsay (1713–84), who was appointed portrait painter to George III much to the consternation of his main rivals Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough. These works tend to command around \$10,000 to \$30,000. "New" Old Masters (for lack of a better label) are equally undervalued, notes Hedberg. In this category he places contemporary painters Jacob Collins, Kate Lehman and Graydon Parrish. Expect prices for this group to range from about \$5,000 to \$40,000.

Mary Kahlenberg, owner of Tai Gallery in Santa Fe, suggests that the whole field of textiles is undervalued for the moment. From Kahlenberg's perspective, textile collecting is rapidly changing due to carbon dating. "It has made people realize they can be much more confident about buying vintage textiles since it is now possible to determine age," she says. Overlooked textiles that Kahlenberg considers of excellent value are from Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos and Cambodia. "You can buy an extraordinary piece, perhaps silk embroidered with gold, for as little as \$1,000," she says. "Really good pieces, perhaps from the 18th century, depending on

condition might start at around \$3,000."

Another field of collecting where scientific testing has made an impact is Neolithic jade, according to Spencer Throckmorton, owner of Throckmorton Fine Art in New York. "The best sleeper is Chinese jade—as now we have scientific testing so there is reliability and confidence restored," he says. Among Throckmorton's "great buys" are jade Bi disks (representing heaven) and jade Tsung tubes (representing earth). In general, they date from late Neolithic to the early Bronze Age (2200–1600 B.C.) and range from \$2,000 to \$20,000 for the Bi and \$5,000 to \$100,000 for the Tsung.

"I have observed broadening market support for late 19th- and early 20th-century European Arts and Crafts furniture," says John Levitties, director of John Alexander Ltd. in Philadelphia. Levitties is still able to obtain rarities from some of the most important architects and designers in the domestic revival movement, particularly from many of the pioneering figures who were part of William Morris' inner circle. Currently, he has a strong collection of Cotswold crafts furniture, including a number of chests and cabinets by seminal figure Ernest Gimson (1864–1919), priced from \$18,000. An extremely rare sideboard by English architect and designer Philip Webb (1831–1915) is generally considered a "huge bargain" at \$65,000.

When it comes to fine silver, forget about price and buy what you respond to, suggests David Firestone, president of Firestone and Parson Inc. in Boston. For those interested in traditional pieces, "some very good things are now selling at prices similar to 25 years ago," he says, citing Queen Anne, George I and George II silver. "These would be worthwhile additions to a collection."

Sundaram Tagore, director of the Sundaram Tagore Gallery in New York, admires the abstract expressionist sculptures of New York artist Nathan Slate Joseph, whom he considers less well known than he should be. Joseph's powerful wall sculptures in the manner of John Chamberlain or Frank Stella are the result of a series of processes that result in extraordinary color and patination. His works sell in the range of \$40,000 to \$60,000. Another artist Tagore admires is Sohan Qadri, a Sikh painter who stopped using oil on canvas because the paint and turpentine odors interfered with his meditation. Now working with painted paper ritually immersed in ink and dye and then

serrated, Qadri has "developed a new methodology of painting beautiful spiritual work where the artist is in a calm introspective state," says Tagore. Qadri's work starts at about \$15,000.

"Jimmy Baker is a young artist showing great promise, so his prices are low, but they won't be for long," says Bennett Roberts, co-owner of Roberts & Tilton Gallery in Los Angeles. Baker's themes tend to include youth culture, war and over-consumption. At present, his work is in the \$2,000 to \$10,000 range. Another contemporary artist to watch, according to Roberts, is Faris McReynolds, who works in oil on canvas and in watercolors. "His imagery is based on the history of film, and his work has a lot to do with motion, speed and happiness," Roberts explains. McReynolds' works run from about \$1,500 for a watercolor to about \$15,000 for a large canvas painting.

According to Garth Clark, New York dealer and pre-eminent authority on ceramic art, "the genie is out of the clay lamp." Ceramic shows are everywhere—from Betty Woodman at the Met to Ken Price at Matthew Marks Gallery. Yet Clark still predicts recognition for the "extraordinary talent" of Adelaide Paul, whose works start at \$800. He also favors Christine McHorse, who is selling to art collectors who don't usually collect Santa Fe material. Her prices are \$7,500 to \$18,000, but Clark argues she is heading toward major recognition and much higher prices.

Adam Cohen at Gagolian Gallery in New York keeps his focus on mid-career artists who have had some success with museum and gallery shows, but still are not major names. Cohen thinks the work of Franz West, already on his way to achieving wider recognition, will eventually realize top prices. "He's among the people who should be looked at," says Cohen. West's work is interdisciplinary—combining sculpture, collage and painting—and sells for roughly \$150,000. "In my mind, Tom Friedman is a million-dollar artist," says Cohen, who is intrigued by conceptual work such as Friedman's "Cursed Space." Friedman has the potential to be another Jeff Koons, according to Cohen. Currently his pieces range from \$2,500 to about \$450,000 for a major work.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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