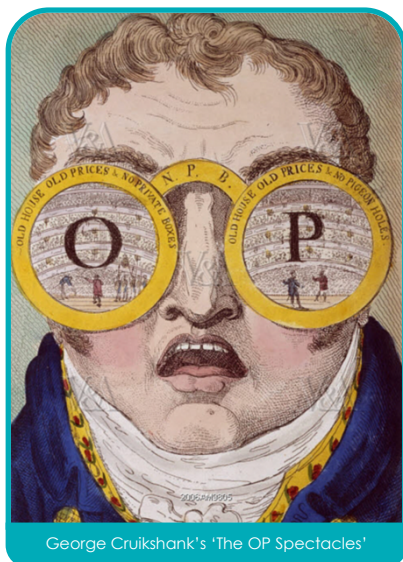




Stephanie Connell
Senior Valuer & Collectibles
Specialist

The Eyes Have It – With Eye-Catching Prices!



**John Lennon,
Gandhi,
Malcolm X,
Iris Apfel and
Benjamin
Franklin –
what do they
all have in
common?
Glasses!**

Spectacles are
so associated
with these
historical figures;

it may be the first thing used to describe
their appearance. The same can be said
of fictional characters – from Harry Potter to
Clark Kent glasses are a defining feature.

Interestingly, eyeglasses are documented
as having been used as early as the late
13th century. By the 20th century, their
connection with impairment and use by
academics and learned individuals may
have resulted in what one might call 'geek
chic'.



BONHAMS, 31st January 2025, Americana Week, Lot 5 – A late 19th century trade sign –
Sold for \$16,640 [Insurance replacement £25,000]

In the world of memorabilia, instantly
recognisable glasses are highly sought
after by collectors – certain frame shapes
immediately evoking renowned figures.
As one would anticipate, provenance
is a key factor in determining value. The
closer the association with a star (or the
production) the higher the prices. In recent
years, sales from the estates or collections
of famously bespectacled individuals have
allow buyers the opportunity to purchase
pieces guaranteed to be genuine.

Earlier this year the sale of *Barry Humphries:
The Personal Collection* was held at
Christie's, and clearly illustrated this point.
The sale included several pairs of glasses
worn by Humphries as his most famous
comic character 'Dame Edna Everage'.



Christie's, 13th February 2025, Barry Humphries: The Personal Collection, Lot 24 – A pair of
yellow lacquered 'possum' spectacles by Anglo American Eyewear – Sold for £37,860

The glasses were offered individually
with an estimate of £1,000 – 1,500 each.
Spectacles were a crucial part of the
iconic characters costume - therefore
these unusual designs generated enormous
interest.



Christies, 13th February 2025, Barry Humphries: The Personal Collection, Lot 233 – A pair of glittered star and diamante blue lacquered spectacles by David – Sold for £30,240

It can be difficult to predict the value of such pieces, where rarity, excellent provenance, and a strong fan base combine. The highest priced paid was for the yellow lacquered 'possum' glasses. Based on the characters catchphrase the 'eye-catching' eyewear sold for £37,800! (insurance replacement in the region of £55,000). While a glittered-star and diamante pair by David Cox also sold for just over £30,000 (insurance region of £45,000).



Hanson's Auctioneers, 10th – 11th January 2025, The Eric Morecambe Collection, Lot 645 – a pair of Metzler spectacles – sold for £20,000 hammer

Another comedy great's glasses were also sold this year. In January 2025 auctioneers Hanson's offered the collection of the late British comedian Eric Morecambe. The highest price achieved during the two-day 816 lot auction was for a pair of Eric's signature glasses (offered together with a pipe). The pre-sale estimate of £2,000 – 4,000 was fair in light of the provenance. However, one serious fan was determined to purchase the glasses. They reached a hammer price of £20,000 (insurance value anticipate £40,000).

Post-sale it was revealed that fellow celebrity glasses wearer Robbie Williams had been the buyer. It is common for serious memorabilia collectors to have an emotional reaction when acquiring an important personal piece. Williams commented he had shed 'happy, childlike tears' upon successfully purchasing the lot.

When Sir Michael Caine offered his personal collection at Bonhams in 2022, one of the highest prices amongst the memorabilia was for a lot described as 'a pair of Sir



Bonhams, 2nd March 2022, Sir Michael Caine Auction, Lot 183 – Sold for £16,500 inc BP

Michael Caine's iconic spectacles'. Manufactured by Rodenstock, similar vintage pairs can be purchased in a retail environment for under £200. However, as with the previous pairs discussed the importance of the provenance resulted in a final total of £16,500 (Insurance price £25,000).



Sotheby's, 1st October 2020, The Beatles Auction, Lot 38 – John Lennon | Pair of round Windsor spectacles, Sold for £44,100

There have been a few instances in recent years where glasses worn by John Lennon have gone under the hammer. In 2020 Sotheby's held an auction dedicated to The Beatles. And what was the highest price achieved during the auction? As one may guess it was for a pair of these frames. With provenance suggesting they had been given by Lennon to his housekeeper in 1965, they were believed possibly the first pair of round frames he owned. With an estimate of £30,000 – 40,000, they sold for £44,100. If you are lucky enough to own a pair of John Lennon glasses expect to insure them for a minimum of £70,000.

These glasses were of a similar design to a pair which hold the world record for a pair of glasses at auction. In August 2020 East Bristol Auctions offered a pair of gold-plated round spectacles which by repute had belonged to Mahatma Gandhi.

According to information provided by the vendor they had been gifted to their uncle in South Africa c. 1920 – 1930. Both Gandhi's historical importance and the iconic nature of the piece led to a pre-sale assessment of £10,000 – 15,000. This time they achieved a hammer price of £260,000 (total selling price of £316,000, insurance replacement £450,000 region). Sunglasses and glasses relating to Gandhi have appeared on the open market on a few occasions, if looking to invest anticipate over £10,000 for any pair.



East Bristol Auctions, 21st August 2020, Military, History & Classic Cars, Lot 600 – Sold for £260,000 hammer



Jacques Marie Mage 'Deaver' limited edition, RRP \$2,395

In 2025, glasses are highly fashionable, regularly worn on the red carpet by A-list actors such as Pedro Pascal, Jonathan Bailey, and Robert Downey Jr. Designer brands such as Jacques Marie Mage, Tom Ford, Cutler & Gross and Cartier are currently offering collections of ultra-luxe frames, possibly the star worn collectables of the future.

If you are looking to start collecting, the market is ever changing but new or previously unknown examples appear regularly. Retaining the provenance is essential and will dictate any future change in value.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephanie Connell

Stephanie is an experienced general valuer. She began her career as a Valuer & Auctioneer in the northwest of England. More recently she worked as an Auctioneer & Valuer in the South East. Her specialist areas include 20th century design, luxury accessories, vintage fashion, commercial art, sporting memorabilia, music and film memorabilia, historic and collector's items.