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The cost of Bacon

All eyes on Cape Town; Berlin dealer sticks to London; Americans invade Chatsworth

"The Art Market

Francis Bacon's 'Study of Red Pope 1962. 2nd Version' (1971), to be auctioned by Christie's

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SEPTEMBER 15, 2017 by Melanie Gerlis

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One of the most heart-wrenching paintings by Francis Bacon comes to Christie's next month (October 6). "Study of Red Pope 1962. 2nd Version" was unveiled at the artist's 1971-72 retrospective at the Grand Palais, Paris. Just 36 hours before, George Dyer — Bacon's lover and inspiration, who features spectre-like in the painting — had committed suicide in their hotel room.

The painting has not been on public view since. "It's truly and simply art history," enthuses Francis Outred, Christie's chairman of postwar and contemporary art.

Christie's will offer the work with a £60m-£80m estimate, which would make it the priciest work to sell in Europe this year. It could become the most expensive painting ever sold at auction in London. Accounting for inflation, this record is currently held by Rubens' "The Massacre of the Innocents", which sold for £45m (hammer price) in 2002, the equivalent of £67m in today's money.

The European seller of the Bacon has turned down Christie's offer to guarantee the work, according to the auction house.

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South Africa's art spaces can expect a rare influx of international attention as the continent's first major contemporary art institution, Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Mocaa), has its VIP opening in Cape Town this weekend.

A privately funded museum, Zeitz Mocaa has been founded with the collection of German businessman Jochen Zeitz, chief executive of Puma until 2011, who is also contributing to its operating costs. The museum has been designed by Thomas Heatherwick's studio on the V&A Waterfront, whose management company has funded the building's ZAR500m ($38m) redevelopment.

Local media have expressed concerns about South Africa's museums being privatised, and in a western mould, but acknowledge that options are limited, particularly given the country's economic backdrop.

Liza Essers, owner of South Africa's Goodman Gallery. "A major museum of contemporary art is so needed, the building is wonderful and it is generating a great energy."

Other privately run spaces were welcomed in South Africa last week. These include Cape Town's A4 Arts Foundation for southern Africa's artists, backed by Wendy Fisher, president of the board of trustees at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. And in Johannesburg, artist William Kentridge launched his privately funded Centre for the Less Good Idea to encourage experimental art.

Berlin dealer Johann König is bucking the trend of other European galleries by committing to London. He has taken a lease on 259-269 Old Marylebone Road, a converted car park in a less-than-chic, but central, area off Edgware Road to carry out what he calls an "experiment". Rather than using the 3,750 sq ft space for traditional exhibitions — his Brutalist converted church in Germany does that well enough — König will offer books, multiples and artist-made products (including clothes and homeware) while also showing solo presentations.

Of his faith in the city, König says "We opened during a market downturn in Berlin [in 2002]. When galleries seem to be leaving or closing, it's good to go against the cycle; visitors are grateful." Called Archiv & Souvenir, he will open during Frieze on October 5 with a film by Julian Rosefeldt.

Other mid-level gallerists are reinforcing their London presence this season. Stuart Shave/Modern Art is to open a second space in the 6,000 sq ft building vacated by Wilkinson on Vyner Street (with a Josh Kline show on October 3); while Sprüth Magers, which has been closed for renovation since April 2016, will open with vastly more space on September 29 (Gary Hume, until December 23).

Sotheby's has thrown its weight behind postwar America for its 12th annual selling exhibition of sculpture at Chatsworth, a stately home in Derbyshire, which opens this weekend (until November 12). Simon Stock, Sotheby's Impressionist and Modern art specialist, says the US focus was prompted by last year's Abstract Expressionism exhibition at London's Royal Academy and cites several other UK exhibitions dedicated to Americans since, including this month's Basquiat retrospective at the Barbican and *States of America* at Nottingham Contemporary. Commercially, Americans are buying their own artists back from the UK, Stock says. Gallery shows coming soon to the capital — including Brice Marden at Gagosian and an American Pop exhibition at Ordovas — support the case as, presumably, does the cheap pound.