On the 50th anniversary of her death, fast-climbing auction prices signal Hollywood legend remains as popular as ever.

By Hector Cantú

It is arguably the biggest star Hollywood has ever produced. A blonde bombshell who’s been described as sensual, gifted, intelligent, vulnerable, beautiful, hopeful, fascinating… and far more complex than the sex-symbol roles she portrayed on screen. Her big-screen persona and personal life fueled a pop-culture phenomenon—and a favorite of entertainment memorabilia collectors worldwide.

Marilyn Monroe

Her Collectible Treasures

She is the most enduring symbol of Old Hollywood—and perhaps the world’s most iconic star. From her sultry screen presence to her off-screen scandals, Monroe left an indelible mark on pop culture. Her beauty, poise, and charisma continue to captivate fans around the world. From her iconic films like “The Seven Year Itch” and “Some Like It Hot” to her timeless fashion, Monroe’s legacy lives on. In this special feature, we explore the world of Marilyn Monroe memorabilia and the fascinating journey of her collectible items. From rare photographs and personal letters to vintage clothing and rare movie posters, this collection offers a glimpse into the life of one of Hollywood’s most beloved icons.

50th Anniversary Collection

In 2021, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of her death, the world was treated to a special collection highlighting Monroe’s most beloved films. The campaign, which included rare stills and behind-the-scenes photos, captured the essence of Monroe’s timeless魅力 and her enduring impact on popular culture. This collection has become a must-have for collectors and fans alike, offering a unique glimpse into the enchanted life of Marilyn Monroe.

Her Final Check?

The iconic star’s final check, dated May 22, 1962, was recently discovered and auctioned for over $1.2 million. The check, written to her second husband, Arthur Miller, has become one of the most valuable pieces of Monroe memorabilia. The auctioneer, Nate D. Sanders, describes the check as a “rare and important historical document.”

1955: Limited Edition Print

It’s a scene that forever endeared Marilyn Monroe as the screen’s quintessential sex goddess. In “The Seven Year Itch,” Monroe’s iconic dressblow skirt scene is a must-have for any Monroe collector. This limited edition print, signed by the famous photographer, was released in 1953 and has become a collector’s item among Monroe memorabilia enthusiasts. This print is not only a piece of art but also a testament to Monroe’s enduring appeal.

50 Years Later

As we commemorate the 50th anniversary of Marilyn Monroe’s passing, her influence on pop culture remains unparalleled. From fashion to film, Monroe’s legacy continues to inspire and captivate fans around the world. In this special section, we explore the ways in which Monroe’s image and spirit continue to shape our understanding of celebrity and the media. From her iconic films to her timeless fashion, Monroe’s impact is undeniable. This section offers a unique perspective on the lasting influence of one of Hollywood’s most beloved icons.

Heritage Auctions

Heritage Auctions specializes in the world of entertainment memorabilia and has been at the forefront of Monroe memorabilia auctions. Their expertise in this field ensures that collectors and fans alike have access to some of the rarest and most valuable pieces of Monroe memorabilia. This section features a selection of their recent auctions, highlighting the incredible demand for Monroe memorabilia and the increasing value of her collectible items.
1940s
The Budding Star

In 1945, an Army photographer for Yank magazine snapped a photo of a young munitions factory worker named Norma Jean Dougherty. Afterward, she was encouraged to visit the Blue Book Modeling Agency in Los Angeles. Her get-next-door looks proved popular, and she was soon appearing on magazine covers as well as pin-up models for photographers and pin-up artists. A Hollywood contract followed, with studio executives giving the starlet a new name: Marilyn Monroe.

1941: Early Signature
Before she was a star, Norma Jean Baker was a student at Ralph Waldo Emerson Junior High School in Southern California. The manager, with her black fountain pen, on the back of a promenade class photo measuring 6 x 5.5 inches, wrote a message to a classmate: To “George” / A super, swell fellow in fact really keen (I really mean it George) / Norma Jean Baker / 5 / 41. It’s one of the future icon’s earliest autographs.

Auction price: $11,950
Sold: December 2015

1945: Studio Portrait
At about the same time she joined the Blue Book Modeling Agency, Norma Jean-Baker posed for a small group of portraits at H. Maller Studios. The images are among the earliest professional photographs of the future superstar, with 8 by 10-inch prints like this one, with the studio’s embossed blotted stamp, popular with fans.

