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Exploring art by and about people of African descent, primarily through the lens of books, magazines and catalogs, Culture Type features original research and reporting and shares invaluable interestingness culled from the published record on black art.

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Record Breakers? Paintings by Jack Whitten, Sam Gilliam, Barkley L. Hendricks, and Other African American Artists Priced to Set New Auction Highs This Week

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on Nov 14, 2018 • 2:58 am

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Sotheby's is auctioning "Ancient Mentor I" (1985) by Jack Whitten on Nov. 14 in New York. | Video by Sotheby's

WORKS BY SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR, expensive, and critically recognized African American artists are featured in this week's auctions at Sotheby's, Christie's, and Phillips in New York. Several lots will arrive at the auction block with price estimates higher than the artist's existing record.

In June, "Forth" (1967), a beveled-edge painting by Sam Gilliam went for \$1.2 million (including fees), an artist record. Less than six months later, the record is expected to fall. "Lady Day II" (1971), another beveled-edge painting by Gilliam, is featured in Christie's Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale on Nov. 15. A tribute to Billie Holiday, the monumental work carries an estimate of \$1.5 million to \$2 million, which is higher than the artist's current record.

In addition to "Lady Day II" at Christie's, "Ancient Mentor I" (1985) by Jack Whitten (1939-2018) at Sotheby's, and "Jazz on Easter Sunday" (1961) by Sam Middleton (1927-2015) at Phillips, also have estimates higher than the artist's existing record.

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Dec 14, 2018

For others, estimates hover near the artist's record, which is the case for "[North Philly Niggah \(William Corbett\)](#)" (1975) by Barkley L. Hendricks (1945-2017), "[The Businessmen](#)" (1947) by Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), and "[Cultural Exchange](#)" (1987) by Robert Colescott (1925-2009). Another lot to watch is Henry Taylor's "[I'll Put a Spell on You](#)" (2004).

One of the benefits of observing auctions is the opportunity to see works long held in private collections. The fall modern and contemporary auctions this week feature decades-old paintings by Lawrence, Hendricks, Colescott, Whitten, Gilliam, and several by Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988), among others.

Beyond the likely record breakers, paintings by Mark Bradford and Kerry James Marshall, whose works have garnered the highest prices at auction for living African American artists, are also featured in this week's sales. Also of interest are paintings by emerging artist Christina Quarles (her first at a major auction) and recent auction favorite Njideka Akunyili Crosby, whose record at auction is more than \$3 million. An early painting by Nigerian-born, Los Angeles-based Akunyili Crosby is being offered at Christie's. A sculptural textile by El Anatsui and a selection of works by Glenn Ligon are also for sale, in addition to several other lots by well-known black artists.

New auction highs are expected to be achieved this week among a handful of African American artists. As new records are set, the entities that have consigned these paintings for sale should do handsomely (netting exponential profits), the artists who made the works will receive no direct benefit. This is the case for all artists whose work is sold at auction in the United States—even in California where resale royalties were curbed by an appeals court ruling over the summer.

According to the [New York Times](#): "Variations of resale royalty laws for artists have been implemented worldwide, in dozens of countries including Australia, and most of the countries in the European Union, but all attempts at creation of a United States law have failed." **CT**

CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK



Nov. 15 Evening Sale – [Lot 15C](#): SAM GILLIAM, "Lady Day II," 1971 (acrylic on canvas, 107 x 160 inches / 271.8 x 406 cm.). | Estimate \$1.5 million-\$2 million. **Sold for \$2,172,500 (including fees). RECORD**

Sam Gilliam's beveled-edge paintings have done well over the past year, accounting for three artist records. "[Rays](#)" (1971) sold for \$684,500 (including fees) at Sotheby's Contemporary Curated sale on Sept. 27, 2017. The amount, an artist record, far surpassed the \$100,000 to \$150,000 estimate.

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HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE 2018: SELECTIONS INSPIRED BY THE WORKS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS JACK WHITTEN, MICKALENE THOMAS, CHARLES WHITE & MORE

In March, (Untitled, 1968) sold for \$885,000 at Sotheby's New York, setting another auction high. The current \$1.2 million record was achieved in June at Sotheby's London. According to New York Times report, "Forth" (1967) was consigned by a Washington collector and an Asian collector placed the winning bid by phone.

