

GARAGE SALES

Finds of a Lifetime

Garage sales are full of all kinds of unique items for sale. You can find clothes that are no longer for sale in stores, toys and games from your childhood and other items. And, every once in a while, you can find genuinely valuable items for a song.

15TH CENTURY CHINESE BOWL

A shopper at a 2020 Connecticut garage sale found a blue-and-white Chinese floral bowl decorated with lotus, peony, chrysanthemum and pomegranate blossoms. They snagged it for \$35. It later sold for more than \$721,000, because it wasn't any ordinary bowl. It was a 15th century antique commissioned by the Chinese imperial court during the Ming dynasty.

It's a lotus bowl, named not for the paintings but for its shape's resemblance to a lotus bud. It was made between 1403 and 1424 during the Yongle Emperor, a



period noted for its distinctive and celebrated porcelain techniques. The small bowl was just more than 6 inches across. It's unknown how it came to be at the sale, but only six other similar bowls

are known to have survived, auction house Sotheby's says. Those bowls are housed by places such as the National Palace Museum in Taipei, the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

An old painting snapped up at a 1989 Pennsylvania flea market for \$4 was hiding one of 500 official copies from the first printing of the

Declaration of Independence. Only 23 similar copies remain, and most of those are privately owned. It fetched more than \$2 million at a 1991 Sotheby's auction.

"This was a record for any printed Americana. It was far and away the highest price for historical Americana ever," said auctioneer and Sotheby's Senior Vice President David Redden.

The document later sold again in 2000 for more than \$8 million, going on the road as part of Norman Lear's Declaration of Independence Road Trip.

\$5 WARHOL?

A British businessman bought some Gertrude Stein drawings at a 2012 Las Vegas garage sale. He says he was getting the purported Stein drawings frame when he found another picture signed Andy Warhola.

The seller of the drawings said she used to babysit Warhol, and the businessman says the drawing is one of the pop artist's earliest works.

There's some controversy, however, as the artist's family disputes his story and the Warhol Authentication Board never verified the drawing.

You may not get as lucky as these buyers, but you can find your own treasures at your local garage sale.

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BUYER'S TIP

Treasure in the Eye of the Beholder

While your local sale may not offer up an original Declaration of Independence or Andy Warhol, remember that treasure is in the eye of the beholder. You might find a beloved toy from your childhood or the perfect vintage dress for your next post-pandemic soiree. Before you hit the road, get a thorough education on what you might be looking for, including how to authenticate labels. Remember that the best treasures are the ones that fit you.

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