

Artspace

The Breakout Art Stars of 2013

By Eric Bryant

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Francis Bacon and Jeff Koons grabbed the headlines with their stratospheric auction records this past November—mind-boggling prices that helped push Christie's sale total to a record of its own, nearly \$640 million for a single week of contemporary sales in New York. But there were plenty of artists at more affordable price points who made waves in the market throughout the year. Many were younger, some just starting out. Others, meanwhile, reached that mysterious mid-career tipping point when the critical and collector opinions align to peg them as ripe for re-evaluation. And in the now globalized art world, some long-overlooked region is always next in line for focused review. In 2013, contemporary art from Africa commanded the spotlight as never before. What follows is a very selective list of some of the artists—and prices—that grabbed our attention in the past year.

BREAKING ONTO THE SCENE

Oscar Murillo was the name on every auction observer's mind as the year drew to a close. He set a modest new record in the spring at Sotheby's New York, when one of his paintings earned \$37,000—not bad for a painter in his late twenties who just pocketed his MFA in 2012. By June, with rumors of his having signed with David Zwirner spreading, one of his paintings took home what seemed a speculative sum of \$391,500 at Christie's in London. But the number proved to be no fluke. When the fall sales rolled around in London, four works brought between \$200,000 and \$350,000 each for a total of more than \$1.1 million—against combined estimates of just \$300,000. By the time of Murillo's first solo outing at Zwirner this coming spring, expect the placement of the works, rather than prices, to be the hot topic.

Another young painter to have made a mark at auction, Lucien Smith likewise seemed to come out of nowhere to end the year with new record at Philips's Under the Influence sale in New York, where *Hobbes, The Rain Man, and My Friend Barney/Under the Sycamore Tree* (2011) fetched \$389,000. Having trained at Cooper Union under Dan Colen (an auction darling of a slightly earlier generation), the 2011 BFA graduate primed the collector base earlier in the year by staging two New York solo shows at marquee venues: Suzanne Geiss, Co. in the spring and Salon 94 in the fall.

While dealers sometimes complain about escalating auction prices for young artists disrupting their markets, Christie's contemporary specialist Saara Pritchard points out that auctions provide the only access to many talents whose galleries maintain a tight grip on waiting lists. "It's not about flipping," she notes. "It's about providing a great way to collect—to buy artists early on. It makes sense that some who are just entering collecting will want to focus on younger artists. And this may be their only way to get the work."

Pritchard points to Keltie Ferris, whose abstraction gracing the back cover of the catalogue for Christie's spring First Open sale earned just shy of \$70,000. The price roughly doubled the primary-market prices for her work, since so many collectors are unable to gain access at her gallery, Mitchell-Innes & Nash. Angel Otero had his first work ever to come up at auction in the same sale. And it likewise brought \$52,500 against a \$20,000-30,000 estimate. Ryan Sullivan, another barely 30-year-old abstract painter, ended the year with an auction record of \$185,000 set at Christie's in November, nearly doubling his auction high at the beginning of the year.

STAYING POWER

Wade Guyton and Kelly Walker take the prize for breakout stars of recent years who have shown they have staying power. Whether working together or independently, the two have shown themselves to be masters of using digital technology rather than a brush to advance the field of painting, and they will be influencing younger generations for decades to come. A show of their collaborations at the Kunsthaus Bregenz during Art Basel drew new admirers, and a new record was set in September when a 2008 work by Guyton/Walker took \$245,000.

That price is low, however, thanks to a collector bias against collaborations that is only beginning to break down. Walker's solo works have hovered in low-to-mid six figures at auction for several years. And Guyton took off in 2013, tripling a November 2012 record of \$782,500 to reach \$2.4 million by November 2013, earning a place among the elite contemporary artists to break the million dollar barrier. (In the coming months both will have major shows in New York, Guyton at Petzel in his first solo outing since making a splash a year ago at the Whitney, and Walker at Paula Cooper.)

