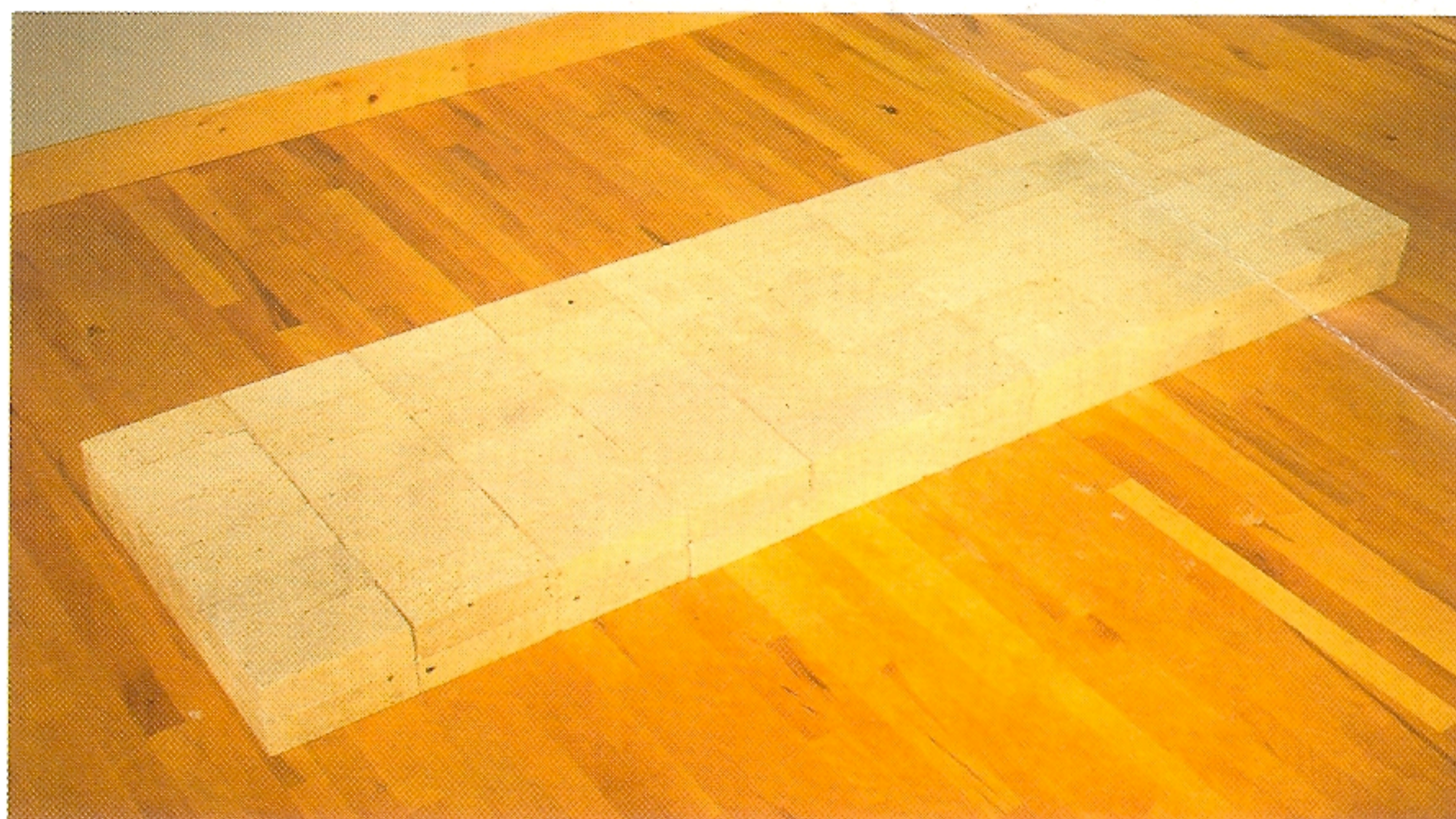


## ● Just a load of old bricks?

In 1972, the Tate Gallery, London, bought this sculpture for several thousand pounds\*. The purchase provoked a storm of controversy. Andre's use of actual bricks (which are dismantled when the work is in storage) follows in the footsteps of many modern artists, above all Marcel Duchamp (see page 32). However, unlike Duchamp who was mocking traditional values, Andre's aim was to reveal the beauty in humble, man-made objects arranged in a precise mathematical order. The Tate Gallery argued that as Britain's major public gallery showing modern art, it should buy works which reflected important historical trends; in this case



Minimalism (see page 54). But the public objected to the high price paid for a work which they thought lacked artistic value.

