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**Dave Dallas**  
Old Master Specialist

## A REVIEW OF THE DECEMBER OLD MASTER SALES IN LONDON

December is an exciting month, not just because Christmas is coming, it is also the last hurrah for the Old Master Painting season in London. Sotheby's had the better pictures and therefore, the better of the results. Their Day Sale (lesser fry) at a total of £3.34M was roughly three times the value of Christie's at £1.185M. Furthermore, Christie's had a large total of lots unsold on the day, 40 out of 104 lots.

The Evening Sale (the top lots) followed a similar pattern with Sotheby's sale to talling £32.72M, with Christie's coming in at a more modest £13.14M. In fact, Sotheby's top lot, Titian's 'Venus and Adonis', at £11.1M made almost as much, on its own, as Christie's whole sale.



Floris van Dijck



Titian's 'Venus and Adonis'

They had a beautiful still life by the Haarlem painter Floris van Dijck, very similar in composition to the painting in the Rijksmuseum and one of my favourite pictures in that collection. This made £2.09M against a pre-sale estimate of £600,000-£800,000.

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Also estimated at £600,000 - £800,000 was a dramatic seascape by Ivan Konstantinov Aivazovsky titled 'The Wrath of the Seas'. I was particularly interested to see what happened to this painting, by a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russian artist, bearing in mind what is going on in Ukraine. On the day it made a very healthy £1.729M, proving that Aivazovsky has an international reputation and is not just for local consumption!



The Wrath of the Seas by Ivan Konstantinov Aivazovsky

During the view at Christie's, I was intrigued to speculate what would happen to two portraits, in particular. The first was a portrait of Erasmus by Hans Holbein the Younger, court painter to Henry VIII and the second was, to my mind, a very beautiful portrait of Henrietta Maria, by Sir Anthony van Dyck, court painter to Charles I.



Erasmus by Hans Holbein the Younger



Henrietta Maria by Sir Anthony van Dyck

In the event, they both disappointed with the Holbein making £1.12M against an estimate of £1-1.5M and the Van Dyck limping away at £2.44M against an estimate of £2-4M. The highest price was £2.92M (estimate £2-3M) for 'Reading Party' by the French Rococo artist Jean Francois de Troy.



Reading Party by Jean Francois de Troy

These sales told us nothing new about taste for Old Masters, but they did reinforce what I said in July and that is that there is keen interest in paintings by good hands, fresh to the market and in good state. Selling lesser things, which have been seen before, is a struggle.

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