

Jane Whitaker
Summer 2013
Christie's Inc.

This summer, I experienced an enriching **internship** with Christie's in New York City. Christie's is an art auction house based in London. They hold over 450 sales a year in over 80 categories of art. These categories include fine art, decorative art, furniture, jewelry, watches, wine, photographs, silver, and many more. The price range of pieces sold in auctions range from less than 200 dollars to over 80 million dollars. Christie's has 53 offices in 32 different countries, with their biggest salerooms including London, New York, Paris, Geneva, and more.

There are many departments in Christie's New York office, including Impressionist and Modern, Post-War Contemporary, American Furniture, Antiquities, Old Master Paintings, Wine, Watches, Porcelain, and many more. I was assigned to **intern** in the Interiors department. Unlike other departments at Christie's, Interiors deals with fine art, objects, and furniture. An Interiors sale is unique in that it auctions off more lots at lower price points. So, while a sale in Old Master Paintings might have 200 lots, a sale in Interiors has about 700 to 900 lots, which typically sell for less money. The Interiors department also holds more annual sales than other departments at Christie's. Most departments have 2 big sales a year, while Interiors has a sale every 1-2 months.

There were many things I loved about interning in the Interiors department. The fast-paced environment and exposure to all aspects of a sale were my favorite factors of the **internship**. While most of my fellow **interns** only got to handle pre-sale or post-sale administrative work without ever witnessing a sale in their respective departments, I had the opportunity to work during two Interiors sales. This also meant dealing with pre-sale

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and post-sale material throughout the summer. I feel that after these twelve weeks, I have a strong knowledge of the type of work required before, during, and after a sale.

My responsibilities as an **intern** were vast. Common tasks included compiling details about lots into spreadsheets, entering information into Christie's "Property" system, filing paperwork from clients, taking photographs of lots that clients were interested in, taking photographs of damaged lots for our business manager to assess, and e- mailing clients regarding upcoming sales or lots that they have purchased.

I developed many important skills from this **internship**. Before the summer, I had no idea how to work Excel. My high school never required knowledge of the program and the classes I take at Sewanee do not utilize it. So when one of my first assignments was to enter information into an Excel spreadsheet, I was extremely nervous and didn't have a clue what I was doing. However, after weeks of using the program daily, I have become quite familiar with it, which I know will be useful in future jobs. I also learned many organizational skills throughout these three months. Sales produce a lot of paperwork from clients, whether they are purchasing items or selling them. There is also all the paperwork that derives from Christie's bid department regarding the actual auction results. Therefore, organization plays a key role in the effective functioning of the Interiors department. One of my jobs as an **intern** was to create a sale binder after each sale, full of its paperwork. I had to organize the paperwork into different categories and create various sections in the binder accordingly. This required a lot of attention to detail and organization. After these twelve weeks, I realize how important filing and organization are to a company.

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I learned many important lessons during these three months. First of all, I learned how far a good attitude can go. Many of the tasks assigned to me seemed menial and laborious compared to the exciting things the employees were working on. However, I made sure to embrace every project I was handed with a good attitude, because I know that the employees need this work done in order to get their work done. It helped to know that the tasks I was doing really did make a difference to the employees in making their jobs easier.

I also realized how important it is to work effectively with one's co-workers. Many of the **interns** at Christie's were competitive and extremely smart. This felt very intimidating at times. However, over the weeks, I learned that projecting confidence made me feel more confident, and led these other **interns** to have more faith in what I was saying or doing. Once we were all able to work effectively together, the projects got done in less time with more care.

While I loved my **internship**, it certainly had its low points. In the beginning of the summer, I was assigned to send out e-mails to clients regarding artists that they had expressed interest in. I realized about halfway through the project that I had sent information about the wrong artist to some of the clients. I had to sheepishly tell the fine art specialist what I had done. She told me that it was no big deal and I continued to work on the e-mails. However, I felt uneasy about what I had done for the rest of the day and worried that I had started off on the wrong foot. As the weeks went on, I realized that I had learned from this mistake and I treated every project I was assigned with extreme care, paying close attention to detail.

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This internship had a profound effect on my career goals. I always thought that I wanted to work in the art world, but I pictured myself working in a museum or gallery setting. After these twelve weeks, I have come to love the fast-paced environment of the commercial art industry. There are also so many more aspects of an auction house that go beyond just art. In addition to all of the art and furniture departments, Christie's also has Legal, Human Resources, Public Relations, Operations, Real Estate, Special Events, and many more. I remain open to the possibility of an internship or job in one of these departments upon graduating Sewanee to explore the other factors behind running a successful art auction house.