

Comments on the Art Market

B Y R E H S G A L L E R I E S

Volume 292

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Upcoming Gallery Exhibition



We are excited to announce our upcoming exhibition, *Bloom*, a vibrant exploration of flowers in contemporary art. Opening with an evening event on April 18th from 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM, and an extended opening on April 19th from 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM, this exhibition brings together a diverse group of contemporary artists who use floral themes to explore life, love, identity, and the environment.

With *Bloom*, flowers are not merely aesthetic objects but rich symbols that reflect human emotions, societal concerns, and personal expression. The exhibition features both paintings and sculptures that highlight how contemporary artists use flowers to comment on the complexity of the world around us.

Through the lens of an artist, flowers represent more than just beauty—they are metaphors for life, death, love, and transformation. From vibrant depictions of blooming flowers symbolizing vitality and renewal to more subtle representations of wilting petals, the works featured will challenge the viewer to consider the delicate balance between life and decay.

Bloom also showcases the stunning variety of ways in which contemporary artists manipulate floral imagery in their paintings and sculptures. Whether through hyper-realistic depictions, abstract representations, or sculptural

re-imaginings, these works invite the viewer to experience flowers in new and exciting ways. The exhibition brings together a wide range of artistic approaches, emphasizing how flowers continue to inspire and challenge artists today.

Ultimately, *Bloom* serves as a celebration of life. It reflects how flowers, as symbols of growth, beauty, and fragility, continue to inspire us to explore complex emotional, social, and environmental issues. Whether representing personal transformation, the state of the natural world, or the intricacies of human relationships, the works in *Bloom* offer a fresh perspective on the enduring significance of one of the most widely painted subjects in art history.

Upcoming Fair



THE PHILADELPHIA SHOW

Preview Party

Thursday, April 24th

General Show Dates

Friday, April 25: 11:00 am – 7:00 pm
Saturday, April 26: 11:00 am - 6:00 pm
Sunday, April 27: 11:00 am - 5:00 pm

**We are pleased to announce that we have received our limited number of complimentary tickets.
If you would like to attend, please send an email with your name and the number of tickets.**

Stocks & Crypto

Do I really have to keep doing this? I don't want it anymore, and neither should you... I can hardly keep up with the headlines, and it all just feels a little depressing. We're self-initiating a recession in the hopes of bringing back American manufacturing for a generation of people who grew up playing on a computer... I don't know who needs to hear this, but the future workforce is not going to be so willing to work in factories. And as awful as this is to say, the people who are immigrating here and are willing to take those kind of jobs are being thrown out in the name of national security – no comment on the Signal group chat national security issues though. Look, I'm tired of tiptoeing around the political stuff... I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings. Feel free to write me a strongly worded email if your heart desires – it wouldn't be the first time I've received one.

This month, we've seen a continued push for tariffs... it appears this next round will target auto-imports, including foreign parts used in the assembly of American made cars, so even they won't be fully exempt from the impacts. If I'm remembering correctly, there were other categories like steel and aluminum, but wading through the mess of news is difficult, to say the least. In turn, we've seen many of our closest trading partners initiate or announce plans for retaliatory tariffs. This isolationist strategy can have dire consequences that won't

necessarily be simple to unravel and could potentially have long-standing and unforeseen consequences. Sure, what do I know, I'm just some guy who sells paintings... or at least tries to.

Anyway, as I'm writing this after the market closed... today (Friday, March 28th), the Dow plummeted more than 700 points, which put it down more than 5% for the month. The NASDAQ shed 2.7% today alone... that pushed the month to more than an 8% loss. The S&P fell in the middle with a 6.2% skid... all around not good, and there aren't many signs to say things will turn around soon.

As for currencies, both the Pound and Euro strengthened relative to the dollar, up 2.7% and 4.2%, respectively. Crude oil has seen some moderate fluctuations and currently sits at a 1.8% loss through March. And continuing to be the star of the show – Gold. Same as last month, we continue to see record highs in the face of substantial uncertainty... up more than 8% this month, gold has freshly crossed the \$3.1K mark – I mean, who needs crypto with these kinda gains?!

Maybe I shouldn't have said that... crypto is feeling like a sore subject right now. Bitcoin shattered hopes and dreams this month when it retreated from the \$100K region, which seemed to have solid support. It tumbled into the mid-\$70K range before recovering slightly. It is still way off its high point as it sits in the low-\$80K range. Ethereum shared a similar fate, now trading in the \$1,900 ballpark – it gave up more than 15% this month. While Litecoin was holding strong last month, it finally gave way... it has stabilized in the \$80 region, which mean it gave up about 1/3 of its value through March.

I have no key takeaways from any of this other than it seems like we have no idea what we're actually doing... this is becoming exhausting.

REALLY!?

Cheeto Or Charizard?? No...It's A Cheetozard!



