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Black Art Stars Go to Auction to Benefit Harlem's Studio Museum

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As college interns at CBS Records, Val Carlotti and Thelma Golden learned how to make chart-topping music. Three decades later, they've teamed up to produce a hit art auction.

Next week, Sotheby's will auction 42 works to benefit the Studio Museum in Harlem, including coveted paintings by market stars Mark Bradford, Glenn Ligon and Njideka Akunyili Crosby.

Carlotti, who joined the auction house from Goldman Sachs about a year ago, and Golden, the Studio Museum's director since 2005, hosted a dinner and preview on Wednesday night. Among the guests: Frederick Terrell of Credit Suisse; Nicolas and Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn; Ron Mitchell, founder of human-resources tech startup Virgil; Sotheby's director Marsha Simms and museum board members Kathryn Chenault, Carol Sutton Lewis, Amelia Ogunlesi, Holly Peterson and Ann Tenenbaum.



Ann Tenenbaum, Thelma Golden and Val Carlotti.
Photographer: Amanda Gordon/Bloomberg



Amelia Ogunlesi and Kathryn Chenault
Photographer: Amanda Gordon/Bloomberg

Collectors across the U.S. are keenly focused on inserting black artists into the canon following generations of neglect. The signs are everywhere: from the portraits of Barack and Michelle Obama by Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sberald to billionaire Steve Cohen's gift of Chris Ofili's "Black Virgin Mary" to the Museum of Modern Art and Jean-Michel Basquiat's \$110 million auction record at Sotheby's a year ago.

"We're all having a moment," said artist Xaviera Simmons, crediting the contributions

of those preceding her, like Norman Lewis, Kerry James Marshall and Carrie Mae Weems.



Xaviera Simmons and Derrick Adams
Photographer: Amanda Gordon/Bloomberg

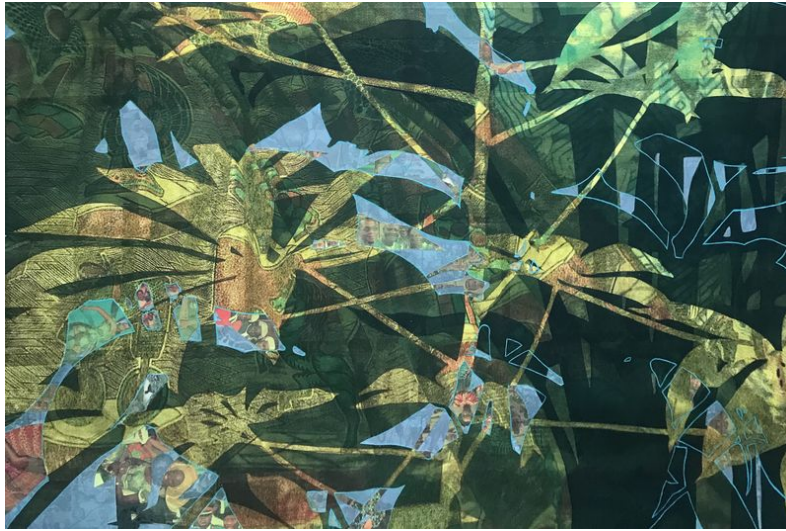
The auction could bring in as much as \$10 million if the works hit Sotheby's estimates. The goal is to raise funds to renovate and expand the museum's 125th Street home with a design by David Adjaye. Golden said the museum is 70 percent of the way to completing its \$175 million goal. This money will help create 82,000 square feet (7,618 square meters) of space that "will elevate our service to artists, audiences and our vibrant Harlem community," she said.

The auction's high caliber of work is a sign of the respect Golden has among the artists, who are donating their pieces.

"I feel like I'm doing it for family," said artist Derrick Adams. "You do almost anything for Thelma."

The evening sale of contemporary art on May 16 will include Bradford's 2018 "Speak, Birdman," a 5-by-6-foot kaleidoscopic map made with layers of paint and salvaged paper. It has an estimate of \$2 million to \$3 million. Another work is Ligon's "Stranger

#86," an 8-by-6-foot abstract painting made with oil stick and coal dust, estimated at \$1 million to \$1.5 million.



Detail of Njideka Akunyili Crosby's "Bush Babies," 2017. The work has an estimate of \$600,000 to \$800,000.

Photographer: Amanda Gordon/Bloomberg

The day sale on May 17 will include more affordable works. Toyin Ojih Odutola's ink and pencil drawing "From a Place of Goodness," depicting a head of a black woman, is estimated at \$10,000 to \$15,000. The artist, who was included in Studio Museum's "Fore" exhibition in 2012-2013, recently had a solo show at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Carlotti and Golden may not have stayed in the music business, but they booked a great act for after dinner: Jon Batiste, the band leader of "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," wowed the crowd with his renditions of Thelonious Monk and Louis Armstrong.



Jon Batiste

Photographer: Amanda Gordon/Bloomberg