

**Auctions** (<https://news.artnet.com/market/auctions>)

## Sotheby's Contemporary Sale Takes \$391 Million, Highlighted by Basquiat, Hockney, and an 'Epic' Kerry James Marshall

Marshall now definitively joins the first order of contemporary art market stars.

Eileen Kinsella (<https://news.artnet.com/about/eileen-kinsella-22>) & Tim Schneider (<https://news.artnet.com/about/tim-schneider-641>),  
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Kerry James Marshall, *Past Times* (1997). Courtesy of Sotheby's.

Sotheby's (<http://www.sothebys.com/en.html>) held a marathon run of contemporary auctions tonight that netted a total of \$391 million overall, compared with pre-sale expectations of \$283.6 million to \$394.9 million. Of 75 lots offered, after the withdrawal of a Tom Wesselmann nude, 72 found buyers—good for a 96 percent sell-through rate. Bidding was strong throughout the duration of the nearly three-hour sale, as evidenced by the 14 artist records set over the course of the evening, and a sale-within-a-sale that offered a serious kick-start to the Studio Museum's "Creating Space" fundraising initiative.

### **The Mandel Prelude**

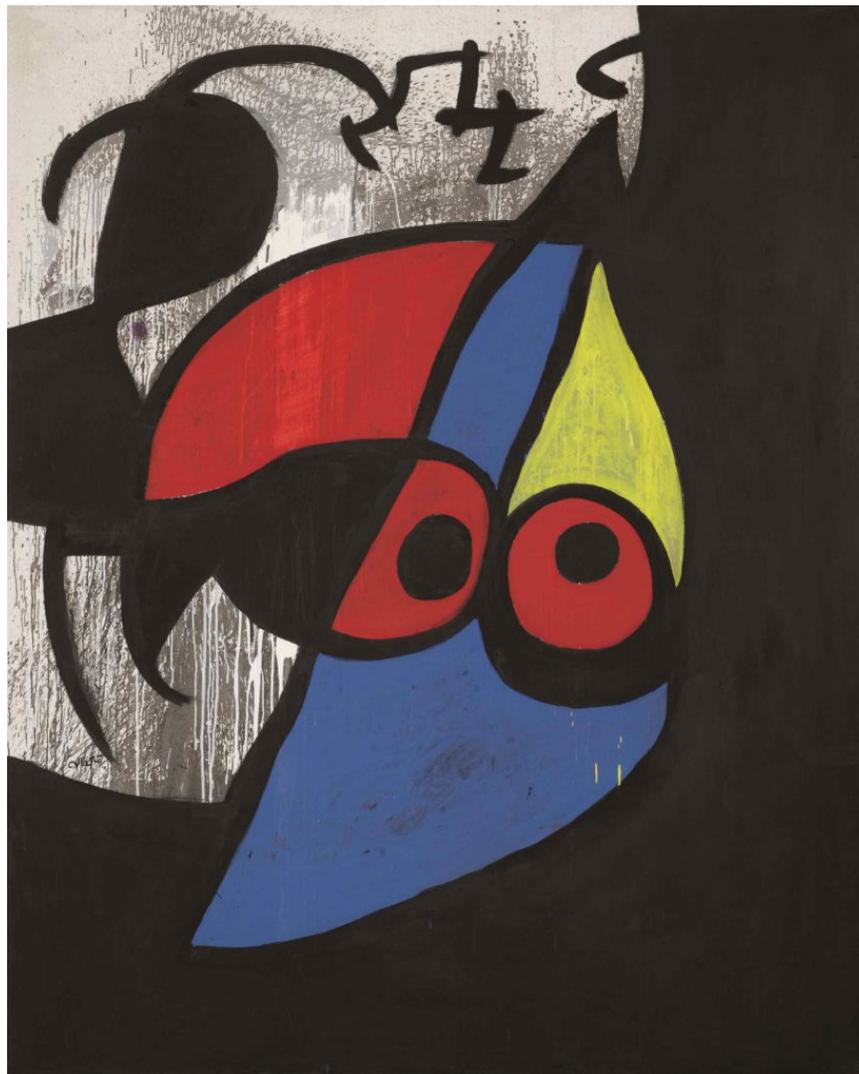
The start time was earlier than usual—at 6:30 pm—to enable Sotheby's to jumpstart the night with its offering of 26 lots from the private collection of Morton and Barbara Mandel. That portion of the larger sale was a resounding success, with each lot finding a buyer and landing a total of \$107.8 million, just clearing the high end of the \$72.9 million to \$105.3 million estimate.