Cheetozard

In 2019, an unknown snack lover stumbled upon an unusual [Flamin' Hot Cheeto](#) while enjoying their afternoon snack. Thinking that the little spicy puff resembled [Charizard](#), the dragon-like [Pokémon](#) beloved by fans worldwide, they decided not to pop it into their mouth. Instead, they decided to list it on eBay, thinking someone might be interested in the unusually shaped Cheeto. They were right! It caught the attention of Paul Bartlett, a collectibles store owner from Canton, Georgia. Amused by the snack's perfect shape, Bartlett purchased it for \$350 and safely stored it, thinking it might be a fun conversation piece for the future.

For years, the 'Cheetozard,' as it became known, remained tucked away. But in 2024, while cleaning his storage, Bartlett rediscovered the rare Cheeto and decided to share it on social media. Pokémon fans and collectors quickly took notice. Realizing its newfound popularity, Bartlett decided to put the cheese puff up for auction. The Cheetozard was presented in a custom-made display case designed to resemble a Pokémon trading card. While it wasn't sold with an actual Charizard card, the case featured an image of Charizard along with custom text that framed the Cheeto as a one-of-a-kind collectible. This presentation elevated Cheetozard beyond just a quirky snack, transforming it into a legendary display piece.

The auction started at \$250, but as bids poured in, the price skyrocketed. After 60 competitive bids, the final sale price reached \$72,000 (\$87,840 w/p), making it one of the most expensive Cheetos ever sold. And by the way, the highest price paid for a Charizard Pokémon card is \$420,000. This record-breaking sale occurred in 2022 for a 1st Edition Base Set Shadowless Charizard card graded PSA 10 Gem Mint.

Tales From The Dark Side

Stolen Brueghel Recovered

A painting by Pieter Brueghel the Younger, one of Poland's most wanted stolen paintings, has been recovered in the Netherlands after nearly fifty years.



The National Museum,
Gdańsk

Arthur Brand, a specialist in stolen art (who I have mentioned before in relation to [a stolen Van Gogh](#) and [the British Museum's Higgs theft](#)), tracked down the stolen painting to the city of Gouda. Titled [Woman Carrying the Embers](#), the recovered work is a rather small painting, showing one of the artist's typical peasant subjects: a woman with a bucket of water in one hand and a pair of tongs holding fireplace embers in the other. Like many of his peasant scenes, Brueghel created the work as a pictorial representation of a Dutch proverb. In a warning against deceitful individuals, *Woman Carrying the Embers* conveys the message, "Never believe a person who carries water in the one hand and fire in the other". Estimates indicate that Brueghel created this work around 1626. The painting was originally at the National Museum in Gdańsk, Poland between 1944 and 1974. As if written for a heist movie, the National Museum discovered that the painting was missing when a janitor accidentally knocked the painting off the wall and revealed that someone had replaced the actual painting with a replica

image. Only one other work was found to be missing, a crucifixion scene sketch by Anthony van Dyck. After the Polish authorities abandoned their initial investigations, various rumors and conspiracy theories began circulating, including that the communist Polish security services had had a hand in the painting's theft.

Brand was able to track the stolen Brueghel to Gouda after reading an article in the Dutch art and antiques magazine *Vind*. One of the writers, John Brozius, commented on an exhibition at the Museum Gouda featuring a work similar to the stolen painting. Brueghel created six paintings of the same subject, which was not unusual for the artist. However, Brand claims to have read this review and decided to go to Gouda to confirm his suspicions. The Museum Gouda had secured the painting for the exhibition as a loan from a private collector. Both the owners and the museum claim that they were unaware that the painting had been previously stolen and were acting in good faith. Dutch authorities are now investigating how the work wound up in the Netherlands, while Poland has requested the work be returned to Gdańsk. No one has given an estimate as to the value of the painting. In the past, Brueghel the Younger's work has sold at auction for millions. However, both the small size of the painting and its backstory complicate any appraisal made by a specialist.

Supreme Court Rules On Nazi-Looted Picasso



*Saint Honoré, après
midi, effet de pluie*
by Camille Pissarro

The Supreme Court has, in just a few sentences, ruled in favor of a Holocaust survivor's descendants in their efforts to regain their stolen Picasso painting.

Over a year ago, I wrote about how a court in California ruled against the Cassirer family [in their restitution case against Spain's Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum](#). The family's forebear, Lilly Neubauer, was a collector who owned the painting *Rue Saint Honoré, après midi, effet de pluie*, created in 1897 by Camille Pissarro. The Nazi government forced her to sell the painting in exchange for visas for her family. In 1958, the West German government declared Neubauer was the painting's rightful owner and granted her a large sum equivalent to about \$250,000 today. In 1999, Neubauer's grandson Claude Cassirer learned that the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum had his family's painting. By 2001, he initiated legal proceedings to have the work returned. He filed a lawsuit against the museum and the Spanish government as per the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act, which provides legal immunity to foreign governments in American courts

with several exceptions. One of those exceptions is if the suit involves "property taken in violation of international law." The lawsuit went to the Supreme Court, then back to the lower courts, which decided that Spanish law should apply in this case rather than California law. Under Spanish law, an individual or entity may keep a previously stolen work if it was acquired and displayed in good faith for at least three years. The Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum insists they did their due diligence and had no knowledge that the painting was sold under duress. While the appeals court ruled that the museum does not have to do anything from a legal perspective, there is, of course, the ethical imperative to return the painting to the Cassirer family.

