

# AI Art at Christie's Sells for \$432,500

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**By Gabe Cohn**

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Last Friday, a portrait produced by artificial intelligence was hanging at Christie's New York opposite an Andy Warhol print and beside a bronze work by Roy Lichtenstein. On Thursday, it sold for well over double the price realized by both those pieces combined.

“Edmond de Belamy, from La Famille de Belamy” sold for \$432,500 including fees, over 40 times Christie's initial estimate of \$7,000-\$10,000. The buyer was an anonymous phone bidder.

The bidding late this morning lasted just under seven minutes, during which the buyer competed against an online bidder in France, two other phone bidders and one person in the room in New York. When the hammer came down, the bids had reached \$350,000, the final price before fees.

The distorted portrait, by the French art collective Obvious, was marketed by Christie's as the first portrait generated by an algorithm to come up for auction.

“It is an exciting moment,” Obvious said in a statement. “Our hope is that the spotlight on this sale will bring forward the amazing work that our predecessors and colleagues have been producing.”

The auction was inspired by a sale earlier this year, in which the French collector Nicolas Laugero Lasserre bought a portrait directly from the collective for about 10,000 euros, or about \$11,400.

The Andy Warhol print that hung across from the portrait last week sold for \$75,000; the Roy Lichtenstein work sold for \$87,500. Both prices include fees. Those two pieces were part of the same sale as “Edmond de Belamy, from La Famille de Belamy.” (The sale included 363 lots.)

Auctioning the work seemed to be a test by Christie’s of the traditional art market’s interest in AI art. But the strongest response after the announcement of the auction came from other artists who work with AI, many of whom have said that the portrait is unoriginal. Generative Adversarial Networks, or GANs, the technology used to create the portrait, have been used in art since around 2015, including by the artists Mario Klingemann, Anna Ridler and Robbie Barrat. Obvious first started gaining attention earlier this year.

Much discussion over the past few days has centered on Mr. Barrat, an artist who said that code he had written and shared online was used in the production of “Edmond de Belamy, from La Famille de Belamy.” Obvious told the technology website The Verge on Tuesday that it did use Mr. Barrat’s code, but modified it.

“We would like to thank the AI community, especially to those who have been pioneering the use of this new technology, including Ian Goodfellow, the creator of the GAN algorithm,” Obvious said in its statement today. “And artist Robbie Barrat, who has been a great influence for us.”