



See What Top Dealers Are Bringing to Frieze New York



Top 25 Most Collectible Living Latin American Artists



Mysterious Asian Buyer Causes Sensation at Sotheby's \$368 Million Impres...

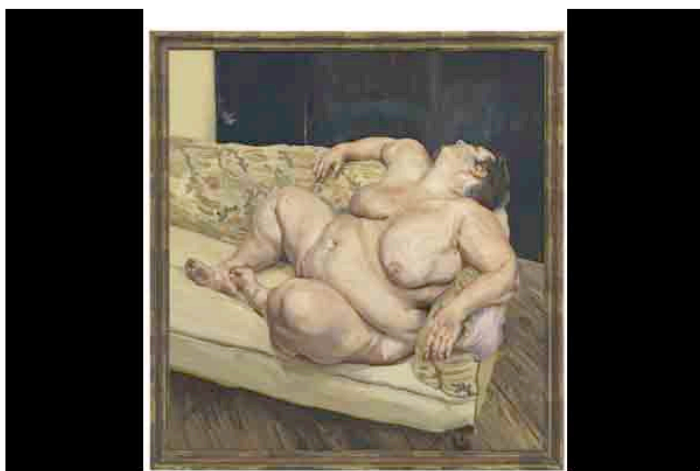


10 Tips To Make Art Fairs More Fun

## \$81.9 Million Rothko Leads Christie's Frenzied \$658.5 Million Contemporary Art Sale

Brian Boucher, Wednesday, May 13, 2015

SHARE ▾



In a night of frenzied selling, Christie's New York racked up \$658.5 million from the world's wealthiest over a two-and-a-quarter-hour sale of postwar and contemporary art, on the same day as the VIP preview of the Frieze art fair on Randalls Island (see [Ben Davis's Standout Artworks Amid the Chaos of Frieze New York 2015](#) and [Leonardo DiCaprio, Mike Myers Grace Celebrity VIP Frieze New York Preview](#)). The astronomical sale saw three works sell for north of \$50 million, eight for upwards of \$20 million, and 20 for better than \$10 million. It was the house's fifth-highest sale ever.

"Fifty million is the new normal," New York dealer Francis Beatty, of Richard Feigen & Co., said after the sale.

Mark Rothko's eight-foot-tall abstract *No. 10* (1958) was the prize lot. The painting was guaranteed to sell. Off the market for nearly 30 years, the canvas hasn't been on public view since 1987. It features the artist's trademark floating rectangles of color, in this case deep reds, floating in front of a black ground. Seven anonymous phone bidders slugged it out over nearly six minutes.

Even Arte Povera, "poor art," a post-war Italian movement that expressed scarcity, turned up very rich, with the night's first offering, a Giovanni Anselmo sculpture estimated at up to \$800,000, rising to eight times its high estimate to command \$6.4 million, a record for the artist. That set the tone for a night of wild spending.

Eight new auction records were set, including for Anselmo, Carroll Dunham (\$509,000), [Lucian Freud](#) (\$56.2 million), Hans Hoffmann (\$6.3 million), Robert Ryman (\$20.6 million), Sturtevant (\$5 million), and Rudolf Stingel (\$4.8 million).

[Robert Rauschenberg's](#) 1961 assemblage *Johanson's Painting* also set a record when it sold for \$18.6 million, beating his previous high by \$4 million. That work was one of 20 lots on offer early in the evening, that came from the collection of fabled New York dealer Ileana Sonnabend, which New York dealer [David Zwirner](#) described to artnet News as "beautiful material with a great provenance."

"That was a thing of beauty," New York dealer Cristin Tierney told [artnet News](#). "Just when you think auctions are about nothing but diamond dust, a bidding war over something rigorous and conceptual restores your faith in an intellectual elite. There are still some collectors out there who are the real deal." Several of the Sonnabend lots dramatically exceeded their estimates.