This week "Lady Day II" (1971), another beveled-edged painting by Gilliam is on the auction block. On the back of the painting, on the overlap, it is dated "July 21, 1971" and "Lady Day (Billie)" is inscribed on the stretcher. If there is any interest the painting made nearly a half century ago, it will set yet another record, as the estimate is higher than the existing artist record.



LATEST NEWS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN ART: CRENSHAW GETTING OUTDOOR MUSEUM, SOTHEBY'S SUPPORTS BLACK FILM EXHIBITION, SHIRLEY CHISHOLM MONUMENT & MORE



Nov. 15 Evening Sale – Lot 26C: ROBERT COLESCOTT, "Cultural Exchange," 1987 (acrylic on canvas). | Estimate \$250,000-\$350,000. **Sold for \$912,500 (including fees). RECORD**

Just last month, Robert Colescott (1925-2009) achieved a new artist record. On Oct. 4, "Down in the Dumps: So Long Sweetheart," a large 1983 painting was featured in the African-American Fine Art Sale at Swann Auction Galleries. Estimated to sell for \$35,000-50,000, the price shot up to \$329,000, a new high mark for Colescott.



BETYE SAAR, 92, IS TAKING STEPS TO SECURE HER LEGACY WHILE FORGING AHEAD WITH NEW ARTWORK AND EXHIBITIONS



POWER 100: ARTIST KERRY JAMES MARSHALL RANKED NO. 2 MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSON IN CONTEMPORARY ART WORLD



Nov. 15 Evening Sale – [Lot 30C](#): MARTIN PURYEAR, "Sharp and Flat," 1987 (pine). | Estimate \$250,000-\$350,000. **Sold for \$672,500 (including fees)**

Martin Puryear is representing the United States at the Venice biennial, where he will present a solo exhibition in the U.S. pavilion in 2019. Puryear reached a high mark when his "[Untitled](#)" sculpture (1989) sold for \$1.8 million at Christie's New York in 2014, an artist record. The winning bid was more than twice the estimate (\$600,000-\$800,000).

Nov. 16 – Afternoon Session, [Lot 816](#): NJIDEKA AKUNYILI CROSBY, "Untitled," 2010 (oil, fabric collage and printed paper collage on canvas, 36 x 48 1/8 inches / 91.4 x 122.2 cm.). | Estimate \$300,000-\$500,000. | **Sold for \$1,392,500 (including fees)**

This lot is an early painting by Njideka Akunyili Crosby completed a year before she received her MFA from Yale.

Akunyili Crosby set a new benchmark on May 16 when "[Bush Babies](#)" (2017) sold for nearly \$3.4 million (including fees) at Sotheby's New York, a new artist record. The painting was featured in the Studio Museum's Creating Space auction benefitting the museum's new building. Akunyili Crosby's previous high was just north of \$3 million.

Nov. 16 Afternoon Session – [Lot 842](#): ADRIAN PIPER, "Decide Who You Are #22: Field Work," 1992 (triptych – photomontage flush-mounted on board, in artist's frame); left and right element: 72 7/8 x 42 7/8 inches / 185.1 x 108.9 cm.; center element: 46 1/8 x 79 inches / 117.2 x 200.7 cm.) | Estimate \$60,000-\$80,000. **Sold for \$125,000 (including fees)**

["Adrian Piper: Concepts and Intuitions, 1965-2016"](#) is on view at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles through



CRUSHING DECADE-OLD AUCTION RECORD, 'THE BUSINESSMEN' BY JACOB LAWRENCE SOARS TO \$6.1 MILLION, PLACING HIM AMONG THE MOST EXPENSIVE AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS



THE STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM IS SHARING ITS COLLECTION WITH AMERICA, LAUNCHING A TOURING EXHIBITION OF 100 ARTWORKS IN JANUARY 2019



DAWOUD BEY'S PHOTOGRAPHIC TRIBUTE TO THE VICTIMS OF 16TH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH BOMBING COLLAPSES THE PAST AND PRESENT



'SOUL OF A NATION' OPENS IN NEW YORK WHERE MANY OF THE EXHIBITION ARTISTS WERE ACTIVE DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS, BLACK POWER ERAS



CULTURE TYPE: THE YEAR IN BLACK ART 2017



Jan. 6, 2019. It is being presented as the most comprehensive West Coast exhibition of Piper's work to date. The 50-year survey features more than 270 works.