Soon after the lower court's decision, [the California state assembly quickly passed a law](#) stating that California law must apply in cases involving stolen property due to political persecution. With this new law in effect, the Supreme Court issued a brief decision: "The petition for a writ of certiorari is granted. The judgment is vacated,

and the case is remanded to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit for further consideration in light of Assem. Bill 2867, 2023–2024.” This will send the lawsuit back to the lower courts, the same court that decided against the Cassirer family last year. However, with the new law in effect, it will likely turn out differently. The Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum will probably not be very enthused. In the two decades they have dealt with this lawsuit, they have continued to emphatically affirm that they are the rightful owners of the Pissarro.

Collector Refuses To Give Up Stolen Madonna

A Renaissance-era Madonna & Child painting stolen from an Italian museum fifty years ago has recently been rediscovered in Britain. But the owner will not let it go.

Antonio Solario was a sixteenth-century northern Italian painter. While moderately successful in his lifetime, he is not often the first name to come to mind when thinking of the great Italian Renaissance painters. Many may become more familiar with his work when learning about his *Madonna & Child*. It was kept at the Belluno Civic Museum in the Veneto region until its theft in 1973. Several other works of art were stolen from the museum in the robbery, nearly all of which were recovered in Austria shortly after the incident. However, the Solario painting remained missing. Investigators tracked the painting to East Barsham Manor, a house in the English countryside previously owned by Baron de Dozsa. De Dozsa purchased the painting shortly after its theft, apparently not knowing that the work had been stolen. Authorities pinpointed the painting's location because after De Dozsa died in 2017, his widow Barbara attempted to consign it to a local auction house. Police in Norfolk were alerted, and they confiscated the painting. But the Norfolk Constabulary returned the painting to De Dozsa due to Covid-related delays and poor communication. But now the relevant authorities are asking for the painting back, and there seems to be a small problem. She will not turn over the painting.



Madonna & Child
by Antonio Solario

Barbara de Dozsa refuses to surrender the painting, even though there is no benefit in keeping it. It is listed on Interpol's stolen art database and is, therefore, known to most law-enforcement entities. Also, confusingly, she has previously confessed that she does not even like the painting. According to art law specialist Christopher Marinello, De Dozsa admits that she does not display the painting on the walls of the old Tudor-era mansion as it reminds her too much of her late ex-husband. According to British law, if you buy a piece of stolen property but in good faith, you become the legal owner after six years. When the police gave the painting back to her, she was under the impression that this meant the legal title of ownership was officially transferred to her. However, the Norfolk constabulary contests this. So now there seems to be a bit of a standoff. De Dozsa will not turn over the painting, but since she was not part of the initial theft, the police can only treat this as a civil matter and not a criminal one. And so now we have a situation somewhat similar to the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum's Pissarro cityscape I recently wrote about. De Dozsa may not be obligated to turn the painting over to the police, but many are now putting pressure on her to do so as a moral choice.

Disgraced Art Advisor Lisa Schiff Sentenced To Prison



Court House

Lisa Schiff, the Manhattan art advisor who admitted to stealing money from her clients, has just been sentenced to time in prison.

Schiff was a veteran of the art world. She worked in galleries and auction houses in both North America and Europe, finally making a career for herself in art advisory. She even once helped actor Leonardo DiCaprio manage his art collection. However, that all began to unravel in 2023 when her clients discovered that she was using their money to fund a luxurious lifestyle for herself. Schiff would get money in various ways. This included pocketing the proceeds of paintings she sold on behalf of clients, as well as accepting payment to acquire artworks that she never ended up buying. The scheme was all to pay for her apartment (which allegedly cost \$25,000 a month), first-class travel, five-star hotels, a chauffeur, private school tuition for her son, and other expenses. According to a later government report, the extravagance

of her lifestyle plus her previous legitimate success in art advisory makes it clear that this scheme “was not born out of necessity”.

The full extent of Schiff's deceit came to light through a lawsuit filed by two of her former clients, Richard Grossman and Candace Carmel Barasch. They alleged that they had each invested in a 25% stake in the painting [The Uncle 3](#) by Adrian Ghenie, with Schiff owning the remaining 50%. When Schiff later sold the

painting at Sotheby's, she gave the two collectors \$225K each, a mere fraction of what was owed to them. According to the lawsuit, Schiff owed them an additional \$1.8 million. Grossman and Barasch were met with constant delays before Schiff finally admitted that she did not have the money she owed them. After her confession, Schiff turned herself in and eventually pled guilty to wire fraud. She filed for bankruptcy and even consigned works from her private collection to Phillips to raise the money she owed to clients and creditors.