**Carl Andre: Equivalent VIII. 1966. Fire bricks. 12.8 x 68.6 x 229cm (5in x 27in x 7ft 6 1/8in). Tate Gallery, London, England**

## ● The role of the critic

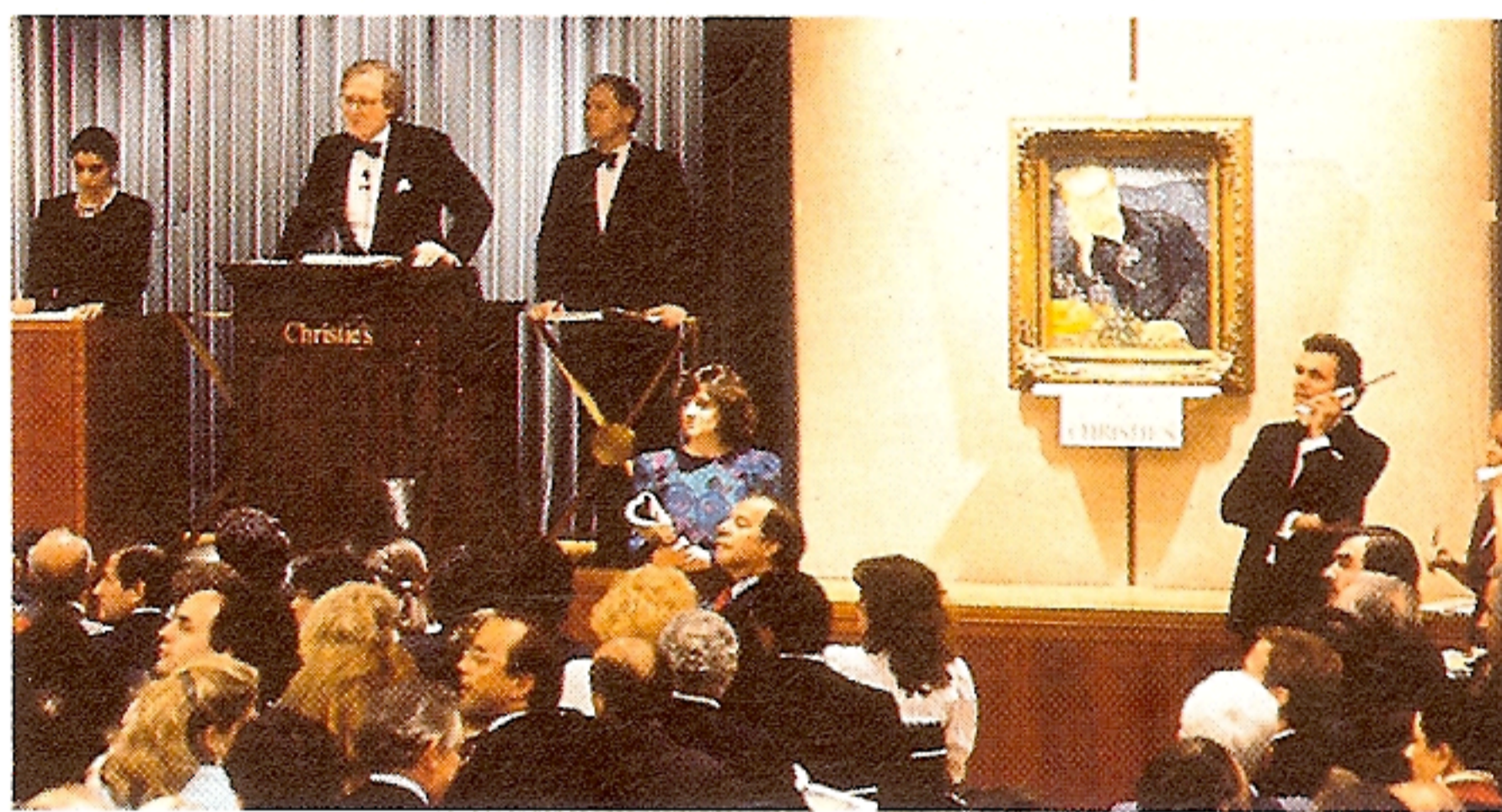
There is nearly always a connection between the artistic "worth" of a work of art (as judged by critics and the general public) and its commercial value (see "How do they set the price?" above left). But just as the price is fixed by assessing a range of factors which coincide at a particular point in time, so critics are influenced in their opinions by their background, education and experience - and times change. You only have to remember how the critics received the French Impressionists (see page 8) to realize that, at worst, they often just reflect society's prejudices.

So if you read exhibition reviews and books about the history of art, try to read as widely as you can, and bear in mind that there is no "absolute" truth when it comes to judging a work of art. Your opinion may be as valid as anyone else's.

## ● What happens at an auction?

The auction-house sends out a catalogue in advance, giving details of the works of art which will be on sale and an estimate of the sums they will fetch. The works can also be seen at a preview.

On the day of the auction, each bidder is registered and given a numbered bidding paddle, to avoid confusion. Then, when an item comes up for sale, would-be buyers signal that they want to enter or raise the bidding by holding up their paddle.



**Van Gogh's Portrait of Dr Gachet being auctioned at Christie's, New York, on 15 May 1990.**

People who are unable to attend the auction can bid by telephone or by registering an absentee bid. In both cases a representative bids on their behalf until the work reaches the

client is willing to pay.

When no one wants to bid anymore, the auctioneer closes the bidding by hitting his hammer on the auction table. The item is sold to the person who made the last bid.

## The top five

Here are the five most expensive works of art sold at auction (up to August 1991)

1. Portrait of Dr Gachet (van Gogh): \$82,500,000. 15 May, 1990
2. Au Moulin de la Galette (Renoir): \$78,100,000. 17 May, 1990

3. Les Noces de Pierrette (Picasso): FFr 300,000,000. 29 November, 1989

4. Irises (van Gogh): \$53,900,000. 11 November, 1987

5. Self-Portrait: Yo Picasso (Picasso): \$47,850,000. 9 May, 1989

\*The gallery never revealed the exact sum, and various figures were quoted in the press.