SOTHEBY'S NEW YORK



CULTURE TYPE PICKS: THE 14 BEST BLACK ART BOOKS OF 2017



Nov. 14 Evening Auction – Lot 2: BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, “North Philly Niggah (William Corbett),” 1975 (oil and acrylic on canvas, 72 X 48 inches / 182.9 by 121.9 cm.). | Estimate \$1,200,000-\$1,800,000. **Sold for \$1,935,000 (including fees)**

The latest auction record for Barkley L. Hendricks (1945-2017) was set on May 16, when “Brenda P” (1974) sold for \$2.1 million (including fees) at Sotheby’s New York. The painting was the first female portrait by the artist to come to auction since his death. The benchmark more than doubled his previous record which was just under \$1 million.

FIND MORE about Barkley L. Hendricks’s [current artist record](#) on Culture Type



BLACK ART HISTORY: 10 CHILDREN’S BOOKS ILLUMINATE THE LIVES OF IMPORTANT AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS

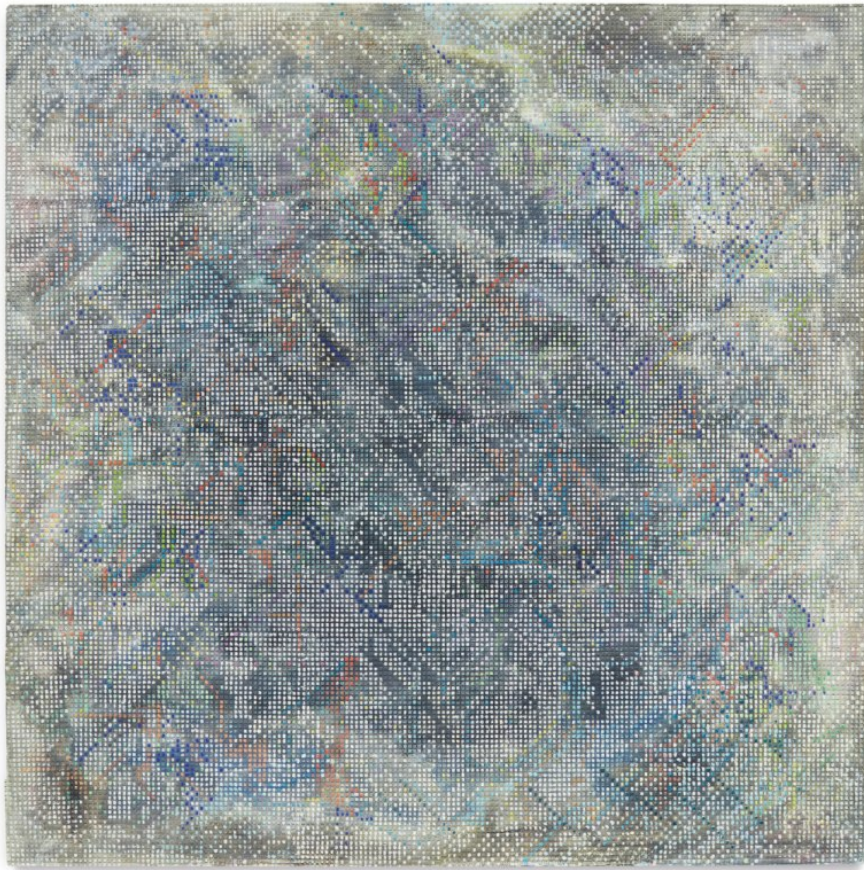


A LOOK BACK: FOR 8 YEARS, PRESIDENT OBAMA TOUTED MERITS OF ART FOR CHANGE



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Nov. 14 Evening Auction – Lot 36: JACK WHITTEN, “Ancient Mentor I,” 1985 (oil and acrylic on canvas, 66 3/4 by 66 3/4 inches / 169.5 by 169.5 cm.). | Estimate \$800,000-\$1,200,000. **Sold for \$2,235,000 (including fees).**
RECORD

The current auction record for Jack Whitten (1939-2018) was set one year ago on Nov. 17, 2017, at Sotheby’s New York. His 1986 painting “The Ghost of Joseph Beuys” sold for \$855,000 (including fees), against an estimate of \$200,000-\$300,000.

“Ancient Mentor I” (1985), the current painting up for auction has an expected estimate that surpasses the existing record. The video at the top of this page explores Whitten’s biography and the techniques he used to make the painting.

