

Van Sabben in Hoorn, The Worldwide Walhalla of Posters

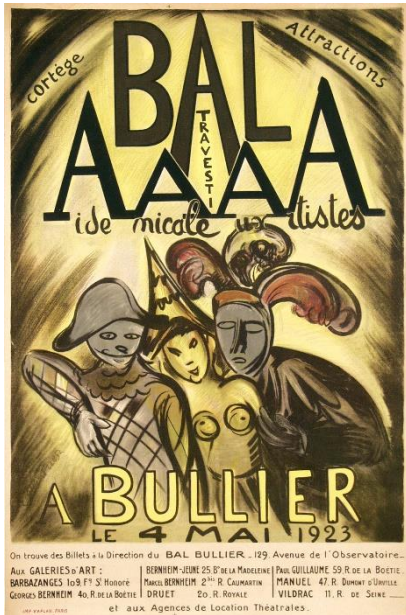
Van Sabben is the only auction house in the Netherlands that deals exclusively in posters, mainly advertising posters. Customers from all over the world find their treasures in the auctions in the historic center of Hoorn via online bidding.

Marc van den Eerenbeemt 29 oktober 2023

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Owner and director Udo Boersma of Van Sabben Poster Auctions is working with posters that will be offered in the next auction. Photo Raymond Rutting / de Volkskrant



'Take this poster from a benefit evening in Paris. Exactly one hundred years old! A festive evening used to raise money for artists in need. Look, the image is signed at the bottom left by the maker, painter and fauvist Othon Friesz.' Udo Boersma (64), owner of Van Sabben Poster Auctions, runs his hands affectionately over the paper. He gives the quality of the poster an A-. That minus is for the minor discoloration of the paper, but that's all! No tears, no folds, no pin holes. And the poster ticks all the right boxes; aesthetics, history and an interesting story. He estimates the result of the poster at the

forthcoming auction: somewhere between 600 and 1,200 euros.

In the large room of his auction house, Boersma is busy unpacking packages full of consignments, photographing the offerings and compiling his catalogue. Auctioning not only involves looking closely, assessing and pricing, but also physical labor. The tables will soon be put aside for the next auction. Then the former cheese factory on the Appelsteeg in Hoorn becomes an international hub for lovers of posters.

Almost all bids originate from elsewhere via absentee bids or telephone, and especially via the internet. Three quarters of the posters go abroad, especially to the many collectors in The United States and Japan. Prices range from a few tens of euros to hundreds and sometimes thousands of euros. Boersma still thinks that these are incredibly low prices. You're able to have a masterpiece on your wall for very little money. But yes, powerful imagery or not, the poster is still the neglected child of the art world.

210 thousand euros

Of course there is that big hit from 2014. Then an extremely rare art deco poster from 1925 was sold in Hoorn for 210 thousand euros, excluding buyers premium of 20 percent. A world record for this artist. The creator of the striking poster for the Paris evening newspaper l'Intransigeant was the famous French graphic artist Adolphe-Mouron Cassandre, also known for his posters for the Holland-America Line. The buyer: an American privat collector.

This is how European, but also Dutch masterpieces disappear to other continents. Such as Jan Toorop's poster for the *Delftsche Slaolie* (Delfts salad oil) from 1893, 'the Night Watch of Dutch posters', says Boersma. Because of that striking image, the Art Nouveau art movement in The Netherlands was nicknamed the 'salad oil style'. Of course, Boersma is happy to support institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York.

Restaurant visit

The specialized auction house was founded in 1991 by Piet van Sabben (84). Boersma, a teacher for expat children abroad, was a regular customer as an enthusiast. In 1998 he and Van Sabben had a conversation in which Boersma couldn't help but blurt out: "Damn it Piet, such a fun business you have." To which he replied: "Well, it's for sale."

The purchase price was 'several tons in guilders', Boersma reluctantly admits. But it is not a gold mine, he swears. His approximately ten employees are all volunteers. Like the art history student, Jules, who makes the descriptions for the posters. And his Boersma's wife and children and friends who assist during the auction. Only the experienced auctioneer Willem de Winter receives compensation. The rest will be treated to a good restaurant meal after the auction.

Approximately 65 percent of the offered lots is sold at the two or three auctions per year, for a total of approximately 750 thousand euros.

People can bid from a minimum price set by Boersma. Both the consignor and the buyer pay 20 percent of the hammer price as compensation for the sale. Of the unsold lots, another 10 to 15 percent are sold in the aftersales, to the first to offer the starting price.

The provider of the digital auction system, the American site Invaluable, receives 5 percent of the proceeds. And then there are the costs of his paper catalogue, about 15 thousand euros per auction. Boersma is one of the last with a integral illustrated paper edition. The other auction firms stick to a digital version exclusively, Boersma does both. 'There are people who think I'm crazy, but the catalogue is my pride and joy. It would hurt me as a man of paper to stop making it.'

Propaganda

Van Sabben Poster Auctions also faces competition from regular auction houses, but mainly for posters in the top categories. 'Otherwise, they do



ORGANISATIONS-KOMITEE FÜR DIE IV. OLYMPISCHEN WINTERSPIELE 1936 GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN / BAYERN



not find the proceeds interesting enough.' He also feels the pressure from digital auction houses such as Catawiki, where the objects do not first end up at the auction house, but are sent directly from seller to buyer after sale. 'How can one judge a work for authenticity and quality if you have not had it in your hands? How can you call yourself a specialist if you have not felt, smelled or embraced the poster yourself?'

In this way, countless posters pass through this auction house. Maritime and aviation are classic collecting categories, just like tourism, winter sports and racing. For the propaganda section, Boersma points to a poster on the wall, a propaganda-style advertisement for the 1936 Winter Olympics in Nazi Germany. A work by Ludwig Hohlwein, 'a designer on the wrong side of history but a fantastic one at that'.

In the other corner of the room he is enthusiastic about a design by the artist Koos Hooykaas, a poster for the 'Tel-machine' (the calculator), a piece by the Utrecht Student Theater Association in 1928. Starting price at the auction: 3,000 euros. 'From a graphic point of view alone, this is a striking and exciting poster. Did

you know that he also designed the decor? There is so much to say about posters.'