Bertoia's smash November 12-13 auction hits $2.3M after two days of nonstop bidding and a 15½-hour session that ran till 1:30 a.m.

Internet platforms were challenged by a tsunami of bids as Christmas & Halloween enthusiasts battled over treasures from the collections of Bob Merck and other titans of the hobby

VINELAND, N.J. – If there were a trophy for stamina and composure at the auction podium, it surely would have been awarded to Michael Bertoia on November 14th around 1:30 a.m. That's when an intense two-day marathon auction of toys, trains and holiday antiques finally came to a close with a $2.3 million gross and bidders clamoring for more.

Sold for $72,000

Sold for $44,800

Sold for $14,400

Sold for $10,200

Sold for $11,400

Sold for $3,300

Sold for $5,700

Adhering strictly to COVID guidelines that govern New Jersey businesses, Bertoia's initially had planned to accommodate a limited number of pre-registered, socially-distanced bidders at their gallery. "We wanted very much to have a live attendance because so many people told us they wanted to come. We thought we would be able to control it, but the response was so overwhelming, we had to change course and err on the side of safety. The bidding ended up being by remote methods only – absentee, by phone and through two bidding platforms, Bertoia Live and LiveAuctioneers," said Michael Bertoia, the company's president and principal auctioneer.

Sold for $5,700

Sold for $5,100

Sold for $3,600

Sold for $6,600

Sold for $8,400

Sold for $14,400

Online participation during the November 12 and 13 sessions was relentless. At times, there were communication lags, and on the most popular lots, patience was required due to the sheer number of bidders. “But every bid was recorded, and in the end, the prices – especially on Bob Merck’s phenomenal Halloween antiques – went beyond anything we could have predicted,” said Bertoia’s co-founder Jeanne Bertoia.

“Some bidders had begged to be allowed inside. One even said he would wrap himself from head to toe in plastic wrap, but we could not make an exception for anyone,” Jeanne said. “During the weeks prior to the auction, we would allow one person, or couple, at a time into the gallery to preview. If they didn’t have masks, gloves and hand sanitizer, we provided it. One couple drove in from Iowa, previewed during the hour before the sale, then bid by phone from their hotel room. When the auction ended after midnight, they came back to collect the items they had won, using curbside pickup, then headed back to Iowa.” There were several other patrons who traveled cross-country to preview live and later bid by phone or online. Some even did so seated in their cars in Bertoia’s parking lot.

Sold for $36,000

Sold for $13,200

Sold for $9,600

Sold for $15,600

Sold for $3,600

Sold for $5,100

Sold for $7,800

Sold for $6,000

Sold for $4,500

Sold for $8,400

Sold for $5,700

Sold for $21,600

Sold for $4,500

Sold for $4,200

Sold for $4,800

Sold for $3,900

Sold for $5,400

Sold for $4,800

Sold for $3,600

Holiday antiques, highlighted by the all-star four-decade Bob Merck Halloween collection, generated the most excitement of any auction category. Every phone line and both bidding platforms were in use throughout the Friday session. “Bob Merck’s collection was well known for its quality and uncompromising condition,” Michael observed. “We were selling his entire collection, so it was a now-or-never opportunity for other collectors to own something with Bob Merck provenance.” The Halloween category was further sweetened by a small but elite selection of items consigned by another private collector.

Sold for $8,400

Sold for $12,000

The top Halloween lot was a German composition frowning tree trunk lantern candleholder, which defied all expectations. A diminutive item at only 3.5 inches tall, it had been estimated at $700-$1,000 but ended up selling for $18,000. “Even at that price, underbidders were upset to drop out of the competition but knew they had to stop bidding at some point,” Michael said. Following closely behind was another collector favorite, an 11.5-inch cloth-dressed witch disguised as a devil jack-o’-lantern, which sold for $16,800. An endearing veggie man lantern and candy container fashioned as a stick-legged pumpkin figure holding two smaller pumpkin-faced jack-o’-lanterns was bid to $14,400.

Sold for $18,000

Sold for $16,800

Sold for $5,400

Sold for $5,400

Sold for $11,400

Sold for $14,400

Sold for $5,100

Sold for $4,800

Sold for $4,800

Sold for $4,500

Sold for $4,500

Sold for $4,500

The spectacular Christmas selection produced the auction's top lot, a 35-inch-long sleigh pulled by six composition reindeer on a wheeled platform, with a composition Santa in the driver's seat. A very rare and special production, each of its bell-adorned reindeer was posed differently and had beautifully crafted antlers. Entered with a $1,000-$1,500 estimate, the prized lot soared to an incredible $72,000, with many bidders in hot pursuit. Another big winner was the red-coated, mohair-bearded Santa atop a wind-up white fur polar bear nodder. Standing 29 inches tall inclusive of its iceberg base, the Christmas rarity swept past its $7,000-$9,000 auction estimate to land at $36,000. Other Christmas highlights included a clockwork donkey with Santa rider, $15,600; a rare 15-inch articulated German belsnickle with a rabbit-fur beard and snow-flecked, fur-trimmed brown coat, $14,400; and a magnificent 17-inch-tall nodding reindeer with a decorative harness and Santa rider, $13,200.

