



Famous Marilyn Monroe photos head for auction block

PALO ALTO, Calif. (Reuters) - It could be the biggest Internet auction spectacle yet when eBay puts historic nude photos of Marilyn Monroe on the block next month, but critics say the shots could be almost worthless and buyers should beware.

If the 22-year-old Monroe was already well aware of her sex appeal back in 1949, when she posed for what would become the famous "Red Velvet" photo series, she could not have possibly known the value of her signature on a standard model release form.

But 52 years later, while images of Monroe can be found in countless magazines, calendars, posters and on Web sites all over the Internet, that little piece of paper in which Monroe gave up rights to the images, is believed to be worth well over a million dollars.

Tom Kelley Jr, whose father shot the famous photos, says the consent form will grant the highest bidder the right to take the nude images, dramatically manipulate them if they wish, and use them for any conceivable commercial purpose. The owners of Monroe's image say this will infringe on their rights and they plan a court action.

"There's still a very strong interest in Marilyn Monroe, for fan clubs, celebrity endorsements, and it is not going to get any smaller. It will probably get larger," said Kelley Jr., who is also a photographer and, at 50, hopes the Monroe photos will bring in enough cash to afford him a little leisure time.

As Big As A Honus Wagner Baseball Card?

eBay, which owns the Butterfield auction house, is planning to host an Internet auction simultaneous with an old-fashioned auction at the Butterfield



Marilyn Monroe, one of four photographs from her "Red Velvet" photo series, 1949.

offices in Los Angeles on March 22. The company is not officially speculating on the value of the photos but is talking about the sale as a major event in the same league as its all time biggest sales.

Last year, a baseball card of Hall-of-Famer Honus Wagner and a property in Kentucky both fetched over \$1 million on eBay.

Sources say the Red Velvet photos, and the accompanying model release bearing the sex symbol's loopy signature, are worth at least \$700,000. Others estimate they could ultimately sell for three times that amount.

Enter CMG Worldwide Inc, which for the past seven years has represented the Monroe estate and blocked such products as Marilyn Monroe condoms. The company is planning a legal action to block any commercial use of the Red Velvet series.

CMG has good reason to fight. The company, which also acts as the business agent for other celebrities from Sophia Loren to the late Princess Diana, oversees a lucrative business licensing Monroe's image.

Monroe, who never had any children, left her name and image to her acting

coach Lee Strasberg and a psychiatric institute in London. Strasberg's widow, and the Anna Freud Center continue to hold these rights. Through CMG Worldwide, they have licensed the name and image to corporations including General Motors Corp., Spain's Iberia Airlines and Hallmark Cards.

"Kelley can sell the photographs of Marilyn Monroe if he wants, but that is all he is selling," insisted Roesler. "There are tens of thousands of original photographs of Marilyn Monroe out there, and we just think an 8 by 10 (inch) transparency has minimal value."

A Moving Image.

Even if Roesler prevails in blocking the commercial use of the shots, he is probably wrong about their value to a collector. The Red Velvet photos, a series of playful and flirty shots, capture a more innocent Monroe than many later images. They have some historic value too, as the centerfold shots in Playboy magazine's debut issue.

The dispute could blow over if the buyer who steps forward is just a wealthy individual collector with a soft spot for the woman some consider the signature female of the 20th Century. After holding onto the photos for all these years, however, Tom Kelly Jr. seems determined to make the most of the sale.

He has an agent of his own who says the ways the photos could be used in advertising are almost endless. "Say, for the sake of discussion, someone wanted to take the image of Marilyn Monroe and dress her up, turn her into a moving image and have her purchase an airline ticket," said Kelley's agent Gary Saal. "With the model release form, you are allowed to create derivative images. Moving figures? Absolutely."

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