



‘Selective Histories’ by Toyin Ojih Odutola Set Auction Record in London, Forthcoming Lot in New York May Surpass Benchmark

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE

SOTHEBY’S RECENT [Contemporary Art Evening Auction](#) in London featured 65 lots. Only 13 of the works were by women artists, but the representation was a milestone. According to Sotheby’s, it was the highest proportion of works by women the auction house has ever offered in an evening sale.

Each season, the evening sale is reserved for premium works by sought-after artists. Louise Bourgeois, Marlene Dumas, **Toyin Ojih Odutola**, Jenny Saville, and Cindy Sherman, are among those whose works were offered at the March 5 sale.



Lot 23: TOYIN OJIH ODUTOLA, "Selective Histories," 2016 (charcoal, pastel and pencil on paper, 101.6 x 76.2 cm. / 40 x 30 inches). | Estimate 100,000-150,000 British Pounds (\$131,790-\$197,685). **Sold for 250,000 British Pounds (\$329,475) fees included. RECORD**

"Selective Histories" by Ojih Odutola set a new artist record, according to Sotheby's and the Artprice database. The 2016 drawing sold for 250,000 British Pounds (\$329,475), fees included*.

Featured in the exhibition "A Matter of Fact: Toyin Ojih Odutola" at the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) in San Francisco, "Selective Histories" was expected to sell for 100,000-150,000 British Pounds (\$131,790-\$197,685). The charcoal, pastel and pencil work on paper far exceeded the estimate.

The auction record also markedly surpassed Ojih Odutola's previous high mark, which was set a year ago when another drawing "From a Place of Goodness" (2017-18) sold for \$62,500 at Sotheby's Contemporary Art Day Auction in New York on May 17, 2018..

"SELECTIVE HISTORIES" depicts an African mask surrounded by a selection of fine art in gilded frames hung gallery style against a dramatic vermilion red wall. The drawing is part of a series of works, mostly portraits, inspired by the UmuEze Amara Clan, a fictional aristocratic Nigerian family imagined by Ojih Odutola.

In "A Matter of Fact," the MoAD exhibition, the body of work is presented as the rarely shown private collection of the family. Leigh Raiford, a professor of African American studies at the University of California, Berkeley, contributed an essay to the exhibition catalog and describes the show as a "fabulist conceit." She further states:

Rather than portraitist, Ojih Odutola casts herself as curator and "private secretary" to the family's gay patriarchs (whose double newlywed portrait hung just outside the gallery proper). The eighteen portraits that compose the exhibit convey the family's stories, proclivities, relationships, its tastes. Whether on horseback or draped in fur, surrounded by gold tea sets, or adjusting an extensive collection of fine art "from the ancient, premodern, and contemporary eras," these subjects demonstrate an easy relationship to wealth. We are offered an *elsewhere* in which black subjects are possessors of wealth, rather than the source of wealth of others; black subjects who are fully in possession of themselves.

Toyin Ojih Odutola's portraits "convey the family's stories, proclivities, relationships, its tastes. ...these subjects demonstrate an easy relationship to wealth. We are offered an elsewhere in which black subjects are possessors of wealth, rather than the source of wealth of others; black subjects who are fully in possession of themselves." — Leigh Raiford, UC Berkeley

Beyond MoAD, Ojih Odutola continued to focus on the aristocratic family making additional related works presented in subsequent exhibitions, including "To Wander Determined" at the Whitney Museum of American Art (her first New York museum show), "Testing the Name" at the SCAD Museum of Art, and "The Firmament" at the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth.

Born in Ife, Nigeria, Ojih Odutola lives and works in New York. Her work is currently on view in Venice in the Future Generation Art Prize exhibition, an official collateral event of the 58th Venice Biennale. She is also featured in "Plumb Line: Charles White and the Contemporary" at the California African American Museum in Los Angeles.



Lot 19: CHRIS OFILI, "Afro Love and Envy," 2002 (acrylic, oil, glitter, polyester resin, map pins and elephant dung on linen, with two elephant dung supports, 285.8 x 212.8 cm. / 112 1/2 x 83 3/4 inches). | Estimate 500,000–700,000 British Pounds (\$658,950-\$922,530). **Sold for 915,000 British Pounds (\$1,205,879) fees included**

THE LONDON SALE also featured works by **Jean-Michel Basquiat**, **Mark Bradford**, **Chris Ofili**, and **Adam Pendleton**.

Selling for \$10.8 million, "**Apex**" (1986) by Basquiat was the auction's top lot. Five bidders vied for the painting, an acrylic, oil stick and Xerox collage on canvas, that reached 8,227,950 British Pounds. The estimate was not made public, but bidding started at 3,800,000 British Pounds. According to Sotheby's, "Apex" last sold at auction at Christie's London on June 30, 1988, for 16,500 British Pounds (\$28,190).

Ofili's "**Afro Love and Envy**" (2002-03) was acquired by the **Dallas Museum of Art** for 915,000 British Pounds (\$1,205,879). The resplendent mixed-media painting depicts an Afrocentric Adam and Eve.

Embellished with resin, glitter, map pins, and resting on elephant dung supports, the painting was produced for "**Chris Ofili: Within Reach**," the artist's 2003 show in the British Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale. The painting was also featured in "**Chris Ofili: Night and Day**," his first major solo museum exhibition in the United States, which was organized by the New Museum in New York City.

Also performing well, "**Black Dada/Column (K)**" a two-part painting by Pendleton sold for 200,000 British Pounds (\$263,580), an artist record.

THIS WEEK, a new round of contemporary art sales is being staged at major auction houses in New York. Sotheby's is offering another drawing by Ojih Odutola, which was exhibited in "[Of Context and Without](#)" at Jack Shainman Gallery in 2015-16. Exploring the possibilities of line and form, "[Quality Control](#)" (2015) portrays two standing nude figures from the rear, their skin rendered like a topographical map in varying tones of gray.

Ojih Odutola [has talked about](#) how she depicts skin in her work, likening it to an otherworldly surface ripe for exploration. "When I draw the skin of my subjects, I really want people to travel throughout them," the artist has said. "The surface isn't something I trifle with. In the making of the work, skin is the geography I travel in order to discover each individual and his/her story. With every line I mark up, I map out the territory of their realities."

Carrying an estimate of \$150,000-\$250,000 in tomorrow's Contemporary Art Day sale, "Quality Control" may exceed the artist's current auction record and establish a new benchmark. **CT**

** Fees included in sales results, unless otherwise noted*

UPDATE (5/17/19): "[Quality Control](#)" by Toyin Odutola went UNSOLD at Sotheby's Contemporary Art Day Auction in New York

FIND MORE [about Toyin Ojih Odutola](#) on her website

FIND MORE [about how artists and their estates might benefit directly](#) from the sale of their work on the secondary market through artist resale royalties

FIND MORE [about French court decision](#) opening door for artist royalties

BOOKSHELF

"Selective Histories" is illustrated in the exhibition catalog "[A Matter of Fact: Toyin Ojih Odutola](#)." The show was presented at the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco. The publication includes a statement from Linda Harrison, then director of MoAD (she is now director of the Newark Museum in New Jersey), essay contributions by MoAD curator Emily Kuhlmann and Leigh Raiford of UC Berkeley, and notes from the artist.