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# Charles White Drawing Tops Swann African American Art Sale, 12 Artists Achieve Auction Records

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on Oct 9, 2018 · 7:58 pm

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DAYS BEFORE THE OPENING of “[Charles White: A Retrospective](#)” at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York on Oct. 7, a dramatic drawing by the pivotal, 20th-century figure topped the [latest African-American Fine Art sale](#) at Swann Auction Galleries. “Nobody Knows My Name #1” sold for \$485,000 (including fees) on Oct. 4. **Charles White** (1918-1979) made the work in 1965, when he was living and working in Los Angeles. That same year, Malcolm X was assassinated, the Voting Rights Act was passed, and days later the Watts Rebellion broke out.

The lot description provided by Swann notes the symbolism of the work and its connection to the fraught period: “While the swirling blackness of the charcoal almost makes the drawing abstract, its symbolism has a strong message. The darkness surrounding this young man was very much a portent of the times.”



**Lot 78:** CHARLES WHITE (1918-1979), “Nobody Knows My Name #1,” 1965 (charcoal and crayon on illustration board, 737 x 1003 mm; 29 x 39.5 inches). | Estimate \$100,000-\$150,000. **Sold for \$400,000 (hammer price)/\$485,000 (including fees) TOP LOT**

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Works by White, **Robert Colescott**, **Eldzier Cortor**, **Stanley Whitney**, **Beauford Delaney**, **Hughie Lee-Smith** and **Sam Gilliam** topped the auction, all selling for \$100,000 or more (including fees). Artist records were set for Colescott, Cortor, **Noah Purifoy**, **Melvin Edwards**, **Betye Saar**, and **Emma Amos**. Overall, 12 African American artists achieved new benchmarks, according to Swann. Auction records were also set by **Richard Mayhew**, **Sylvester Britton Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence**, **Sam Middleton**, **Richard Yarde**, and **Barbara Chase-Riboud**.

Buyers were enthusiastic, bidding up a selection of works to prices that were two, three, and five times their estimates or more. "**Nobody Knows My Name #1**" by White was estimated at \$100,000-\$150,000 and brought \$485,000. White's 1965 drawing addresses the feeling of invisibility many black people feel in American society, particularly during the period when it was produced. The work references the title of James Baldwin's 1961 collection of essays and the central theme of "Invisible Man," the 1952 novel by Ralph Ellison.

**Stanley Whitney's** painting "**Radical Openness**" carried an estimate of \$35,000-\$50,000 and sold for \$185,000. "**Untitled (African Figure)**," by **Beauford Delaney** garnered \$173,000 against an estimate of \$40,000-\$60,000. Most notably, "**Down in the Dumps: So Long Sweetheart**," a large 1983 painting by Colescott was estimated to sell for \$35,000-50,000 and the price shot up to \$329,000, a record for the artist.

Colescott was the first African American artist to represent the United States at the Venice Biennale with a solo exhibition in the American Pavilion (1997). In recent years, renewed attention has been brought to his provocative and insightful work.

At the end of last year, Blum & Poe, the Los Angeles gallery, [announced its representation](#) of Colescott's estate. He was featured in "[Figuring History: Robert Colescott, Kerry James Marshall, Mickalene Thomas](#)," the three-artist exhibition on view earlier this year at the Seattle Art Museum. Late in 2019, Lowery Stokes Sims is curating a traveling retrospective of Colescott, which will originate at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati.



**Lot 145:** ROBERT COLESCOTT (1925-2009), "Down in the Dumps: So Long Sweetheart," 1983 (acrylic on cotton canvas). | Estimate \$35,000-\$50,000. **Sold for \$270,000 (hammer price) / \$329,999 (including fees) RECORD**

A number of other artists whose works performed well at the sale are also featured in or are the subject of major exhibitions. After debuting at the Art Institute of Chicago, White's retrospective opened at MoMA on Sunday (Oct. 7), and will travel to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in Spring 2019. White is also featured in "[Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power](#)," which is on view at the Brooklyn Museum. The groundbreaking exhibition also presents work by Amos, Hammons, Purifoy, Saar, **Benny Andrews**, **Romare Bearden**, **Roy DeCarava**, **Elizabeth Catlett**, **Ed Clark**, **Sam Gilliam**, **Norman Lewis**, **Howardena Pindell**, and **William T. Williams**, all of whom were represented in the Swann sale.