Auction price: $607
Sold: November 2009

1945: Portrait Still
Norma Jean Baker’s beauty instantly caught the eye of Andre de Diens (1911–1985) when she showed up at his photo studio in 1945. “Norma Jean seemed to be like an angel,” de Diens says in his memoirs, “an earthly, way-looking angel! So, expressively for me!” De Diens built a portfolio of striking photographs that would launch her career. One of those early images, an 8 by 10-inch artist’s still, was captured in 1945.

Auction price: $9,015
Sold: July 2008
1946: Signed Model Release

After signing with the Blue Book Modeling Agency, Norma Jean Dougherty (using the name of her first husband) modeled for photographer Richard C. Miller (1913-2015). On that day, April 20, 1946, Norma Jean signed a model release form – a rare artifact from the earliest days of her modeling career. The document sold at auction with a color print of an image captured at that session: a fresh-faced Monroe posing in a suit. 

Auction price: $19,120  Sold: July 2011

1948: First Movie Poster Appearance

Between modeling jobs, Monroe was cast in the 1948 Warner Bros. film *Damon and Pythias*, playing a julep waitress. The movie marked her first credited appearance and her image was used on three of the movie’s eight promotional lobby cards, including the one card. The cards were sold as a set.

Auction price: $3,597  Sold: March 2011

1947-48: Original Pin-Up Art

Pin-up artist Earl Moran (1893-1984) moved to Hollywood in the 1940s to focus on Hollywood publicity pieces. At the same time, he was still working for calendar companies, and soon was hiring models to pose for his pin-up art. Mona Jean Dougherty was Moran’s favorite, and he used her in numerous pieces, including this pastel on board titled Marilyn.

Auction price: $83,650  Sold: February 2011

1949 Limited Edition Print

On May 27, 1949, Norma Jean visited the cramped Los Angeles studio of photographer Tom Kelley (1914-1949), who produced promotional photographs for Hollywood studios. His session with the model produced a series of photos that sold millions of pin-up calendars worldwide. Her nude modeling job later caused a Hollywood scandal, but the public accepted Monroe’s explanation that she took the job only because she was a struggling actress. The year of Kelley’s photo is from the Playboy magazine archives and is initialed by Hugh Hefner, who published the image in his first magazine.

Auction price: $6,871  Sold: December 2010

1949: Movie Lobby Card

The same year she posed in the nude for photographer Tom Kelley, Monroe appeared in *Gave Happy*, which premiered in San Francisco in October 1948. Her small role in the Mine Brothers movie led to an audition for director John Huston, who later cast her in his drama *The Asphalt Jungle*. The rare lobby card went to auction in very fine/near mint condition and measures 11 by 14 inches.

Auction price: $1,553  Sold: November 2007
LEGENDARY DIRECTOR JOHN HUSTON cast Marilyn Monroe in his 1950 drama The Asphalt Jungle and a star was born. The decade belonged to Monroe. In 1952, she appeared on the cover of Life magazine, and she was soon dating baseball Hall of Famer Joe DiMaggio. It was the decade of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, How to Marry a Millionaire, The Seven Year Itch, Bus Stop, The Prince and the Showgirl, and Some Like it Hot. Monroe and DiMaggio married in January 1954, but divorced 11 months later. In June 1956, she married playwright Arthur Miller. By the end of the decade, Monroe’s sexpot-screen persona had made her an international sensation.

1953: Limited Edition Print

For a 1953 feature on Marilyn Monroe, the editors at Life magazine hired photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt (1898-1995), whose snapshot of a sailor passionately kissing a young nurse is among the most famous images of World War II. The limited edition silver gelatin print was produced in 1991 and bears Eisenstaedt’s signature.

Auction price: $1,481 – Sold June 2011
1950: Original Pin-Up Art
As the decade began, Monroe's modeling gig for pin-up artists began taking a back seat to her movie assignments. At this time, pin-up calendar artist Darla Monroe (1905-1984) completed this 24-by-36-inch oil on board titled When You Don't Give 'Em What You Want, You Get What You Give. Auction price: $23,705  Sold: February 2010

1950: Movie Agreement
In March 1950, Twentieth Century Fox offered Monroe $500 a week to appear in the film that would eventually be titled Home Town Story. She got a start on a long-page, double-sided paperwork offer document. Monroe signed a standard freelance player's contract. It's one of the earliest-known examples of a signed Monroe movie contract. Auction price: $5,975  Sold: July 2011

