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Records Abound at Swann Galleries \$2.5M Sale of African-American Fine Art

New York— The crowd was standing-room only at Swann Galleries' spring auction of African-American Fine Art on Thursday, April 6. The sale totaled \$2.5M, with five of the top lots breaking previous auction records, all of which were set by Swann since the department's inception ten years ago. Onlookers cheered as six lots exceeded \$100,000, with David Hammons's *Untitled (Double Body Print)*, 1976, reaching \$389,000*.

Hammons was an important member of the L.A. Assemblage artists, who used found material to create sculptural collages in the wake of the Watts Riots in 1965. He was represented in the sale by two unique multimedia works: in addition to the previously mentioned double body print, his slightly later *Untitled (Body Print)* was purchased for \$161,000. A haunting work by Timothy Washington, another member of the group, titled *Raw Truth*, 1970, incorporates such diverse media as a deconstructed baseball mitt and a zipper; it was purchased by a collector for \$22,500, a record for the artist.

All five works by graphic abstractionist Alvin D. Loving, Jr. found homes, with nearly all selling above their estimates. A monumental untitled diptych of two hexagonal canvases broke the artist's previous auction record, selling to a phone bidder for \$161,000. The previous record of \$156,000 was set by Swann Galleries in October, 2008.

A run of works by Hughie Lee-Smith spanned the artist's career, beginning with his 1954 *Untitled (Cityscape)* (\$57,500). A midcareer canvas titled *Couterpoise*, 1988, exceeded its \$25,000 high estimate to sell for \$45,000, while a late surrealist painting, *Silhouette*, 1995, sold after breakneck bidding for \$106,250.

Morning Light, 1974, a luminous yellow "poured painting" by Frank Bowling, reached \$161,000, a record for the artist, above a high estimate of \$90,000. A similar work by Sam Gilliam, *Mess of Greens*, 1968, features a beveled-edge canvas and was purchased for \$37,500.

A previously unrecorded canvas by Walter Williams was also the largest work by the artist ever to come to auction. *Untitled (Boy on Porch)*, circa 1965, is from Williams's *Southern Landscape* series and nearly doubled its high estimate to sell for \$93,750, a record for the artist.

The sale offered media beyond painting as well. A transfixing painted copper mask by Sargent Johnson, *Untitled (Negro Mother)*, 1935-36, landed the artist a new record at \$100,000, while Leslie Garland Bolling's carved poplar *Beautiful Womanhood* reached \$24,700, also a record for the artist. Several additional artists achieved new records, including William Majors, Eugene Martin and Priscilla "P'lla" Mills, whose work made its auction debut.

James VanDerZee's magnum opus, the portfolio *Eighteen Photographs*, 1905-38, tied its previous auction record of \$87,500, set by Swann in September 2016. Carrie Mae Weems's striking triptych of gelatin silver prints, *Chocolate Colored Man*, 1989-90, was purchased by a collector for \$68,750, above a high estimate of \$50,000.

Nigel Freeman, founder and director of the African-American Fine Art department at Swann Galleries, said "I am thrilled with this sale's strong results. We saw great activity with bidding often exceeding the high estimate, and several record prices. We continue to build on our strengths with both modern and post-war artists, surpassing our

previous records with artworks from the 1930s through the '70s." Swann Galleries is the only major auction house with a department dedicated to African-American Fine Art, and has been instrumental in building a market for oft-overlooked artists.

The next sale of African-American Fine Art at Swann Galleries will be held in October 2017. For more information, contact Nigel Freeman at nfreeman@swannalleries.com.

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