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## Georgia O'Keeffe Made 5 Portraits of Beauford Delaney, 1 is For Sale at Christie's

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on Nov 9, 2018 • 7:58 am

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EVENTUALLY HER SUBJECTS WERE flowers, bones, and the New Mexico landscape, the Modern images for which she is best known. But over the course of her career, [Georgia O'Keeffe](#) (1887-1986) also made a very limited number of portraits. **Beauford Delaney** (1901-1979) was her most frequent sitter. She made five portraits of the artist—three charcoal drawings, and two pastels.

"[Beauford Delaney](#)," a charcoal on paper work executed in 1943 is featured in the [An American Place auction](#) at Christie's New York on Nov. 13. The sale features Barney A. Ebsworth's highly regarded collection of 20th century art. The auction is historic, the first to be recorded [with blockchain technology](#).



**Lot 2B:** GEORGIA O'KEEFFE, "Beauford Delaney," 1943 (charcoal on paper, 24 3/4 x 18 1/2 inches / 62.9 x 47 cm.).  
| Estimate \$200,000-\$300,000

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The 42-lot sale features paintings with eight-figure estimates by Willem de Kooning, Joan Mitchell, Jackson Pollock, and Jasper Johns. "[Chop Suey](#)," (1929) by Edward Hopper carries a high estimate of \$100 million.

There are two works by O'Keeffe in the auction, a [horn and feather painting](#) and the Delaney portrait. The drawing is a realistic depiction of Delaney, evoking both compassion and dignity. She used soft shading to create highlights and shadows that add dimension to his features.

O'Keeffe and Delaney had a connection through Alfred Stieglitz, the famed photographer who was married to O'Keeffe from 1924 to 1946. Stieglitz's gallery served as an informal gathering place for artists. Delaney came on the scene in the 1930s. In the lot essay for the portrait, Christie's describes the milieu:

"Delaney first entered the rarified circle of the foremost American Modernists in New York during the 1930s, after fellow artist and friend Stuart Davis recommended he engage with the famed impresario Alfred Stieglitz. Spending time at Stieglitz's gallery, An American Place, he participated in critical discourse with other artists, including Arthur Dove, John Marin and O'Keeffe."

DELANEY PAINTED PORTRAITS, TOO. He is recognized for his self portraits and depictions of James Baldwin, [Marian Anderson](#), and his brother, the painter Joseph Delaney, among others.

The Knoxville, Tenn.-born artist lived in Boston before heading to New York in 1929. The Harlem Renaissance was in full swing and the Depression was beginning to take hold. An active figure uptown and downtown, after more than two decades in the city, Delaney moved to Paris in 1953. There he became close with Baldwin, a regular subject of his portraits.

"Settling in the Left Bank neighborhood of Montparnasse, an artists' enclave, Delaney, like Baldwin, relished a sense of freedom as a gay black man that he did not have in the United States," the [New York Times](#) reported about his years as an expatriate.

*"Settling in the Left Bank neighborhood of Montparnasse, an artists' enclave, Delaney, like Baldwin, relished a sense of freedom as a gay black man that he did not have in the United States."*



One of Georgia O'Keeffe's portraits of Delaney is in the collection of The Philadelphia Museum of Art. [The label for the work](#) says in part: "A regular at Stieglitz's New York gallery, An American Place, Delaney was particularly impressed by O'Keeffe's work, which he described as 'alive and quite amazing.' O'Keeffe, in turn, deeply respected Delaney's painting and wrote a tribute to him in the catalogue for his 1973 solo exhibition at Darthea Speyer's gallery in Paris." Shown, from left, Beauford Delaney and Georgia O'Keeffe.

In Paris, Delaney charted a new direction and began focusing on abstraction. His expressionist canvases were captivating meditations on light. Though his creativity blossomed, it wasn't matched by economic success, which eluded him. Meanwhile, he was critically recognized stateside.

["Amazing Grace: A life of Beauford Delaney,"](#) by David Leeming, illuminates the disconnect between the artist's acclaim and his ability to support himself.

"...1970 and 1971 were years of success of sorts. Georgia O'Keeffe's portrait of [Delaney] was on display at the Whitney Museum in New York, the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery asked to borrow the Marian Anderson portrait that only a few years earlier they had declined to buy, *Jet* magazine referred to him as the 'Dean' of African-American painters, his portrait of Henry Miller was in the November 1971 issue of *Playboy*, and he was included in a 1970 exhibition called 'Afro-American Artists Abroad,' presented at the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts at the National Center of Afro American Artists in Dorchester, Massachusetts, and at the University of Texas Art Museum in (Austin) Texas..."

But when Romare Bearden, Sam Middleton, and Herbert Gentry came by to visit one afternoon and commented on their friend's fame, he answered, 'I ain't seen no famous money, and I'm hungry.'" The trio



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went off that night to Haynes for soul food and reminiscing."

*"...1970 and 1971 were years of success of sorts. Georgia O'Keeffe's portrait of [Delaney] was on display at the Whitney Museum in New York, the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery asked to borrow the Marian Anderson portrait that only a few years earlier they had declined to buy..."*

Later that decade, the Studio Museum in Harlem presented the first major retrospective of Delaney's work in 1978. The year after, suffering from mental illness, the artist died destitute.

Seventy-five years ago, a white woman chose a black man as her subject. The Christie's essay concludes by citing the progressive and consequential nature of O'Keeffe's choice:

"...the fact that the pioneering female painter chose to dedicate such a notable body of work to the African-American Modernist Delaney radically places these two potential outsiders firmly among one of the most important art groups in the history of America, solidifying the position of both painter and sitter in the early Modern American canon." **CT**

FIND OUT more about Georgia O'Keeffe's [portraits of Beauford Delaney](#).

FIND OUT more about artist resale rights and how artists and their estates might benefit from secondary sales on the auction market [here](#).

#### BOOKSHELF

*"Amazing Grace: A Life of Beauford Delaney"* by David Leeming was published in 1998. Richard Long (1927-2013), the collector and Emory University scholar called the biography a lovingly crafted narrative. The cover features a self-portrait of Delaney.

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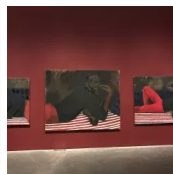
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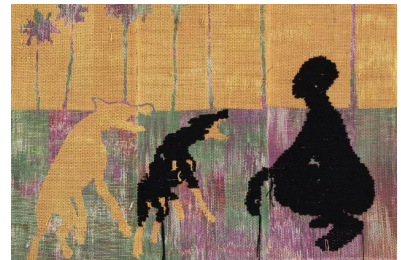
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