1951-55: Signed Studio Documents
In 1951, Monroe signed a standard employment contract with 20th Century Fox. Relations with the studio continued through 1955, with the star signing contract extensions and promising to promote the movie Moontime Inn and Niagara. Other documents detail Monroe's issues with Pink Tights and How to Be Very, Very Popular—the films she refused to make, resulting in her suspension from the studio and her move to New York, where she started her own production company. In all, this set of documents includes six Monroe signatures. Auction price: $33,300  Sold: December 2011

1952: Signed Baseball
New York Yankees baseball legend Joe DiMaggio retired in 1951, and within a year was seeing Marilyn Monroe, visiting her at the 20th Century Fox studio. In 1952, players from the World Champion Yankees participated in the studio's intramural softball league, represented by Monroe. Of course, Marilyn's team won the championship, and 15 balls were signed by all participants—including Monroe, DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle and Yogi Berra—and gifted to the winners. This lot includes the outline of Monroe's red lipstick, a remnant of the star's lipstick kiss, and was sold with photos from the signing ceremony. Auction price: $59,750  Sold: August 2011
1952: Movie Poster

By 1952, Marilyn Monroe was beginning to establish her acting credentials, and was given a chance to lead the noir thriller Don’t Bother to Knock. Starring opposite Richard Widmark, Monroe pulls off a near-brilliant performance as a disturbed and obsessive baby-sitter. The poster remains popular with collectors because of its seductive depiction of the iconic screen queen. This 27-by-41-inch one sheet went to auction with a five-plus grade.

Auction price: $2,151  Sold: March 2008

1953: Signed TV Contract

Monroe made her TV debut on The Jack Benny Program in an episode that first aired on Sept. 13, 1951. It featured a sketch in which Benny fancied that the sexy actress is in love with him. Monroe on Sept. 11, 1953, signed and initialed a standard one-page, double-sided agreement with CBS Television. Attached was a rider that stipulates Monroe would receive a rate $104,504 in a convertible for her appearance on the show.

Auction price: $4,481  Sold: December 2011
1953: **Photographer’s Print**

After a distinguished career capturing images of World War II, the civil war in China, and the Russian occupation of Manchuria, photojournalist John florea (1916-2006) settled in Los Angeles, where he quickly found his niche as an entertainment photographer. A friendship with Monroe led to more than 10 magazine covers of the star shot by florea. This gelatin silver print, from a 1953 shoot, is signed by the photographer. 

Auction price: $1,553  
Sold: June 2010

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1953: **Playboy Magazine’s First Issue**

As Monroe’s career began its stellar ascent, publisher Hugh Hefner (b. 1926) launched his legendary magazine, and tried to photographe during the star’s nude modelling days. This rare first issue is graded in near mint condition—one of the best graded copies known. 

Auction price: $31,070  
Sold: February 2012
1953. Publicity Still
How to Marry a Millionaire starred Monroe, Betty Grable and Lauren Bacall as a trio of convincing forlorn heroines. The romantic comedy proved another boost to Monroe’s blonde bombshell status. This 8 by 10-inch publicity still, showing Monroe in a swimsuit she wears in the film, was distributed to newspapers nationwide. Auction price: $1,195 Sold: July 2008

1953. Movie Poster
Gentlemen Prefer Blondes gave fans one of Monroe’s most memorable performances. In this Howard Hawks musical, she plays the gold-digging Lorelei Lee, with her rendition of the song “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend” considered an iconic movie moment. This oversized 60 by 60-inch poster is rare as print runs for larger posters were limited in addition, the large size made the poster fragile. This poster went to auction graded in very fine-plus condition. Auction price: $5,680 Sold: March 2002

1954. Monroe & DiMaggio Signed Photograph
After their marriage, Monroe and DiMaggio honeymooned in Japan, accompanied by DiMaggio’s friend Frank “Lefty” O’Dell, a minor league manager who helped establish professional baseball in Japan. While there, the three autographed an 8-by-10-inch photo snapped by a Japanese photographer. A one-of-a-kind piece from the couple’s happy days together. Auction price: $89,625 Sold: October 2006
1955: Promotional Standee

Of all display and advertising material created for a film’s release, standees are often the most transient. To boost moviegoer awareness of The Seven Year Itch in theater lobbies, 20th Century Fox produced this 76-inch high cut-out, which features the film’s famous “subway grate” scene. Because they were large and hard to store, most standees were discarded after the film’s run.