Sold for $4,200

Sold for $5,100

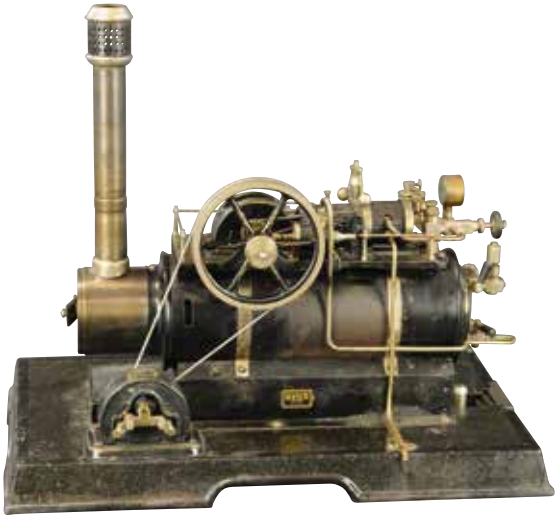
Sold for $5,100

Sold for $6,000

Sold for $15,600

Sold for $9,000

Sold for $7,800



Sold for $12,000

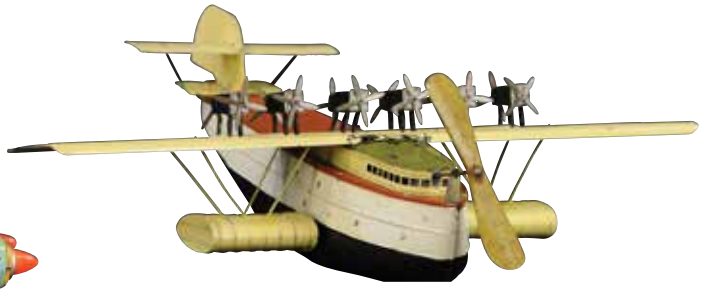
Sold for $4,200

Sold for $7,800

Sold for $20,400

A tremendous variety of antique toys awaited bidders. One of the rarest of all comic character productions, a Gunthermann (German) Felix the Cat windup merry-go-round in gorgeous, all-original condition with whimsical Felix passengers easily surpassed its high estimate at $20,400. From the early 20th-century French toymaker Fernand Martin, a circa-1914 clockwork "Nanny" holding a bundled baby sold with its original pictorial box for $7,800. A Martin cloth-dressed Roller Skater, one of only a handful of known examples, sold (unboxed) for the same money.

Sold for $4,500



Sold for $5,100

Sold for $6,000

Sold for $3,000

Sold for $2,280

Sold for $3,600

Sold for $6,600

Sold for $5,100

Sold for $5,700

Sold for $13,200

Sold for $6,000

American horse-drawn cast iron toys were led by a Dent Police Patrol Wagon, $13,200; and a Pratt & Letchworth combination fire wagon, $10,800. Rare examples of Schoenhut (Philadelphia) toys drew strong competition. Top lots included a Freihofer's Fine Bread wagon, $7,200; and a jointed Felix the Cat figure with its original Schoenhut box, $5,700. Made to commemorate the 1892 Columbian Exposition, a seldom-seen Ives Columbus "Santa Maria" egg toy of painted tin with cloth sails sold with its original box for $8,400.

Sold for $10,800

A ball toss game featuring a wonderfully expressive bas-relief composition bulldog with a hinged open/shut jaw capable of catching a ball sold for $6,000, more than six times the high estimate. The auction menagerie also included two irresistible circa-1905 Steiff teddy bears. A 24-inch apricot plush mohair center-seam teddy with elongated limbs and shoebutton eyes was won for $26,400; while a 28-inch golden mohair teddy with a "cone" nose, elongated limbs and shoebutton eyes made $21,600. Both easily beat their high estimates.

Sold for $7,200

Sold for $4,500

Sold for $3,600

Sold for $5,400

Sold for $3,900

Sold for $26,400

Sold for $10,800

Sold for $10,200

Of the antique train lots offered, the one attracting the most attention was a Lionel 2 7/8-inch powered gondola and trailer from the late Norm Schaut's collection. The second of two such examples Schaut owned (the other sold at Bertoia's last May), it was entered with an $8,000-$12,000 estimate and was chased to $40,800. Also noteworthy, a Marklin Pennsylvania Railroad set estimated at $3,000-$4,000 rose to $10,200.

Sold for $6,600

Sold for $9,600

Standouts in the pressed steel section included a boxed Tonka Toy Builders Supply Fleet set in near-mint condition, $15,600 against a $700-$1,000 estimate; and a circa-1930 Sturditoy Oil Company tractor-trailer/tanker, $12,000. Two classic 1926 American National vehicles came to auction with provenance from the legendary Donald Kaufman collection: a Packard open-cab Fire Chief vehicle, $19,200; and a Packard couple with a mounted spare wheel, $14,400.

Sold for $9,600

Sold for $6,600

Sold for $5,100

Sold for $19,2200

Sold for $4,500

Sold for $31,200

A Midwestern collection was the source of 18 working mechanical music machines, each equipped to play either cylinders or disks and all housed in finely carved wood cases. A Swiss mandoline box in a Black Forest case whose lid was ornately carved with figural pheasants and their chicks sold for $31,200 against an estimate of $5,000-$10,000.

To discuss consigning to a future Bertoia Auctions event, call 856-692-1881 or email toys@bertoiaauctions.com. Visit Bertoia's online at www.bertoiaauctions.com.

Sold for $10,800

Sold for $9,000

Sold for $7,800

Sold for $4,500

Sold for $3,900

Sold for $4,200

Sold for $7,800

Sold for $3,900

Sold for $15,600