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The star lot of the Mandel sale was Mark Rothko's glowing orange work on paper, *Untitled* (1969), which drew intense competition from the room and the phones before it was eventually hammered down for \$16 million to Sotheby's specialist Yuki Terase, head of contemporary art for Asia, bidding for a client. With premium, the final price came to \$18.8 million—far higher than the initial \$7 million to \$10 million estimate.

Willem de Kooning's *Untitled VI* (1980) saw similarly fervent action in a volley of bids, after opening around \$6 million. (It was estimated at \$8-12 million). Art advisor [Mary Hoeveler \(https://www.mghltd.com/\)](https://www.mghltd.com/) came away victorious for a \$9.5 million hammer price, or \$11.2 million with buyer's premium.

Meanwhile, another expected Mandel collection highlight, Joan Miró's *Femme Oiseau* (1969–74), drew somewhat muted bidding. Opened at \$7 million against a pre-sale estimate of \$10 million to \$15 million, it drew a single bid from Amy Cappellazzo and was hammered down at \$8 million, or an under-estimate \$9.3 million including fees. But quiet spots like this were rare throughout the entire evening.



(<https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2018/05/Joan-Miro-Femme-oiseau.jpg>).

Joan Miro's *Femme Oiseau* (1969). Image courtesy of Sotheby's.

## “Creating Space” Scores

Following the Mandel sale, the main auction began with a bang, as its first five lots kicked off the [Studio Museum's “Creating Space” initiative \(http://www.sothebys.com/en/news-video/blogs/all-blogs/sotheby-s-at-large/2018/03/creating-space-artists-for-the-studio-museum-in-harlem-an-auction-to-benefit-the-museums-new-](http://www.sothebys.com/en/news-video/blogs/all-blogs/sotheby-s-at-large/2018/03/creating-space-artists-for-the-studio-museum-in-harlem-an-auction-to-benefit-the-museums-new-)

[building.html](#)), for which 42 artists donated works whose sales proceeds will help fund construction of the institution's new David Adjaye-designed building on 125th Street. Tonight's quintet—by Mark Bradford, Julie Mehretu, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Glenn Ligon, and Njideka Akunyili Crosby—carried a combined estimate between \$4.7-6.95 million.

In hindsight, that number would look almost laughably conservative.



(<https://news.artnet.com/app/news->

[upload/2018/05/SNY-SMH-Bradford-Speak-Birdman-copy.jpg](#)).

Mark Bradford, *Speak, Birdman* (2018). Image courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

There were fireworks for Bradford's painting, *Speak, Birdman* (2018), estimated at \$2 million to \$3 million. Bids were so fast and furious that auctioneer Oliver Barker had trouble keeping up. The work eventually sold to a phone bidder for \$6.8 million with premium.

Four lots later, Crosby's *Bush Babies* (2017) shattered the artist's previous record with a premium-inclusive \$3.375 million boom.



(<https://news.artnet.com/app/news->

[upload/2018/05/SNY-SMH-LYB.jpg](#)).

Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, *An Assistance of Amber* (2017)  
Courtesy the artist, Corvi-Mora, London and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Producer and rapper Swizz Beatz was seated in the front row and bid through a Sotheby's specialist to win Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's painting, *An Assistance of Amber* (2017), for a final price of \$555,000 (\$450,000 hammer).

In all, the mini auction realized \$16.4 million for the Studio Museum. With the remaining 37 works slated to appear in Sotheby's Contemporary Art afternoon session on Thursday, *Creating Space* looks set to make the museum's expansion a considerably easier reality.



