



### Welcome to Culture Type!

An exploration of black art through vintage and contemporary books, magazines and catalogs, Culture Type shares invaluable interestingness culled from the published record on black art.

ABOUT  
BOOKSHELF  
CONTACT

SEARCH



BOOKS & CATALOGS

MAGAZINES

EXHIBITIONS

RECOMMENDED

AUCTIONS

ART AGENDA

NEWS

CULTURE TALKS

# Record Breaker: Norman Lewis Painting Sells for Nearly \$1 Million at Swann Auction

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on Dec 20, 2015 - 10:42 am

No Comments



THE MOMENTUM SURROUNDING NORMAN LEWIS (1909-1979) continued earlier this week when a large-scale abstract painting by the artist garnered nearly \$1 million at Swann Auction Galleries. The [Dec. 15 auction](#) featured seven Lewis works, including the sale's [top lot](#), an oil on canvas painting executed in a limited beige palette, estimated to sell for \$250,000-\$350,000.

According to Swann, the painting has never been publicly exhibited, and it is described in the auction catalog as "newly discovered" and "previously unrecorded." Depicting a march of abstract figures, the untitled circa 1958 work exceeded expectations and sold for \$800,000 (\$965,000 including fees), more than twice the high estimate and an

## CONNECT



## RECENT POSTS



Popular on Culture Type: Top 10 Posts of 2015

Dec 31, 2015



Culture Type Picks: 14 Best Black Art Books of 2015

Dec 30, 2015



The Year in Black Art: April 2015

Dec 27, 2015



The Year in Black Art: March 2015

Dec 26, 2015



Record Breaker: Norman Lewis Painting Sells for Nearly \$1 Million at Swann Auction

Dec 20, 2015

## POPULAR NOW



Culture Type Picks: 14 Best Black Art Books of 2015



Spring Openings: 28 New Exhibitions Feature Black Artists



Where My Girls At? 20 Black Female Artists with Solo Exhibitions on View this Fall



artist record.



Nigel Freeman, director of African-American Fine Art at Swann, said in the sales results press release that the Dec. 15 sale was the department's "best auction to date," exceeding sales totals for all of its previous African American fine art auctions since the house inaugurated the category in 2007. The hammer total was \$2,529,350 and the sales total (including the buyer's premium fees) was \$3,117,132.

Six lots surpassed the \$100,000 mark, including "Tuff Tony" (1978), an acrylic painting by Barkley L. Hendricks, and "Recognition" (1970), a black marble sculpture by Elizabeth Catlett. "Friends," a 1944 painting by Catlett that covered the catalog, sold for \$81,250 (including fees), a record price for a non-sculpture work by the artist.

BORN IN HARLEM, Lewis's introduction to art came during the Harlem Renaissance when he was a student of sculptor Augusta Savage. Later, he was a painting instructor at the Harlem Community Art Center during the Works Progress Administration. When Lewis won the prestigious Carnegie

International Award in Painting in 1955, he was the first African American artist to earn the honor. In 1956, he was selected to represent the United States at the Venice Biennial. Lewis and Jacob Lawrence were the only two black artists among 36 included.

Alain Locke featured Lewis's work in the 1945 exhibition "The Negro Artist Comes of Age: A National Survey of Contemporary American Artists" and the following year he joined Marian Willard Gallery in New York, which represented a stable of abstract artists. Lewis was represented by the gallery from 1946-64 and, over the years, his exhibitions there garnered a positive critical response.

Under appreciated during his lifetime, Lewis made significant contributions to abstract expressionism that have only begun to be broadly acknowledged and seriously examined in the past dozen years or so. A [New York Times review](#) of "Norman Lewis: Black Paintings, 1946-1977," at the Studio Museum in Harlem, referred to the 1998 exhibition as "an ongoing attempt to restore his work from near oblivion to public and historical attention."

Renewed interest in Lewis's practice was evidenced when the [previous record](#) for his work was set at Swann on Oct. 3, 2013. A bold blue composition, the untitled work sold for \$480,000 (\$581,000 including fees).



[Lot 22](#) | NORMAN LEWIS, "Untitled," circa 1957 (oil on linen canvas). | Estimate \$250,000-\$250,000. Sold for Oct. 3, 2013 for \$581,000.