As part of her guilty plea, she agreed to pay \$6.4 million as a forfeiture to the state. While the maximum prison sentence for wire fraud is twenty years, Schiff got off relatively lightly as a first-time offender. Judge J. Paul Oetken sentenced her to thirty months, after which she would receive two years of supervised release. Her sentence also included that she pay her victims an additional \$9.15 million in damages related to fifty-five works of art. Schiff is expected to report to prison by July 1st.

The Art Market

AI Art: The New NFTs?



*Machine
Hallucinations-
MRO Dreams – A*
by Refik Anadol

Trends come and go in the art world, and it can be somewhat difficult to predict which ones will stay around and which will fizzle out. Because of that, I've found it useful to have skepticism as my first initial reaction. Some recent contemporary art sales featuring NFTs and AI-generated art have served as an interesting example of how quickly trends in the secondary market can come and go.

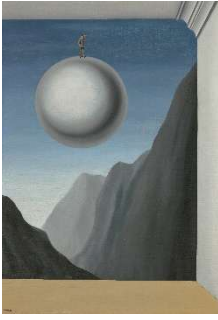
Last week, on February 28th, Sotheby's New York hosted their Contemporary Discoveries sale, featuring works by artists like George Condo and Wolf Kahn. However, nineteen of the two hundred sixty-five available works were NFTs. With the world of blockchain technology suffering many setbacks over the last few years, NFTs are no longer the hot new darling of the art world. That can be seen in the results of just these nineteen works. Sotheby's specialists predicted these NFTs would bring in at least \$256K hammer, yet they made just \$80.7K (or \$102.5K w/p). These shortcomings can mainly be attributed to the failure of Refik Anadol's work *Machine Hallucinations- MRO Dreams – A*, which Sotheby's gave an estimate range of \$120K to \$180K. Even with the Anadol removed from the equation, it's still not a great look for NFTs. Sixteen of the nineteen NFTs sold. However, thirteen sold below their estimates, sometimes incredibly far below them. Works valued at a few thousand dollars were not generating the expected enthusiasm from buyers. Works estimated to sell for at least \$5K were selling for \$2K, or even as low as

\$400 in one case. The failure of these NFTs was part of why the sale overall proved dissatisfactory for Sotheby's, with 38% of the lots selling below their estimates.

I bring this up because Christie's, [despite an incredible amount of pushback](#), decided to go ahead with their AI art sale on Wednesday, March 5th. Several publications seem to have declared the sale an unequivocal success when it's actually a bit more complicated than that. The sale had an 82% sell-through rate, which is rather good. However, fourteen of the thirty-four available lots sold for below their estimates, amounting to 41% of the entire sale. Furthermore, there seems to be some confusion about the sale's total. When I first wrote about the sale while writing about the artists' petition calling for Christie's to cancel the auction, I cited a number I had seen in several other publications, saying that the sale was expected to make around \$600K. However, after totaling up all thirty-four lots, that number is actually \$806.1K. While that isn't an insane difference as far as major auction house sales go, it does make a difference here. The total hammer price fell short of this estimate, adding up to only \$578.4K. However, because the sale's total with all fees added brought that number up to \$728.8K, many covering the sale see this all as a success since that number is definitely more than \$600K. But I'm unsure where this \$600K number came from. I haven't been able to find the source of this. It may have been an approximation before any additional lots were added to the sale that would augment that number.

So, the AI art sale was not as successful as people thought, yet many are treating it like it is. Because AI art is now the new hot topic, it's the latest trend. And like I said before, it's always safe to be skeptical. Artificial intelligence may be impacting our world in various ways, but I don't think that collectors overall will ever be willing to fully embrace AI-generated art to the degree that some are predicting.

Christie's London Art Of The Surreal



*La reconnaissance
infinie*
by René Magritte

Every year, around the beginning of March, Christie's hosts an Art of the Surreal sale at its London location. For as long as I've been covering these auctions, they have always been some of the greatest successes Christie's experiences for the year. And 2025 was no different. On Wednesday, March 5th, a total of twenty-five lots crossed the block and proved that the market for surrealist paintings is incredibly strong.

