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Rediscovered Jacob Lawrence Painting Comes to Swann Galleries

Delaney, Lewis & White Lead African-American Fine Art Auction



New York—**Swann Galleries'** highly anticipated auction of **African-American Fine Art** on **April 5** will offer superlative works by marquee artists, with fine mid-century paintings, contemporary art and important discoveries.

Tension on the High Seas, the nineteenth panel from **Jacob Lawrence's** 1954-56 series *Struggle . . . From the History of the American People*, depicts a British naval officer inspecting three bound and wounded captives seized from the American ship, the *Chesapeake*, in 1807, an incident which led directly to the War of 1812. The *Struggle...* series was envisioned as 60 illustrations for a book chronicling the history of the United States from 1776 to 1817—ultimately only 30 were completed; they were dispersed in 1959. Until now, the whereabouts of five of the panels has remained unknown, frustrating multiple efforts by institutions to reunite the series. The rediscovery and auction debut of *19. Tension on the High Seas* is expected to reinvigorate the search for the remaining four panels; it is estimated at \$75,000 to \$100,000.

Vibrant paintings by modernist New York artists include **Beauford Delaney's** large *Untitled (Village Street Scene)*, 1948, which depicts a Greenwich Village corner in bold citrine impasto and carries an estimate of \$150,000 to \$250,000. An untitled mid-career abstraction by Norman Lewis, 1956, explores a city crowd surrounded by thin veils of pulsating color (\$150,000 to \$250,000).



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Sam Gilliam is well represented in the sale, with a selection led by an arresting purple and orange beveled-edge canvas from 1972, at the height of his experimental “soak stain” approach to color field painting (\$40,000 to \$60,000). The most contemporary work is an untitled painted mixed-media collage on raked polypropylene from 2010, embodying the confluence of painting and sculpture for which he is known (\$20,000 to \$30,000). Another example is *Arina 6*, 1985, an amalgam of media and genres valued at \$12,000 to \$18,000. Select monotypes and collages complete the offering.



A stunning, larger-than-life charcoal portrait by **Charles White**, *O Freedom*, 1956, depicts a young man framed against the sky in an open and uplifting gesture of hope. It leads the sale at \$200,000 to \$300,000—the first time the drawing has been exhibited publicly in 60 years. The realist master is additionally represented by a selection of prints, some unique, and a vivid tempera *Study of a Pregnant Woman*, circa 1968-70 (\$30,000 to \$40,000).

The auction debut of *Jitterbugs II* and *III*, extremely scarce screenprints with pochoir by William H. Johnson depicting the raucous jazz scene of the Harlem Renaissance, circa 1941, carry estimates of \$30,000 to \$40,000 each. Other impressions of both are housed in institutional collections. However, no two impressions of these prints are the same; on the verso of *Jitterbugs III* is a slightly different proof.

Noteworthy auction appearances include the second oil painting by Elizabeth Catlett ever to come to market, *Head of a Woman (Woman)*, 1943-44, carrying an estimate of \$80,000 to \$120,000. Also superlative is the largest work by Ed Clark ever to come to auction, *Untitled*, 1990, a dynamic composition in four colors, with an estimate of \$60,000 to \$90,000.

The auction also features a strong selection of abstract canvases by sought-after contemporary artists including James Little, Alvin D. Loving, Jr., Richard Mayhew, Sam Middleton and Jack Whitten. *Primordial Landscape*, 1967, is an excellent example of Hale Woodruff's postwar painting, in which he describes landscape and natural phenomena within the idiom of Abstract Expressionism (\$80,000 to \$120,000). Select works by Frank Bowling represent the breadth of his oeuvre including *Late Blue*, a 1974 abstract canvas in the style of his homages to Barnett Newman, and *Man Overboard*, 2000, a 3D collage executed as museums began to organize retrospectives of his work (\$50,000 to \$70,000 and \$40,000 to \$60,000, respectively).

Crystallizing his decades-long series of "classical compositions" celebrating the form and beauty of African-American women, Eldzier Cortor's late-career painting *Souvenir No. III*, 2014, evokes the mythical three graces. The work, executed in the same year as his famous *Trilogy* series, was completed when the artist was 98 years old (\$60,000 to \$90,000).

Further highlights from important series include an important late-career untitled watercolor by Romare Bearden from his *Obeah* series, circa 1984, and *Somebody Stole My Broken Heart*, 2004, a painted interpretation by Faith Ringgold of the first panel of her *Jazz Stories: Mama can Sing* series of story quilts (\$25,000 to \$35,000 and \$12,000 to \$18,000, respectively). Hughie Lee-Smith's 1989 oil painting *Curtain Call* evokes his fascination with performers in a staged environment, valued at \$50,000 to \$75,000.

Scarce photographs span evolution of the medium across the twentieth century, with James VanDerZee's complete portfolio of *Eighteen Photographs*, 1905-38, estimated at \$40,000 to \$60,000. Contemporary examples are led by *High Yella Girl* from Carrie Mae Weems's iconic 1989-90 *Colored People* series, from an edition of only three (\$50,000 to \$75,000).

The complete catalogue with bidding information is available at www.swanngalleries.com.

Additional highlights can be found [here](#).

Captions:

[Lot 55](#): Jacob Lawrence, *19. Tension on the High Seas*, tempera on board, 1956. Estimate \$75,000 to \$100,000.

[Lot 33](#): Beauford Delaney, *Untitled (Village Street Scene)*, oil on canvas, 1948. Estimate \$150,000 to \$250,000.

[Lot 50](#): Charles White, *O Freedom*, charcoal with crayon, 1956. Estimate \$200,000 to \$300,000.

Auction date: Thursday, April 5, at 2:30 pm

Exhibition dates: March 31, 12-5; April 2 to 4, 10-6; April 5, 10-12

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