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



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

Several galleries in New York are also showing artists whose work was available at the auction and appears in "Soul of a Nation." A half-century retrospective of Pindell is currently at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

THE SALE INCLUDED 185 lots and 164 were sold yielding a sell-through rate of 89 percent. Four lots expected to sell in the low six figures—by Catlett (2), Alvin D. Loving Jr., and Beauford Delaney—were among the works that went unsold. Estimates for sale as a whole were \$2,594,600-\$3,946,900 (without fees). The sales total was \$3,767,532 (including fees).

Swann has dedicated sales to African American art since 2007. Over the past decade, as the broader art world has turned its attention to the work of African American artists and major auction houses increasingly offer their works in seasonal modern and contemporary art sales, Swann continues to mount sales offering a range of quality works in the category not found elsewhere.

Traditionally, the auction house has concentrated on historic and 20th century artists. More recently, it has been offering a modest selection of works by contemporary African American artists, including mid-career figures who came to prominence in the 1990s.

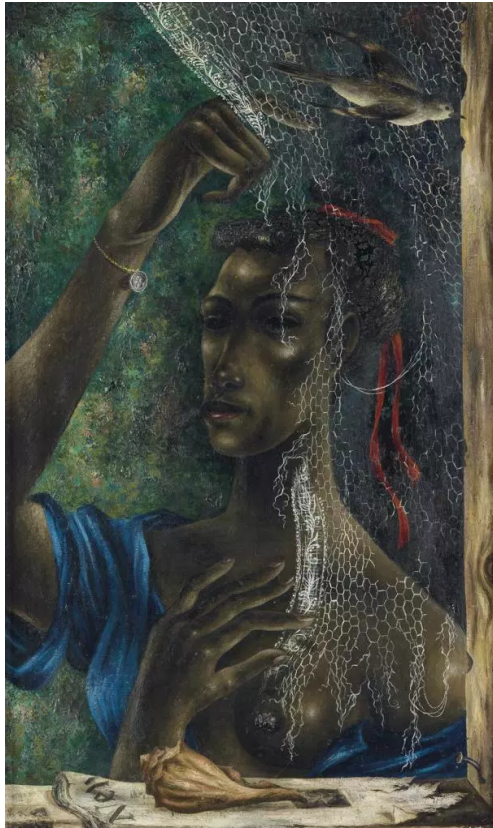
Last week's sale featured works by **Richmond Barthé, Augusta Savage, Aaron Douglas, William H. Johnson, Lois Mailou Jones, Jacob Lawrence, and Joseph Delaney**, alongside lots by **David Hammons, Howarda Pindell, Kerry James Marshall, and Carrie Mae Weems**, as well as **Kara Walker, Lorna Simpson, Trenton Doyle Hancock, and Rashid Johnson**, whose work covered the catalog.

Johnson's 1997 photograph "Jonathan with Hands" was estimated at \$7,000-\$10,000 and sold for an exponentially higher price: \$65,000. CT

READ MORE about how artists might benefit from secondary market sales in a recent article that makes the case for artist resale royalties

#### BOOKSHELF

The Museum of Modern Art and Art Institute of Chicago co-published a fully illustrated exhibition catalog to accompany the Charles White retrospective. The publication features contributions by Kerry James Marshall, Kellie Jones, and Deborah Willis. "Figuring History: Robert Colescott, Kerry James Marshall, Mickalene Thomas." documents the Seattle Art Museum exhibition. "Howarda Pindell: What Remains To Be Seen" coincides with Howarda Pindell's five-decade retrospective. "Rashid Johnson: Message to Our Folks", accompanied the artist's first major solo museum exhibition organized by MCA Chicago.