(<https://news.artnet.com/app/news->

[upload/2018/05/Spring18-SNY-Basquiat-Flesh-and-Spirit-Cropped.jpg](#)).

Jean-Michel Basquiat *Flesh and Spirit* (1982-83). Courtesy Sotheby's.

## Highlights of the Main Event

Beyond the Mandel sale and *Creating Space*, the expected star lot of the main auction was Jean-Michel Basquiat's massive circa 1982 painting *Flesh and Spirit*, which was estimated in the region of \$30 million. It was recently the target of legal action, from a widower who claimed he had a legal right to the painting, but a New York Supreme court judge ruled otherwise.

With the painting free and clear of the judicial shadow, bidding opened at \$24 million. But after scant activity, it hammered down at \$27 million, or \$30.7 million with premium—a happy enough result based on expectations, but perhaps also somewhat of a missed opportunity.



(<https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2018/05/Spring18-SNY-Pollock-Number-32-1949-1.jpg>).

Jackson Pollock, *Number 32, 1949* (1949). Courtesy Sotheby's.

Another lot with star potential, making its auction debut, was Jackson Pollock's *Number 32* (1949), which has been in the same private collection since 1983. Sotheby's described it as "an iconic exemplar of [the artist's] revolutionary drip paintings" executed at the peak of his career. It was estimated at \$30 million to \$40 million. But after opening in the mid-\$20 million range, bidding peaked at just \$30 million, leaving the lot to coast in at a final tally of \$34.1 million.



David Hockney's *Pacific Coast Highway and Santa Monica* (1990). Image courtesy of Sotheby's.

David Hockney's *Pacific Coast Highway and Santa Monica* (1990), however, caused more excitement. The painting was also estimated at \$20 million to \$30 million and carried a guarantee. Barker opened the contest at \$16 million, and the painting reached \$28.5 million once premiums were added to the winning bid from specialist Patty Wong, setting a new auction record for the artist.

In fact, it was the second time this evening that that could be said of Hockney. Earlier in the main auction, his *Piscine de Medianoche (Paper Pool 30)* edged out his previous high mark of \$11.7 million for his 2006 oil on canvas, *Woldgate Woods 24, 25, AND 26 October 2006*, sold at Sotheby's New York in the fall of 2016.

Fresh off "Mastry," a lionized (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/kerry-james-marshall-whups-western-canon-717101>) retrospective that traveled to Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, artist Kerry James Marshall's star went from on-the-rise to exploding. *Past Times* (1997), included in the show, was consigned from Chicago's Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority, and estimated at \$8 million to \$12 million. The pier authority acquired it in 1997 for the now humble seeming price of \$25,000.

It went for \$21.1 million, marking an 844 percent gain. It also set an explosive new record for the artist, surpassing the previous peak of \$5 million achieved this past November at Christie's for the far more recently made painting *Still Life with Wedding Portrait* (2015).

In the exhibition catalogue for the retrospective, Marshall commented that he had never seen "a grand, epic narrative painting with black figures in it, and that's the kind of painting I became interested in making—pictures in the grand manner." This painting, the catalogue said, "marks the decisive moment at which the artist confronts the canon upon its own rigorous terms."

artnet News spoke with Joel Straus, the curator who purchased the painting for the Chicago authority and is now a private dealer. He said he first met the artist in the early 1990s and, as curator of the permanent public art collection at McCormick Place, "I called Kerry to see if we could buy one of his epically scaled paintings. Kerry had a waiting list for his paintings and he needed to intercede in order for us purchase one his works for McCormick Place—near where Kerry lives on Chicago's South side."

Following the auction tonight, in which the painting hammered down for \$18 million, Straus said, simply, "Amazing!"

Of the sold lots in the main sale, some 14 works were backed by guarantees and/or irrevocable bids. A conservative projection based on pre-sale low estimates would set the total guaranteed amount at a minimum of \$88.5 million. (Most guarantees are believed to be mid-estimate.)

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