Also joining the million-dollar club this year was Tauba Auerbach, who has been sought after at least since her inclusion in the 2010 Whitney Biennial. Her record of \$290,000, set in the fall of 2012 at Phillips, was surpassed six times in the course of 2013 and closed at \$1,025,000, paid for a 2011 painting that sold at Christie's in November. Likewise continuing to make an impression in the market even after years of attention was Sterling Ruby, whose freshly painted canvas rushed to \$1.78 million this past spring, up from a mid-six figure record set at the end of 2012. While her prices remain lower, mid-career sculptor Carol Bove was able to translate critical acclaim for this year's installation on the High Line into auction fervor when one of her peacock feather paintings from 2008 brought \$329,000. A significant step up from a previous record of \$25,000 set back in 2007.

CREDIT WHERE DUE

Market rewards also belatedly flowed to a number of artists who have been toiling for decades. At the top of the heap was David Hammons, whose all-time record jumped from \$2.2 million to \$8 million. The new record was joined by a pair of other sales topping the million-dollar mark, demonstrating a solid collector base at the top end. But it should be noted that many of his multiples remain quite affordable, with a signed editioned book selling for just under \$5,000 in November.

By comparison, Mark Flood's record remained within easy reach, but his market rise was in some ways more dramatic. The 55-year-old Texas artist took the New York gallery scene by storm in 2012 with four separate gallery shows, including the much-lauded "ARTSTAR" at Zach Feuer. Having captured the attention of collectors, they set five consecutive new records for him in 2013, raising the top price from \$15,000 at the beginning of the year to \$65,000 at the end. Expect primary-market gallery prices to reflect the increased demand.

Many artists, even those who have been showing for decades simply do not make an impression on the auction circuit, even as they maintain steady sales through galleries. Among those to warrant renewed focus this year was **Sadie Benning**, who has made a clean break from her 1990s reputation that was built on videos made with a toy camera. Her paintings, which have been flying off the walls of art fair booths by Johannes Vogt Gallery, made a splash at the **Carnegie International** this year, and new films were featured in her first solo show at **Callicoon Fine Arts**.

Taking a different approach, Nayland Blake, a mainstay at Matthew Marks gallery, returned to his roots with a half-dozen rambling sculptures riffing on gay identity, public space, sex, and the games people play. The pieces, which were completely fresh while revisiting themes from his early work, brought the gallery to life in one of the artist's best shows in years. Philip Smith ended a decade-long hiatus from the art-world with a hit show this fall at Jason McCoy, where he showed the same sort of hieroglyphic filled canvases that earned him a spot in the original "Pictures Generation" show at Artists Space more than three decades ago.

GOING LOWER

To catch emerging talent on the gallery scene, the Lower East Side has fully established itself as the destination of choice. Venues there consistently worth a look include James Fuentes who since 2008 has been showing John

McAllister, an artist who got a bump when word spread of that Rubells had made a purchase. Invisible Exports has been steadily building its stable with a balance of mid-career artists (Breyer P-orrige and Cary Liebowitz) and up-and-comers (Paul P. and Matthew Porter). When invited to exhibit at the Armory Show this past spring, the gallery featured a major sculpture by 30-year-old Paul Gabrieli that was snapped up in the first few minutes by filmmaker-turned-artist-and-tastemaker John Waters. Rachel Uffner's program skews younger and is home base for emerging talents worth keeping an eye on such as Sarah Greenberger Rafferty and Pam Lins. Bureau, recently moved to Norfolk Street, still lays claim to on-the-rise talents Jaya Howey and Tom Holmes, despite losing Justin Matherly to Paula Cooper.

AFRICA RISING

In recent years, roving eyes in search of the next hot scene have looked toward China, Brazil, and the Middle East. In 2013, signals came from various fields that art from Africa is on the rise. Angola took home the Golden Lion award at the Venice Biennale for the country's first-ever pavilion, which featured the work of photographer Edson Chagas. Then came the announcement that the curator of the next edition of the international confab would be Okwui Enwezor, perhaps the world's leading expert on the contemporary art of Africa. This curatorial validation was matched by market indicators such as the first auction prices surpassing \$1 million for El Anatsui, the Ghanaian sculptor whose retrospective drew crowds to the Brooklyn Museum this spring. And London saw the debut of a new art fair, titled 1:54, and times to coincide with Frieze, that was wholly dedicated to the galleries and artists from the continent, proof of not just ample supply, but also collector interest.

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