PYER MOSS STAGED A POWERFUL, ART-INSPIRED RUNWAY SHOW AT HISTORIC BLACK HERITAGE SITE



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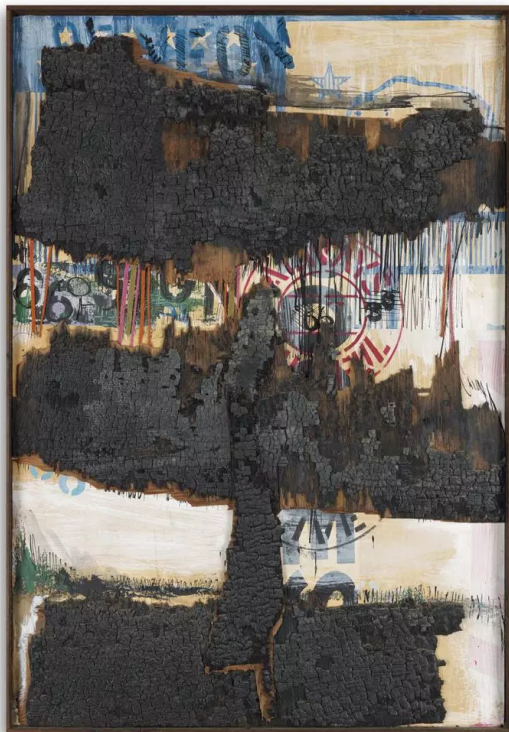


KERRY JAMES MARSHALL'S 'PAST TIMES' SOARS TO RECORD-SETTING \$21.1 MILLION AT SOTHEBY'S, ARTIST ASSUMES MANTLE AS MOST EXPENSIVE LIVING AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTIST

**Lot 25:** ELDZIER CORTOR (1916-2015), "Sea of Time," 1945 (oil on linen canvas). | Estimate \$200,000-\$300,000. Sold for \$200,000 (hammer price) / \$245,000 (including fees) RECORD



**Lot 152:** STANLEY WHITNEY (1946- ), "Radical Openness," 1991 (oil on cotton canvas). | Estimate \$35,000-\$50,000. Sold for \$150,000 (hammer price) / \$185,000 (including fees)



FOR FAITH RINGGOLD, THE AMERICAN FLAG HAS ALWAYS BEEN A POTENT AND POWERFUL SYMBOL



NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY: TITUS KAPHAR AND KEN GONZALES-DAY EXPLORE 'UNSEEN' NARRATIVES IN HISTORIC PORTRAITURE



YINKA SHONIBARE WRAPPED MORE THAN 200 BOOKS IN 'AFRICAN' TEXTILES, HIS 'AFRICAN LIBRARY' IS DESIGNED TO START A CONVERSATION ABOUT IMMIGRATION



**Lot 91:** NOAH PURIFOY (1917-2004), "Untitled (66 Signs of Neon)," circa 1966 (mixed media assemblage, including burnt wood, acrylic, stencil and color felt, on plywood board). | Estimate \$30,000-\$40,000. **Sold for \$65,000 (hammer price) / \$81,250 (including fees) RECORD**



**Lot 135:** MELVIN EDWARDS (1937- ), "Lusaka," 1980 (welded steel). | Estimate \$30,000-\$40,000. **Sold for \$56,000 (hammer price) / \$70,000 (including fees) RECORD**

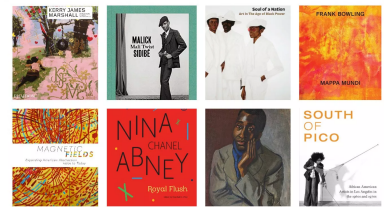


**Lot 171:** RASHID JOHNSON (1977- ), "Jonathan with Hands," 1997 (Van Dyke Brown photo-emulsion print on heavy wove paper, Artist's proof). | Estimate \$7,000-\$10,000. **Sold for \$52,000 (hammer price) / \$65,000 (including fees) COVER LOT**