Auction price: $4,000  Sold: November 2005

1956: Fan Snapshots

In 1956, the production crew for the movie Bus Stop was filming in downtown Phoenix. One evening, Thomas Glenn, a 13-year-old fan, grabbed his Brownie camera and ventured to the location, where he took a number of photos of Monroe, co-star Don Murray and other cast and crew members. After developing his film, the boy returned to the Sahara Hotel where Monroe was staying, knocked on her door and requested an autograph through her assistant. Monroe inscribed “To Tommy, Love and Kisses, Marilyn Monroe.” Glenn sold the photos after self-keeping them for more than five decades.

Auction price: $6,572  Sold: April 2011
1956: Photographer’s Print
Milton Greene (1922-1985) helped transform fashion photography into fine art, and six sessions with Marilyn Monroe certainly didn’t hurt the movement. In a career that included portraits of Frank Sinatra, Grace Kelly, Marlene Dietrich, Elizabeth Taylor and Cary Grant, Greene in 1954 lensed sessions with Monroe. This silver gelatin print from the sessions, measuring 16 by 20 inches, was produced in 1979 and includes the photographer’s signature. Auction Price: $1,792 Sold December 2008

1956: Movie Poster
Director Joshua Logan ( Mister Roberts, South Pacific) provided Monroe with what some critics consider her best role — Cherie, a nightclub singer who wins the eye of rodeo champ Bo (Don Murray). The rarity of Monroe bared in this Bus Stop poster is among the rarest of her movies. The 30-by-40-inch poster went to auction in very fine condition. Auction price: $2,760 Sold November 2005
1956: Movie Garment
This thermal underwear was worn by Monroe on the set of the film “Bus Stop,” directed by wardrobe master Ed Wynigrod and bearing the film’s production number on its tag. The thermals were worn on set, most likely between takes while filming in studio. A 20th Century Fox tag sewn into the collar bears Monroe’s name handwritten in ink.
Auction price: $3,585  Sold: February 2017

1957: Signed Personal Note
After her brief marriage to Joe DiMaggio, Monroe, in 1956, married playwright Arthur Miller. In early August 1957, she suffered a miscarriage. In a handwritten note postmarked Aug. 14, 1957, Monroe replies to a fan who had sent her a get-well card. “Thank you so much for your kind note. Yours and all the other good wishes were a great comfort to me.” The 4-by-6-inch folded card is embossed “Mrs. Arthur Miller” and includes her signature.
Auction price: $3,078  Sold: November 2009

1957: Movie Poster
Lawrence Olivier (1907-1989) directs and stars in what many today consider a romantic masterpiece. As reported by the studio, Monroe finds herself caught up in a political whirlwind, as well as in the arms of Charles, the prince regent of Carpathia (Olivier). The making of “The Prince and the Showgirl” is the basis of the 2011 movie “My Week with Marilyn.” This three-sheet poster went to auction and graded very fine.
Auction price: $2,688  Sold: March 2008

1958: Original Pin-Up Art
By the late 1950s, Monroe was clearly far removed from pin-up modeling jobs, but her iconic images were stopped using her likeness. The legendary pin-up artist Gil Elvgren (1914-1990) produced this Marilyn looks like a 30-by-24 inch oil on canvas titled “Claws for Alarm” (Pudle Awakening, Caught in a Pinch).
Auction price: $5,750  Sold: February 2010

1959: Movie Poster
Many consider “Some Like It Hot” to be Monroe’s finest film. This style Z movie poster, measuring 30 by 40 inches, is among the film’s rarest publicity material, with only one other example of this poster known. This poster went to auction and graded near mint.
Auction price: $4,828  Sold: July 2011

1959: Japanese Movie Poster
Reflecting her international stardom, Monroe’s movies packed movie houses overseas, with the American bombshell captivating audiences across Asia and Europe. This 20-by-26-inch Japanese movie poster for “Some Like It Hot,” showing Monroe in a far easier pose than what was seen on any American paper, went to auction in near mint-minus condition.
Auction price: $14,554  Sold: November 2007
THE DECADE BEGAN WITH THE MISFITS, written by Arthur Miller and directed by John Huston. Production wrapped in November 1960. Miller and Monroe were divorced two months later. In April 1962, Monroe began work on her final, unfinished film, Something’s Got to Give, directed by George Cukor. In May of that year, she made her last significant appearance singing “Happy Birthday” to President John F. Kennedy at Madison Square Garden. On Aug. 5, 1962, the international star was found dead at her Brentwood home in Los Angeles. Officials called it a “probable suicide.” She was 36.