Nov. 14 Evening Auction – Lot 3: HENRY TAYLOR, “I’ll Put a Spell on You,” 2004 (acrylic and newsprint on canvas, 54 x 77 inches / 137.2 by 195.6 cm.). | Estimate \$150,000-\$200,000. **Sold for \$975,000 (including fees).**
RECORD

On June 26, Los Angeles artist Henry Taylor achieved a new artist record when “C&H” (2006) sold for \$363,845 (including fees) at Sotheby’s London. The large-scale painting measures 68 x 77 inches and depicts a group of well-dressed people gathered seemingly to take a photo on a patch of green grass. The logo for the California & Hawaiian Sugar Company hovers behind them. Meanwhile, the artist has inserted himself into the image looming large in the background as though protectively watching over them. According to Sotheby’s catalog essay, the group is composed of “friends, family, acquaintances, homeless people, psychiatric patients, and art world colleagues, critics and viewers.” SEE IMAGE [here](#).

The estimate on “C&H” (approximately \$159,348-\$239,022) was in the same range as the estimate for the current lot on offer.

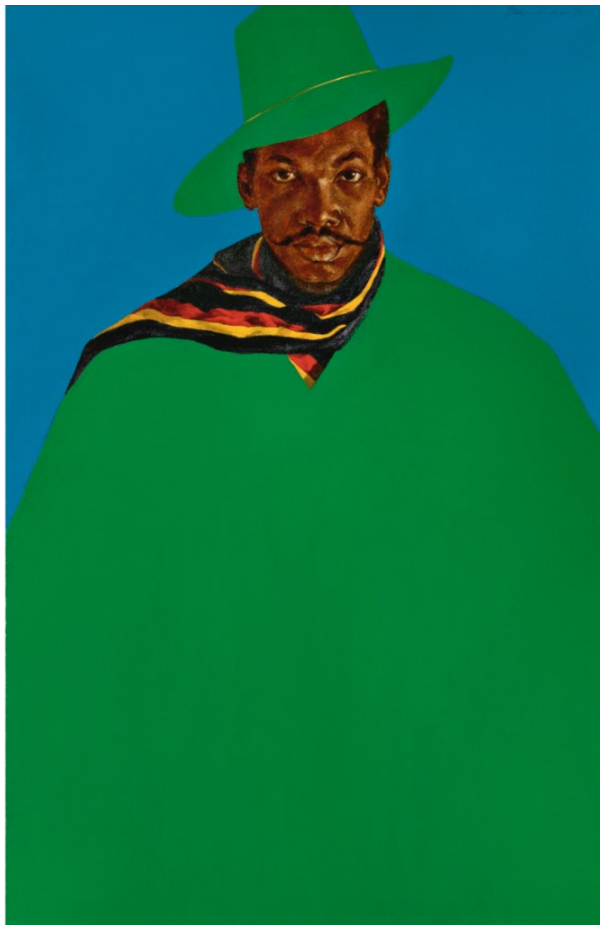


Nov. 14 Evening Auction – **Lot 6:** MARK BRADFORD, “Disappear Like a Dope Fiend,” 2006 (mixed media collage on canvas, 47 3/8 by 61 1/4 inches / 120.3 by 155.6 cm.). | Estimate \$1,800,000-\$2,500,000. **Sold for \$3,855,000 (including fees)**

Bradford’s current record at auction stands at nearly \$12 million, achieved when “Helter Skelter I” (2007) sold at Phillips London on March 8. The sale of the painting, which was owned by John McEnroe, was heavily promoted. The estimate for “Helter Skelter I” was set at about \$8.3 to \$11 million, which was higher than

Bradford's previous record (about \$5.7 million). The Broad Museum in Los Angeles was later revealed as the buyer of "Helter Skelter I."

FIND MORE about Mark Bradford's Helter Skelter I on Culture Type [here](#) and [here](#)



Nov. 15 Day Auction – [Lot 158](#): BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, "Sir Nelson Solid," 1970 (oil on canvas, 46 x 30 inches / 116.8 by 76.2 cm.). | Estimate \$500,000-\$700,000. **Sold for \$783,000 (including fees)**