Coming in second-highest for the night was [Andy Warhol's \*Colored Mona Lisa\* \(1962\)](#), which went for \$56.2 million to New York megadealer Larry Gagosian, bidding from the sales floor against only a single other bidder, after just a two-minute contest. It was created the year after Leonardo da Vinci's iconic painting made a tour of the U.S.

London dealer [Pilar Ordovas](#) snagged the night's third-priciest lot, Lucian Freud's *Benefits Supervisor Resting* (1994), for \$56.2 million. She was bidding from the sales floor against several Christie's staffers bidding for clients by phone over a five-minute contest. Ordovas was formerly the deputy chairman of postwar and contemporary art for Christie's Europe. Estimated at up to \$50 million, the canvas shows the artist's friend Sue Tilley, a London government worker, naked and reclining on Freud's couch, her head thrown back.

"It's a pretty incredible painting and lusciously painted," Citi Art Advisory's Suzanne Gyorgy said.

[Francis Bacon's \*Portrait of Henrietta Moraes\* \(1963\)](#) commanded \$47.8 million to become the fourth-priciest lot of the night. It went to the house's Brett Gorvy, who was bidding on behalf of a client by phone, after a contest of only just over a minute. The five-and-a-half-foot-tall canvas shows Bacon's subject sprawled on a bed, her spread legs facing the viewer, in a luridly hued purple and crimson room. The seller picked it up at Christie's London in 2012 for \$33.5 million, so it increased in value by nearly half over just three years.

Gagosian, bidding from the sales floor, bought an eight-foot-wide untitled [Cy Twombly](#) canvas slathered in house paint with drawing in crayon and pencil, which was the night's top-estimated lot at \$55 million. Despite falling short of that dramatic figure, it came in fifth-highest for the night at \$42.7 million. Guaranteed to sell, the painting had been off the market and out of public view since it was bought from Gagosian in 1989.

That painting was only on the block for about a minute, like the brief contest over the Bacon. Zwirmer blamed the limited bidding on those lots on the high guarantee the house had made on the canvases.

"When you start off so high," he said, "it makes it hard for others to jump in."

The Twombly canvas comes from a group of paintings known as the Bolsena works, named for the Italian lake on whose shores the artist painted them. After his 1964 show at Leo Castelli's gallery was not well received, according to the sale catalogue, Twombly said he was "the happiest painter around" because "for a couple of years no one gave a damn what I did."

New York dealer Christophe van de Weghe went away disappointed, having bid on a [Jean-Michel Basquiat](#) painting, *The Field Next to the Other Road*, but failing to get it.

"Tonight I bid \$33 million," he told [artnet News](#). "When I moved to New York, in 1993, it came up for auction at Sotheby's. It was estimated at \$125,000 to \$175,000 but failed to sell. They told me afterward that if I offered \$75,000, I could get it. I thought about it over the weekend but on Monday I told them I didn't have the money."

"So," he said, "I've failed twice."

Rounding out the night's top 10 were the Basquiat at \$37.1 million, a [Franz Kline](#) at \$21.4 million, the Ryman, the Rauschenberg, and a Kippenberger for \$16.4 million.

The sale came in the middle of a week packed with high-ticket auctions, starting Monday with a specialty sale at Christie's that made records for priciest work and priciest sculpture at auction (see [\\$179 Million Picasso Sets Stratospheric Record at Christie's \\$705.9 Million "Looking Forward" Sale](#)) and a \$380-million contemporary art sale at Sotheby's (see [Sotheby's Stellar \\$380 Million Evening Contemporary Sale Not Without A Few Bumps](#)).

Still to come Thursday night are a contemporary art sale at Phillips (check out [See Highlights of Sotheby's and Phillips Spring Contemporary Sales](#)) and Christie's sale of Impressionist and modern art, rescheduled from its usual spot the previous week (see [Why Is Christie's Shaking Up Its Spring Auction Schedule?](#) and [Is Christie's Abandoning the Impressionism and Modern Art Market?](#)).

Follow [artnet News on Facebook](#) and [@briankboucher on Twitter](#).