



AMY CAPPELLAZZO

Deputy Chairman, Christie's International

79

HER DEAL-
MAKING STYLE
IS AS REFINED
AS HER EYE:
"I DON'T
REALLY CON-
VERT PEOPLE
TO CONTEMPO-
RARY ART.
IT'S A SELF-
SELECTING
GROUP."

ONE OCCUPATIONAL hazard of being an expert on contemporary art is being unable to enjoy a gallery without mentally pricing the room. "When I'm in a museum," says Amy Cappellazzo, "I have to shut off that part of my brain and make sure I'm in the proper pleasure engagement where I'm just enjoying the objects." She doesn't leave it off for long. The former curator and art adviser—she helped establish the annual collector frenzy that is Art Basel Miami Beach—joined Christie's in 2001 and has led the auction house in selling \$2.5 billion worth of postwar art in New York alone, including historic sales in 2004 and 2007 that yielded a combined half a billion dollars.

On a spring afternoon at the company's Rockefeller Center headquarters, Cappellazzo, 42, gives a presale gallery tour of the late writer Michael Crichton's collection. She introduces pieces the way a sommelier might a rare wine. Standing before a painting by American postmodernist Mark Tansey, she points out a female silhouette and says, "This is going to make it or ruin it for you, but that's Lizzie Grubman," referring to the notorious publicist. She then effortlessly weaves in the prominent Egyptian imagery. "It's like Tansey to make a grand epic out of something from history like the Sphinx and combine it with something incredibly pedestrian like a socialite crashing her Mercedes into a crowd at a Long Island club."

Cappellazzo breezes through the Claes Olden-

burgs and mentions that Crichton himself commissioned the flesh-colored alphabet-as-Good-Humor-bar sculpture. Next she saunters over to Robert Rauschenberg's *Studio Painting*—"my favorite thing in the show." She puts it in context: "It is exactly the moment abstract expressionism gives way and caves in to pop. That's the defining moment of art, historically." Seconds later, she's onto the Jasper Johns-Crichton relationship and points to the wall-size photo of the two. "The *Flag* in the collection was acquired directly from Jasper in 1973, and in 1977, he asked Crichton to author his Whitney catalog for its major survey exhibition."

And the price of this room? Some \$60 million, based on the presale estimates.

Cappellazzo's deal-making style is as refined as her eye. "People are always saying, 'You should meet so-and-so, he just sold his company,'" she says. "I don't really convert people to contemporary art. It's a self-selecting group, so if they like

contemporary art or are already collecting or are curious about it, I'm happy to meet with them. But if they are just generically wealthy, I don't sell them into it any more than I can get them interested in horses or boats or Christianity."

That doesn't mean, of course, that she's not strategic about relationship building. She recently did a private sale of a "very small piece to a very big person." Financially, the below-\$100,000 deal was of little consequence, she says: "It was about the potential to do other things."

But the business of art, she says, isn't all about money. At least not for her. "If I didn't have moments where I get this incredible rush of feeling—which I know is a mad, irrational relationship to an object—if I didn't have those very frequently, I'd probably trade derivatives on Wall Street." —Mark Borden