When you pay attention to how surrealist works of art perform on the secondary market, you notice the same few names that always bring in insane amounts of money. And, of course, at Christie's on Wednesday, it was time to show off another priceless work by René Magritte. The Belgian artist's 1933 painting *La reconnaissance infinie* last sold at auction at Christie's in 2004, where it hammered at £600K (or £1.06 million / \$1.37 million in 2026). Magritte created the work in 1933, shortly after a successful exhibition at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. Many interpret the work as a commentary on our ability to reflect on our place in the world and the universe. This time, Christie's predicted the painting would

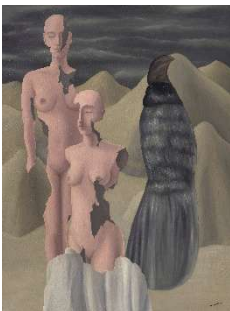
sell for between £6 million and £9 million. Bids came in at a steady pace, stalling at around £8 million. It came down to two phone bidders who gradually decreased the increments, going from £8.2 million to £8.5 million to £8.6 million. The bidder on the phone with Maria Los, head of Christie's American client advisory, finally snagged it at £8.7 million / \$11.2 million (or £10.3 million / \$13.3 million w/p).

Next up was a 1938 oil painting by Magritte's colleague Paul Delvaux. The painting, entitled *La ville endormie*, shows several nude female figures and the artist's self-portrait among the ruins of a town at nighttime. The structures of the ruined city resemble those of classical antiquity. However, their placement and arrangement in the painting give the setting a quality closer to fantasy than history. The use of classical and neoclassical architecture is something that several surrealists used in their works, [most notably Giorgio de Chirico](#).



La ville endormie
by Paul Delvaux

When it crossed the block on Wednesday, it was the first time the painting had gone to auction in over thirty years. The Delvaux was expected by Christie's to bring in a good amount of money, but few anticipated it to become one of the sale's top lots. The most anyone expected the painting to sell for was £1.8 million. It surpassed this estimate after fifty-six seconds of bidding. It then reached double the highest estimate after three-and-a-half minutes. After just over eight minutes, it finally hammered at £5.1 million / \$6.57 million (or £6.18 million / \$7.96 million w/p), or 2.8 times the high estimate. *La ville endormie* is now the artist's third most valuable painting to sell at auction. And finally, another Magritte in third place. In the painting, *La lumière du pôle*, Magritte pulled from his experience as a commercial artist to create several figures, two of them appearing like shattered mannequins while a third appears almost like a person in a fur coat missing their face. Magritte designed catalogues for fur companies in the mid-1920s, allowing him to emulate these textures here. The work also has an interesting provenance. Several European galleries owned it at one point or another, and it was previously in the collection of the actress Sophia Loren. Christie's expected it to make at least £4.5 million. However, interest in the painting was not as great as some of the others in the sale. After only a few bids, Adrien Meyer brought the hammer down after thirty-five seconds at £4 million / \$5.15 million (or £4.88 million / \$6.3 million w/p).



La lumière du pôle
by René Magritte

Delvaux's *La ville endormie* was not the only work by the artist that did spectacularly well on Wednesday. Three Delvaux paintings were available at Christie's that day, one of which, [Les belles de nuit](#), was the biggest surprise of the sale. Against a high estimate of £1 million, the painting attracted much attention, with bidding going on for nearly 5 minutes. It eventually hammered at £3.6 million / \$4.6 million (or £4.4 million / \$5.66 million w/p), or over three-and-a-half times the high estimate. Even compared to previous years, the Art of the Surreal sale at Christie's on Wednesday did exceptionally well. These sales typically have incredibly high sell-through rates and specialist accuracy rates. Last year's sale did not do as well as is normal, and they still managed an 88% sell-through rate with a 40% accuracy rate for the specialists, bringing in £49.5 million against a total low estimate of £48 million. This year, however, the surrealist sale returned with a bang. Of the twenty-five lots available, only one went unsold, giving it a sell-through rate of 96%. Furthermore, twelve lots sold within their estimates, giving Christie's a 48% accuracy rate. An additional

eight lots (32%) sold above their estimates. The sale ended up exceeding its total high estimate. With all twenty-five lots initially predicted to bring in a maximum of £38.4 million, the sale ended with a total hammer of £39.4 million / \$50.8 million.

Christie's London Impressionist & Modern Art



Le quai à sable, environs de Port-Marly
by Alfred Sisley

I thought [the Art of the Surreal sale](#) would be the big triumph at Christie's last week. However, it seems like they ended up with a better week than anticipated, given the success of their Impressionist and Modern Art Day and Works on Paper sale on Friday, March 7th. While there were no multi-million pound lots, the sale was incredible to watch for several other reasons, including a substantial portion of the sale selling not only above their estimates but exponentially so.

Most of the sale was made up of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works by the modern European masters. And the top lots are reflective of that. On top was an 1875 landscape by Alfred Sisley showing the town of Le Port-Marly, located on the banks of the River Seine just northwest of Paris. The artist spent two years in the town between 1875 and 1877 and created many paintings of the surrounding area. The work also has a rather

impressive provenance, including Galerie Durand-Ruel, Knoedler & Co., and the Minneapolis Institute of Art. It has been in the same private collection since 1996 after it sold at Christie's for \$620K hammer. Christie's specialists clearly expected that the Sisley would retain its value in the thirty years since it last appeared on the market, as they gave it an estimate range of £500K to £700K. The work ended up squarely in the middle, hammering for £600K / \$774.7K (or £756K / \$976.1K w/p).