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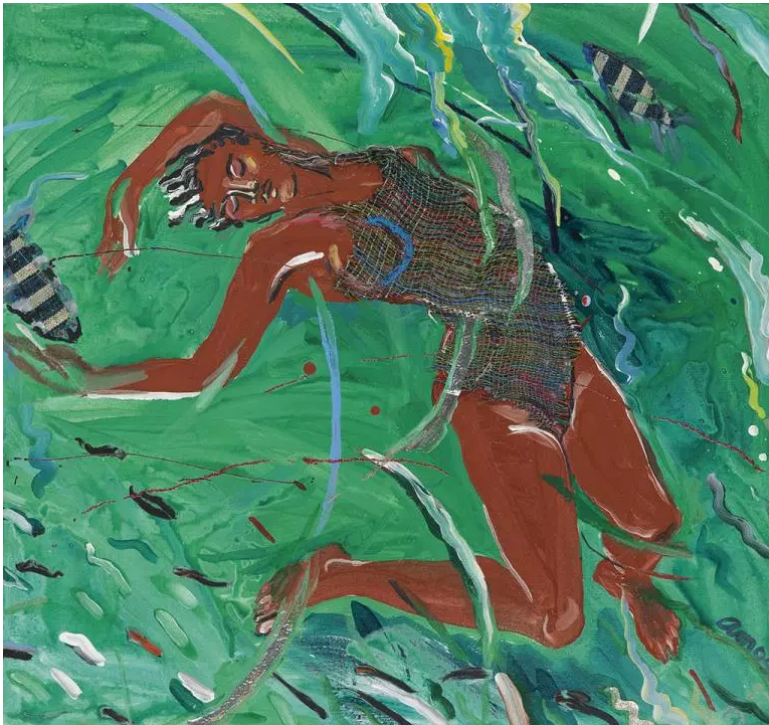


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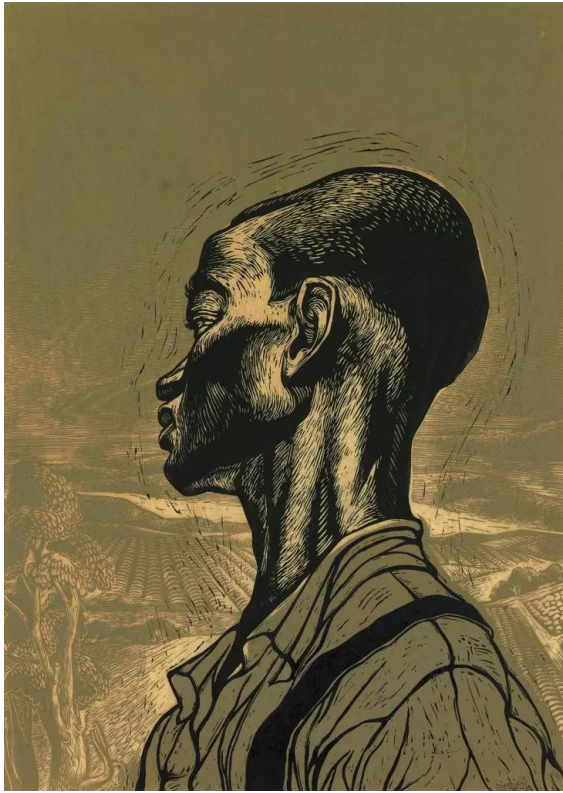


**Lot 107:** BETYE SAAR (1926- ), "Adori," 1973 (mixed media assemblage box). | Estimate \$10,000-\$15,000 | Sold for \$34,000 (hammer price) / \$42,500 (including fees) RECORD