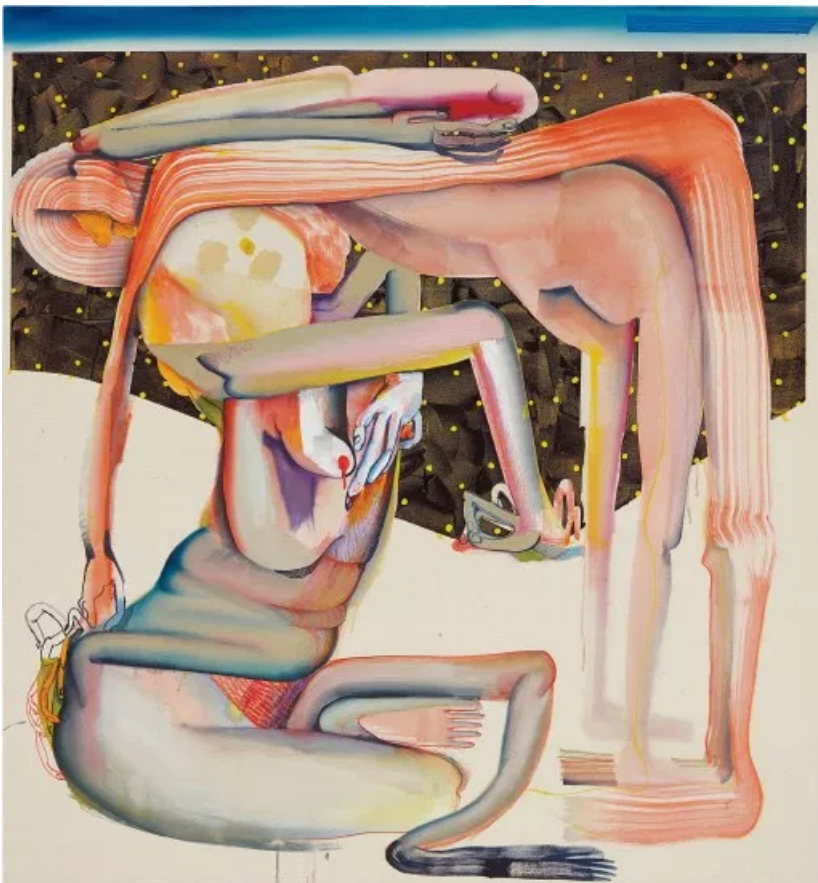
Nov. 15 Day Auction – [Lot 430](#): ROBERT COLESCOTT, "Cotton," May 1989 (acrylic on canvas, 84 1/8 x 72 1/8 inches / 213.7 x 183.2 cm.). | Estimate \$100,000-\$150,000. **Sold for \$663,000 (including fees). RECORD (this high mark held for several hours before being surpassed by an [evening auction sale](#) at Christie's**

PHILLIPS NEW YORK

Nov. 14, Day Sale – [Lot 214](#): SAM MIDDLETON, "Jazz on Easter Sunday," 1961 (collage and gouache on board, 33 x 47 7/8 inches / 83.8 x 121.6 cm.). | Estimate \$15,000-\$25,000. **Sold for \$17,500 (including fees). RECORD**

Sam Middleton (1927-2015) established a new artist record last month at Swann Auction Galleries. His [Untitled \(1962\)](#), oil and sand on masonite board, painting was featured in the Oct. 4 African-American Fine Art Sale and yielded \$13,750 (including fees), an artist record. The [current lot](#) for sale at Phillips carries an estimate that is higher than the artist's high mark.

FIND MORE about the [life and work of Sam Middleton](#) on Culture Type



Nov. 15 Evening Sale – Lot 1: CHRISTINA QUARLES, "Pull on Thru Tha Nite," 2017 (acrylic on canvas, 60 x 56 inches / 152.4 x 142.2 cm.) | Estimate \$30,000-\$50,000. **Sold for \$225,000 (including fees). MAJOR AUCTION DEBUT**

The Phillips catalog essay describes the work of Los Angeles-based, emerging artist Christina Quarles as “upending fixed notions of race, gender and, space.”