1960: Limited Edition Print
Monroe began the decade working on The Misfits with Clark Gable (1901-1960) and Montgomery Clift (1920-1966). The cast was forced to deal with the oppressive heat of the Nevada desert and Monroe deteriorating marriage to Arthur Miller. It was Monroe’s final film. On the set, Life magazine photographer Cornell Capa (1918-2008) snapped this image of Monroe and Gable. This 16-by-20-inch silver gelatin “Museum” print was produced and signed by the photographer in 2001. Auction price: $4,182 Sold December 2008

1960s
The End of a Career
1961: Personal Appointment Book
A "Daily Reminders" appointment book with "MM" on the cover was used by Monroe and her assistant May Reis to keep track of appointments, invitations, and engagements. Notes by Monroe and Reis are made in pencil, colored pencil and ink throughout, and include references to Joe DiMaggio, actress and gossip columnist Hedda Hopper, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, senior advisor to President John F. Kennedy, and director Billy Wilder. Emile Koves, Rod Sargent, Richard Austin, and Harry Heffernie. Auction price: $5,975 Sold: November 2009

1961: Signed Baseball
Although the marriage of Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe was troubled and short, it remains the ultimate celebrity pairing, the consummate sports legend and the definitive Hollywood star. Their brief time together makes items linking the two particularly attractive to collectors. Seven years after they divorced, a New York Times photographer got the duo's autograph on this baseball while they were together in Florida—a possibly considering reconciliation—during baseball spring training. The occasion was detailed in a "1961 Newsweek" cover story titled "The Private DiMaggios.
Auction price: $39,100 Sold: May 2006

1961: Movie Costume Sketch
Before she wore her tight-fitting Jean Louis (1957-1967) creation to President John F. Kennedy's birthday party, Monroe was wearing the Hollywood designer's costume on the set of The Misfits. This sketch of a Louis design, with colored pencil and ink on drawing paper with a fabric swatch attached, shows an outfit worn by Monroe in the 1961 film - her final screen appearance. The drawing is by an unidentified artist but is signed by Louis and initialed by Monroe and director John Huston. Auction price: $2,031 Sold: November 2009
1961: Movie Poster

Monroe's face is displayed in this one-sheet for The Misfits. It would be the last completed picture for both Monroe and Clark Gable, this international 27-by-41-inch poster, with graphics that are far superior to the U.S. one sheet, is scarce, and went to auction in very fine condition.

Auction price: $2,980    Sold: July 2007

1962: Limited Edition Print

Ten days before his actual 46th birthday, President John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) was fitted with a Madison Square Garden party. Monroe took a break from filming the never-completed Something's Got to Give to attend the event at the suggestion of Kennedy's brother-in-law, Tony Bennett. Arriving late, she eventually took the stage to sing her new film's theme song, “Happy Birthday Mr. President.” Monroe's performance was captured by photographer Bill Ray (1922-2012). The photostatic silver print is signed “Bill Ray '62.”

Auction price: $7,031    Sold: June 2010

1961: Prompt Book

Something’s Got to Give passed a struggling and sometimes ill Marilyn Monroe with explosive director George Cukor (1899-1983). Her prompt book for the movie included her lines, plus other actors’ dialog that immediately preceded her lines. The 32-page carbon typewritten, bound in black paper wrappers with a typewritten label reading “Marilyn Monroe/Something’s Got to Give,” was the actor’s personal copy and includes her handwritten annotations. The item has been never exhibited.

Auction price: $6,500    Sold: November 2009
1962: Limited Edition Print

After winning President John F. Kennedy at his birthday party at New York's Madison Square Garden, celebrity photographer Capra Steinberg captured Monroe leaving the building with her borrow. This image provides a great view of the Jean Louis “body stocking” gown Monroe wore at the event. The print was sold with the negative and its copyright notice.

Auction price: $3,107  Sold: April 2007

1962: Limited Edition Print

For director George Cukor’s Something’s Got to Give, Monroe was called to film a nude swimming scene. She had been fired from the set after missing several days of shooting, but was rehired after some negotiations. Sadly, her death two months later put an end to the production. This image was captured during the filming of the movie's famous night-time swim-up scene. The 8.5-by-10-inch silver-weight glossy print is numbered six in a set of seven that were printed.

Auction price: $3,795  Sold: November 2010
1962: Telephone Bills

Some of Marilyn Monroe's last long distance telephone calls and telegrams are revealed in telephone statements dated between March and July of 1962. Telegrams were sent to a man named 'Roberto' in Mexico while phone calls were made from California to New York City and Washington D.C., between March 19 and March 26. Monroe died 45 months later. 

Auction price: $5,673
Sold: December 2017