Homme assis, a painting from 1900 by Henri Matisse, came in right behind the Sisley. The colors and the broad brushstrokes herald the advent of the artist's fauvist style, which he would pioneer in the years following the creation of *Homme assis*. The work is rather rare since it has been kept from the secondary market for so long. It was part of the artist's estate at the time of his death in 1954 and remained in his family until they sold it at Christie's Paris in 2023, where it made €390.6K w/p. The Matisse fared far better in London, where several interested parties drove the final hammer price up to £580K / \$748.9K (or £730.8K / \$943.6K w/p). And finally, it can't truly be an Impressionist and modern art sale without a Chagall. *Femme à l'âne vert ou Tête de vache verte* is a painting dating to 1953, showing several of the artist's characteristic motifs, including human figures, flowers, and animals, against a night sky. Some believe that the woman in the painting may reference Valentina Brodsky, who Chagall had married only the year before the painting's creation. The work was in the collection of Willy and Marina Staehelin-Peyer, art collectors based in Zürich who had part of their collection sold by Sotheby's in 2016. The Chagall secured the third-place spot despite falling short of its £550K low estimate. It accrued a few bids before hammering at £450K / \$581K (or £567K / \$732.1K w/p).



Homme assis
by Henri Matisse



Femme à l'âne vert ou Tête de vache verte
by Marc Chagall

What made the Impressionist and Modern Art Day sale remarkable was the amount of attention many of the lots drew to the point that they sold far above their high estimates. Of the one hundred twenty-five available lots, twenty-nine sold for more than double their high estimates. Seven sold for five times the estimate or higher. However, the greatest surprises were two works on paper by Marc Chagall. Both, owned by the Chagall family, are ink drawings done with pen and brush and stamped with Chagall's signature. [Études en noir et blanc](#) dates to 1956 and is the larger of the two, measuring 10 ½ by 7 inches. Christie's gave it a high estimate of £800. Christie's expected

the other, [Prière dans la nuit](#), to sell for no more than £600. It is an earlier work from 1935 and is far smaller at just under 5 by 3 inches. Both drawings drew a great amount of attention, with their final hammer prices skyrocketing far past their pre-sale estimates. *Études en noir et blanc* sold for over seventeen times its high estimate, hammering at £14K / \$18.1K (or £17.6K / \$22.8K w/p). *Prière dans la nuit*, on the other hand, sold for over twenty-one times its estimate, selling for £13K / \$16.8K (or £16.4K / \$21.1K w/p). Overall, the auction did exceptionally well. Of the one hundred twenty-five available lots, sixty-two sold above their estimates. This accounts for slightly under 50% of the sale. An additional twenty-seven lots sold below their estimates, while twenty-eight sold within, giving Christie's specialists a 22% accuracy rate. Only eight lots (6%) went unsold on Friday. Christie's initially expected the entire sale to bring in between £6.6 million and £9.6 million. The lots that did sell added up to £8.2 million / \$10.6 million.

Bonhams Skinner American Art



Island Funeral, composition drawing
by N.C. Wyeth

On Wednesday, March 12th, Bonham's Skinner hosted one of their American art sales, primarily featuring paintings and sculptures from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among the lots available were works by Thomas Hart Benton and Milton Avery. However, the auction got things started with a bang as works by members of the Wyeth family crossed the block. There were ten works total by N.C. Wyeth, his son Andrew Wyeth, and grandson Jamie Wyeth. One, however, drew a great deal of attention. A charcoal drawing on paper called *Island Funeral* measures an impressive 43 by 50.5 inches, showing a bird's-eye view of a small island upon which a small building, possibly a church, is hosting a gathering as seen by the small crowd of figures assembled just outside. More people are arriving on the island by boat. The work is one of several drawings and sketches made in preparation for [Wyeth's later painting of the same name](#), which has been at the Brandywine Museum of Art since 2017. It was inspired by

Wyeth's time in Maine, where, in 1935, he witnessed a parade of small boats filled with people on their way to the funeral of a local man named Rufus Teel. Until then, Wyeth was primarily known as an illustrator and used the finished painting as the focal point of an exhibition to rebrand himself as a serious artist. The drawing offered at Bonhams was estimated to sell for no more than \$35K. However, to a serious collector, it is an incredibly important work representing a major turning point in the artist's life. Several interested parties drove the final price up more than eleven times the high estimate, hammering at \$400K (or \$508.5K w/p).