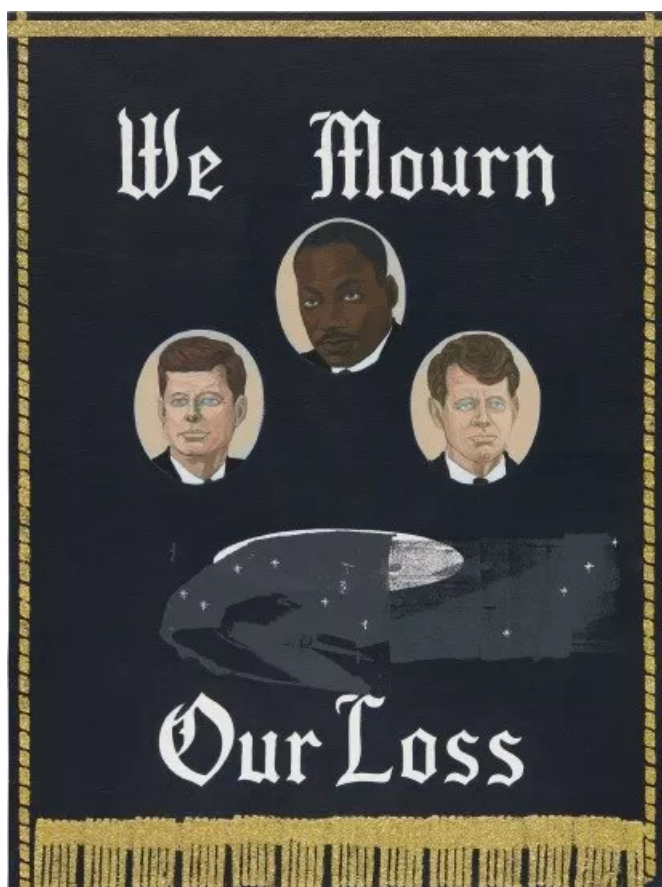
“Christina Quarles / MATRIX 271,” the artist’s first solo museum exhibition is on view at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum through Nov. 18. On view at London gallery Pilar Corrias Gallery in September, “Christina Quarles: Always Brightest Before Tha Dusk,” was her first UK exhibition. In addition, Quarles was featured in Made in L.A. 2018, the Hammer Museum biennial, and also participated in recent group shows at the Studio Museum in Harlem (“Fictions”) and the New Museum in New York (“Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon”).

The painting up for auction, “Pull on Thru Tha Nite” (2017), was on view in “Baby, I Want Yew To Know All Tha Folks I Am,” her solo exhibition at David Castillo Gallery in Miami. Quarles’s painting is the first lot in Phillips evening sale and the work is her first to appear at a major auction.



Nov. 15 Evening Sale – Lot 14: KERRY JAMES MARSHALL, “Terra Incognita,” 1991 (acrylic, ink and paper collage laid on canvas with metal grommets, 94 1/4 x 74 5/8 inches / 239.4 x 189.5 cm.). | Estimate \$2,500,000-3,500,000. **Sold for \$2,775,000 (including fees)**

Kerry James Marshall holds the record for the achieving the highest price at auction among living African American artists. In May, “Past Times” (1977), Marshall’s grand-scale painting of African Americans at leisure, sold for more than \$21.1 million (nearly twice estimate of \$8 million to \$12 million). It was later revealed that Sean Combs was the winning bidder.



Nov. 15 Evening Sale – Lot 37: KERRY JAMES MARSHALL, “We Mourn Our Loss #1,” 1997 (acrylic, glitter and graphite on Masonite, 48 x 36 inches / 121.9 x 91.4 cm.). | Estimate \$1,000,000-1,500,000. **UNSOLD**

UPDATE (11/14-11/15/18): Auction results added

BOOKSHELF

A number of books published this year explore the work of artists featured in this week's auctions. [“Sam Gilliam: The Music of Color: 1967–1973”](#) documents Gilliam's exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel, his first retrospective in a European museum. [“Jack Whitten: Odyssey: Sculpture 1963–2017”](#) coincides with the first presentation of Jack Whitten's sculptural works and [“Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed”](#) explores the artist's studio practice through his notes, interviews and other documentation. [“Henry Taylor”](#) is the first major monograph to survey the Los Angeles artist's practice. In addition, three volumes were published to coincide with Adrian Piper's traveling retrospective, currently on view at the Hammer Museum, including [“Adrian Piper: A Synthesis of Intuitions 1965–2016.”](#)

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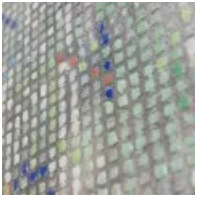
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Nearing \$1 Million, Henry Taylor's 'I'll Put a Spell on You' Sets New Artist Record

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JOYCE OWENS says:
Nov 15, 2018

Reply

I think these are accomplished artists who did the work developing their own signature styles and deserve the recognition. Most, if not all of them have garnered recognition throughout their careers...I know a couple of these artists and admire their deep awareness of the hurdles they would need to get around to sell their art in the millions. The AfriCobra artists have had several exhibitions in recent years...I am grateful some are still alive to see their success. They had three women members. Barkley Hendricks insisted on figuration when other artists were conceptual or installation artists. These artists have all earned their place in art history. I wish art schools would teach students how to get noticed...technique matters less than who knows you!

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