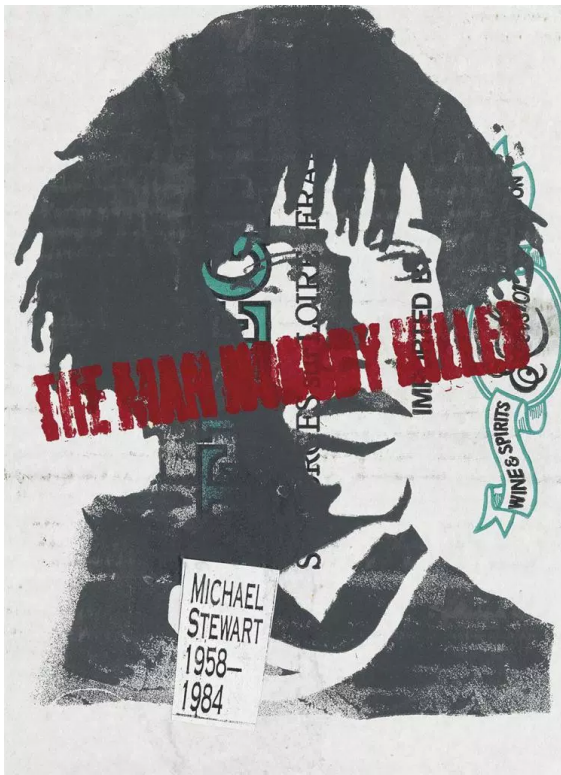


**Lot 148:** EMMA AMOS (1938- ), "Arched Swimmer," circa 1987 (acrylic with glitter and various fabric and threads)

on linen canvas). | Estimate \$10,000-\$15,000. **Sold for \$32,000 (hammer price) / \$40,000 (including fees)**  
**RECORD**



Lot 45: CHARLES WHITE (1918-1979), "Young Farmer (Young Worker)," 1953 (linoleum cut printed in tan and black on thin Japan paper). | Estimate \$8,000-\$12,000. **Sold for \$32,000 (hammer price) / \$40,000 (including fees)**

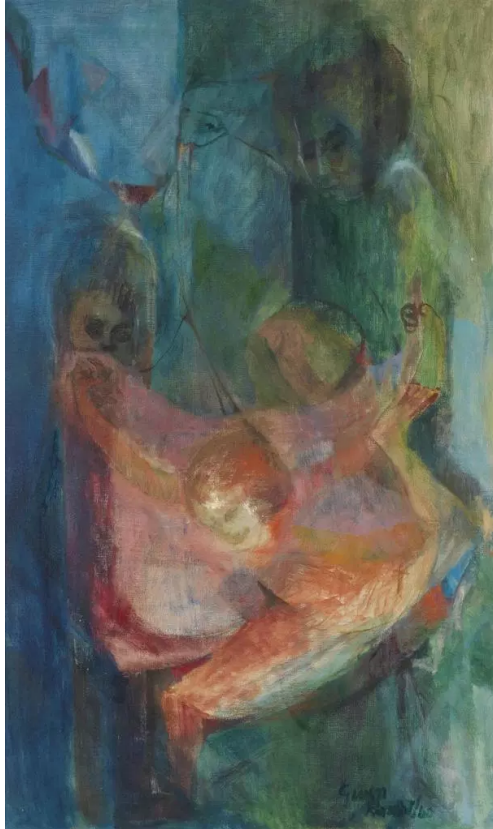


Lot 143: DAVID HAMMONS (1943- ), "The Man Nobody Killed," 1986 (color screenprint printed on cardboard). | Estimate \$3,000-\$5,000. Sold for \$24,000 (hammer price) / \$30,000 (including fees)





**Lot 132:** KERRY JAMES MARSHALL (1955- ), "South Central Los Angeles Folklife Festival," 1981 (linoleum cut printed in black and buff ink). | Estimate \$2,000-\$3,000. **Sold for \$15,000 (hammer price) / \$18,750 (including fees)**



**Lot 56:** GWENDOLYN KNIGHT LAWRENCE (1913-2005), "Dusk," 1960 (oil on linen canvas). | Estimate \$3,000-\$5,000. **Sold for \$11,000 (hammer price) / \$13,750 (including fees) RECORD**

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