The Year in Black Art: March 2015



The Year in Black Art: April 2015

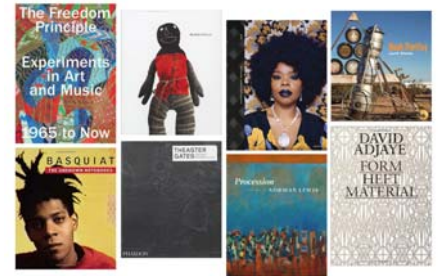


Fall Exhibitions: 42 Must-See Museum Shows Featuring Black Artists



Alma Thomas is Given Pride of Place at the White House

## CULTURE TYPE PICKS: 14 BEST BLACK ART BOOKS OF 2015



## CULTURE TALK: FRANKLIN SIRMANS ON LEADING THE PÉREZ ART MUSEUM IN MIAMI



## THE YEAR IN BLACK ART: APRIL 2015



The Jewish Museum mounted "[From the Margins: Lee Krasner | Norman Lewis, 1945-1952.](#)" in September 2014. At the end of the year, Michael Rosenfeld Gallery in New York announced its representation of the Norman Lewis Estate. This year, the much anticipated "[Procession: The Art of Norman Lewis.](#)" the artist's first major museum retrospective, opened on Nov. 13 at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA). Then on Nov. 20, the Newark Museum [announced it had acquired](#) a untitled Lewis painting currently on view in the PAFA exhibition.

Finally, a photo of Lewis appeared on the cover of the Sunday, Nov. 29 edition of the New York Times (Nov. 28 online) illustrating a major feature. "[Black Artists and the March Into the Museum](#)" details the long overdue institutional attention finally beginning to be paid to otherwise accomplished artists such as Lewis. As the Times described the article, "after decades of spotty acquisitions and token exhibitions, American museums are rewriting the history of 20th-century art to include black artists."

SWANN'S FIRST SALE dedicated to African American fine art in February 2007 included eight works by Lewis. I asked Freeman about the market for Lewis's work and any role Swann may have had in bringing African American artists, including Lewis, to the attention of institutions.

"Our department at Swann has been steadily developing the secondary market for Norman Lewis for years, and working closely with museums and institutions. Their involvement has been a large part of the growth in this market. And we have had major acquisitions by numerous important collections such as the Art Institute of Chicago, Brooklyn Museum, the Cleveland Museum of Art, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, the MFA Boston, the National Museum of African-American History and Culture, just to name a few," Freeman responded by email.

“*We have now set three major auction records for Lewis since 2008... This recent painting was perfectly timed to take advantage of a ballooning market for Lewis over the last two years.*” — Nigel Freeman, Swann Auction Galleries

"We have now set three major auction records for Lewis since 2008 when the MFA Boston purchased a painting from the Dudley collection for \$312,000. This recent painting [the record-breaking lot on Dec. 15] was perfectly timed to take advantage of a ballooning market for Lewis over the last two years. We have seen a huge demand for major works in anticipation of the PAFA retrospective. So this is the outcome of many years in development."

"Procession" is on view in at PAFA in Philadelphia through April 3, 2016, when it will travel to the Amon Carter Museum of American Art (June 4-Aug. 21, 2016) and the Chicago Cultural Center (Sept. 17, 2016- Jan. 8, 2017).  
CT

TOP IMAGE: [Lot 49: NORMAN LEWIS \(1909 – 1979\), "Untitled," circa 1958 \(oil on linen canvas\).](#) | Estimate \$250,000-\$350,000. Sold on Dec. 15, 2015 for \$965,000.

1,195 total views, 24 views today



### You Might Also Like:



Tags: Norman Lewis, Swann Auction Galleries

### WHERE MY GIRLS AT? 20 BLACK FEMALE ARTISTS WITH SOLO EXHIBITIONS ON VIEW THIS FALL



### FALL EXHIBITIONS: 42 MUST-SEE MUSEUM SHOWS FEATURING BLACK ARTISTS



### MODERN PAINTERS: ENGAGING AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS IN TALKS ABOUT POLICE BRUTALITY



### ALMA THOMAS IS GIVEN PRIDE OF PLACE AT THE WHITE HOUSE