Bonhams did not anticipate any of the lots to go for more than \$120K, meaning that after *Island Funeral*, the top lots significantly dropped in hammer price. Next up was a watercolor by John Singer Sargent. Like the Wyeth, this work was also inspired by a vacation in Maine. Sometime in the early 1920s, Sargent visited the home of his friend and fellow artist Dwight Blaney on Ironbound Island in Frenchman Bay between Winter Harbor and Bar Harbor. The artists created works showing an old pier near Blaney's home. The two paintings show their respective artists' different styles and use of color, yet they are undoubtedly the same subject. Sargent gifted his painting to Blaney, and they have stayed with the Blaney family until now. Both were featured in the sale, one after the other. While [the Blaney painting](#) sold for slightly above its \$5K high estimate at \$7K, Sargent hammered at \$60K (or \$76.7K w/p), slightly below its \$70K low estimate.



The Old Wharf, Ironbound
by John Singer Sargent



Copley Square
by Thomas Adrian Fransioli

And finally, a pair of surprises came in joint third place. First was the 1948 painting *Copley Square* by the Massachusetts artist Thomas Adrian Fransioli. Fransioli was originally trained as an architect, bringing detail and precision to his early twentieth-century cityscapes. *Copley Square* is one of the few Fransioli paintings that includes figures. The other work in joint-third is Ernest Lee Major's *The Shower of Gold: Danaë*, showing the scene from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* where Zeus impregnates the titular Greek princess as a shower of gold. Both paintings sold for \$44K hammer (or \$56.3K w/p), far above their respective estimate ranges. The Fransioli was initially predicted to sell for no more than \$8K, meaning it sold for 5.5 times its estimate. Meanwhile, Bonhams assigned a presale high estimate of only \$5K to the Major, giving it a 'surprise factor' of a little less than 9.

Skinner's American Art sale was a success in some ways but fell slightly short in others. Of the one hundred twenty-two available lots, thirty sold within their estimates, giving Bonhams an accuracy rate of 25%. The greatest share of lots sold under their estimates, amounting to forty-one lots (34%). With another twenty-three lots (19%) selling over, Bonhams achieved a 77% sell-through rate. Some unsold lots included the 1974 Andrew Wyeth drawing [Walking in Her Cape Coat](#) (est. \$80K to \$120K) and the 1897 Frederic Remington ink drawing [Fire and Sword in Cuba](#) (est. \$50K to \$70K). This was another example of how a single lot could make or break a sale. N.C. Wyeth's *Island Funeral* drawing really carried the auction up and over its total estimate. Had the drawing sold for just its high estimate of \$35K, the sale as a whole would not have achieved its total low estimate of \$664K. However, the Wyeth lifted the total up to \$989.2K.



The Shower of Gold: Danaë
by Ernest Lee Major

Christie's London Modern British & Irish Evening Sale



Nude on Bed III
by Frank Auerbach

On Wednesday, March 19th, Christie's London hosted one of its evening sales dedicated to modern British and Irish art. These sales often do fairly well, but that is not always a foregone conclusion. This one, I believe, was a great success for Christie's.

Christie's expected two lots to sell for £1 million or more, and they respectively became the first and second place lot of the evening. Frank Auerbach's 1961 oil painting *Nude on Bed III* made its auction debut on Wednesday. The work is incredibly rare to appear at auction since it has been in the same private collection since 1962. Its previous owner, Moyra Campbell, was the daughter of the Duke of Abercorn and served as a lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth's cousin, Princess Alexandra. *Nude on Bed III* has only been exhibited once apart from the show at London's Beaux Arts

Gallery, where Campbell purchased the painting. Having passed away in 2020, Campbell's family consigned the Auerbach to Christie's, anticipating it to make between £700K and £1 million. The painting slightly exceeded expectations, hammering at £1.2 million / \$1.56 million (or £1.49 million / \$1.9 million w/p).

While the Auerbach exceeded its pre-sale estimate, the anticipated first-place lot ended up in second. Lynn Chadwick designed the bronze sculpture *Sitting Couple on Bench* in 1990. Yet this edition (numbered 5 of 9) was not created until 2021, eighteen years after the artist's death. Several editions of this sculpture have previously found great success at auction, with the first edition in the series [selling at last year's modern British and Irish evening sale for £1.6 million w/p](#). The version sold at Christie's on Wednesday fell slightly short of these expectations, hammering at £1.1 million / \$1.4 million (or £1.37 million / \$1.78 million w/p) against a £1.2 million minimum estimate. The sale's biggest surprise ended up becoming the third-place lot. Upon looking at Sir William Nicholson's 1908 still life *The Lustre Bowl*, I thought it was nice but not particularly noteworthy. It is consistent with some of the artist's other still-life paintings, employing a sort of [chiaroscuro background for household objects](#). Some bidders at Christie's that day seemed to disagree with this assessment, as several interested parties continued to bid on the painting until it



Sitting Couple on Bench
by Lynn Chadwick



The Lustre Bowl
by Sir William Nicholson

sold for over five times its high estimate. Though estimated to sell for no more than £180K, interest in the dark still-life drove its final hammer price all the way up to £950K / \$1.2 million (or £1.19 million / \$1.5 million w/p). This made it the second-most-expensive work by Nicholson ever sold at auction, just trailing behind his painting Miss Simpson's Boots, [which sold at Christie's in 2022](#) for £1.78 million w/p.

