

What Recession? Auction Records of 1990

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The weak economy notwithstanding, last year antiques and collectibles buffs paid the highest prices ever for the rarest objects auctioned. While sales slowed at auctions, fairs and antiques shops, bidders flocked to those auctions where uncommon items were offered, some with choice pedigrees. Most of the records were topped in sales held during the first half of the year, before the worldwide economy worsened and war threatened in the Middle East.

Herve Aaron, who heads Didier Aaron's New York gallery, said he was certain that prices would continue to escalate.



\$1,700,000 An 18th-century red violin by Antonio Stradivari set a record for a musical instrument last year. The family of Felix Mendelssohn once owned it. (Christie's)



\$334,620 The Fender Stratocaster that Jimi Hendrix played at the Woodstock Festival in 1969 was bought by Red Ronnie, an Italian actor. (Sotheby's)

"Everything top quality will continue to soar in value," Mr. Aaron said. "Things of lesser quality will maintain their prices or decline about 20 percent."

Diana D. Brooks, president of Sotheby's North America, said: "Buying will continue in collecting areas where there has been the least amount of speculation, where there is a strong collector base and where the people buying are from strong economies -- France, Germany, Spain and Japan."

Musical instruments made headlines several times in the London sales. On April 25 at Sotheby's, one of Jimi Hendrix's guitars, a white 1968 Fender Stratocaster that the rock star used at Woodstock in 1969, became the most expensive guitar ever sold at auction. It was sold for \$334,620 to Red Ronnie, an Italian actor.

On Nov. 21, a red violin by Antonio Stradivari from 1720 brought \$1.7 million at Christie's, a record at auction for a musical instrument. It was bought by an American woman whom the auction house described as "a young professional violinist." The violin was owned from the late 19th century until the 1950's by members of the Mendelssohn banking family of Berlin, descendants of the composer Felix Mendelssohn.