

Christie's \$700 Million Night

With brisk bidding and an uplifting sense that people were buying art for art's sake, Christie's first auctions of New York's fall season revealed a market returning to solid ground. With six well-known collections on offer, the single night yielded some \$690 million in sales, even if the action in the eight-figure range was less heated.



The action was more subdued at the highest tier, where much was sold at or near the estimates. The top lot was a red-and-yellow Mark Rothko painting, No. 31, that was estimated at \$50 million and hammered at \$53.5 million. Photo: Courtesy of Christie's



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The third lot, **Henri Matisse's *Figure et bouquet (Tête ocre)***, from 1937, was **estimated at \$15 million** and sparked a prolonged bidding war between advisor **Ralph DeLuca**, seated on the aisle, and specialist **Conor Jordan**, standing with a cellphone on one of the daises. In the end, Jordan won with a \$27.5 million bid that translated into just above \$32 million with fees. Several other Matisse works also did well. *Nu au fauteuil, main gauche sous la tête*, from 1920, consigned by the Kawamura Memorial DIC Museum of Art, sold for more than \$5 million, or \$6.8 million with fees, against an estimate without fees of \$2.5 million. Elaine Wynn's Matisse, *Océanie, le ciel*, a **screen print** on linen numbered 29 out of a series of 30, from 1948, was estimated at \$1.5 million. It sold for the remarkable price of just under \$5 million with fees.

A **Marc Chagall painting**, *Le songe du Roi David*, from 1966, also performed exceptionally well. That work, too, came from the Kawamura Museum, which ceased operation in March. It was estimated at \$8 million, but sold for \$26.5 million with fees to DeLuca, who used the same paddle number, 266, that he deployed in winning a **Max Ernst bronze** for just over \$20 million. (He told me the purchases were for separate clients.)

Another Chagall from the museum made \$10.5 million with fees. And an **Isamu Noguchi stone sculpture** titled *Myo*, from 1957-66, was estimated at \$2 million but sold for a premium price of \$7.6 million. **Beauford Delaney's portrait of James Baldwin**, estimated at \$500,000, sold for more than \$1.5 million with fees—a record price for the artist at auction. And two of the three **John Singer Sargent** works, from the **Carol and Terry Wall** collection, gave cracking auction performances. *Gondolier's Siesta*, a **watercolor** from 1902-3, sold for almost \$7.4 million with fees on an estimate of \$2 million. Another **version of *Capri***, from 1878—similar to the one in the Met's show *Sargent in Paris*—sold for just under \$11.5 million with fees on an estimate of \$4 million. The last of the Sargent **works** hammered at the \$6 million estimate. Not too shabby.

An **Edvard Munch painting**, *Morning, Nude at the Window*, from 1902, sold for almost \$5 million. Consigned as part of the **Arnold and Joan Saltzman** collection, the work was estimated at half of that. A 1-foot-square **Agnes Martin painting** of a grid of dots on a grey ground, from 1960, was estimated at \$1.5 million. The painting carried a third-party guarantee, but still saw bidding that pushed it to a final sale price of \$3 million. One of the more unexpected moments of the night came when a **painting** by Korean modernist master **Kim Whanki** sold for more than \$10 million—the artist's second highest auction price. Hong Kong is the usual venue for Kim's work, so it wasn't surprising that one of the dogged bidders was a Korean specialist from Christie's. But the winner, having bid nonchalantly from the other side of the audience, was **Saara Pritchard**, an advisor who has worked at both Sotheby's and Christie's. She bought the work for an American client before quickly exiting the room.