Even if the Nicholson hadn't blown away its pre-sale estimate, Christie's Modern British Irish evening sale would have done incredibly well. Of the twenty-five lots available that evening, twelve sold within their pre-sale estimates, giving Christie's an accuracy rate of 48%. Five additional lots (20%) sold below, and six (24%) parentheses sold above. With two lots going unsold, the sale achieved a sell-through rate of 92%. All the hammer prices added up mounted to £9 million / \$11.7 million against a total pre-sale minimum of £7.45 million.

Bonhams 19th-Century & British Impressionist Art



A Reception in the Harem
by John Frederick Lewis

On Wednesday, March 26th, Bonhams' sale room at New Bond Street, London, hosted their 19th-Century and British Impressionist art sale, featuring works by Heywood Hardy, Rudolf Ernst, Sir Alfred Munnings, and Dame Laura Knight. However, the works of the orientalist painter John Frederick Lewis seemed to have been the fixation of many buyers on Wednesday. His 1873 watercolor *A Reception in the Harem* made its first appearance at auction in fifty-eight years at Bonhams on Wednesday. They expected it to do well since not only was the Turkish harem an incredibly popular subject for Western European Orientalist artists, but Lewis, in particular, was one of the more culturally sensitive painters active in the genre in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As I previously noted in my writings [discussing the problematic nature of some](#)

[Orientalist art](#), Lewis stood out among his contemporaries in that he lived in Cairo for close to a decade. There, he made an effort to paint genre scenes and slices of daily life in the region, representing its people and

customs as accurately as possible. Bonhams predicted the watercolor would sell for between £650K and £850K. The bidding pushed up the final hammer price slightly over, with the work selling for £900K / \$1.16 million (or £1.14 million / \$1.47 million w/p).

Immediately after the harem scene, another one of Lewis's works crossed the block, this time a watercolor and pencil work showing the interior of the Hagia Sophia. While mosques were popular subjects for Orientalist artists as a way to show Islamic piety, very rarely do we see specific mosques in paintings. The Hagia Sophia, however, is one of the world's most famous Islamic religious sites. Originally built as a Byzantine church, it has been one of Istanbul's most famous buildings for over 1,600 years. Depictions of actual mosques are so rare because, at the time, it was considered distasteful (and in some places actually prohibited) for non-Muslims to step foot inside without express permission of local authorities. While visiting Turkey in 1840, Lewis accompanied the British aristocrat Lady Londonderry on her tour of Istanbul's religious sites, meaning that he had permission to enter the Hagia Sophia. The work's rarity made it very popular with buyers on Wednesday, with successive bids pushing it to two-and-a-half times its £60K high estimate, hammering at £150K / \$193.3K (or £190.9K / \$245.9K w/p).



Interior of the Hagia Sophia
by John Frederick Lewis



Mia suora Rachel
by Marie Spartali Stillman

Two works ended up tied for third at Bonhams. Moving away from the Orientalist paintings, *Mia suora Rachel* by Marie Spartali Stillman has all the characteristic hallmarks of a Pre-Raphaelite portrait, including the medieval robes, the use of flowers, and an accompanying line originally from Dante's *Divine Comedy*: "*Ma mia suora Rachele mai non si smaga dal suo miraglio, e siede tutto giorno*", or "But my sister Rachel never leaves her looking glass, and sits all day long". While the central figure looking into a mirror may suggest vanity, the Dante reference indicates it is a scene of self-reflection. Sharing third place with the Stillman was a landscape by the great French Barbizon painter Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. *Souvenir de la Rotte, près Rotterdam* shows the River Rotte leading from the Dutch countryside into the city of Rotterdam. The painting has a provenance somewhat typical of a Corot landscape, including Georges Bernheim, Galerie Georges Petit, and Knoedler. It being featured at Bonhams on Wednesday marked the work's first auction appearance in over twenty years. It's last time crossing the block saw it sell at Christie's New York for \$147K w/p. The Stillman and the Corot each sold for £110K / \$141.7K (or £140.1K / \$180.5K w/p), the

former selling for slightly over its £100K low estimate and the latter selling for slightly below its £120K estimate. While this was only a moderate improvement from the Corot's previous auction appearance, *Mia suora Rachel* became one of the top five most expensive works by Stillman ever sold at auction.

Despite these successes, unfortunately, the sale fell short because of one lot's failure. Along with John Frederick Lewis, one of the most prominent Orientalist artists who remained respectful of their subjects was the Turkish painter Osman Hamdi Bey. His painting, *The Hearth*, has never been seen on the secondary market. It had been in the same family since 1910, after being purchased from the artist. While many European artists chose to depict scenes from the Ottoman harems for erotic titillation, Hamdi sought to push back against harmful Western clichés of Middle Eastern people by showing more realistic representations of harem life. Nothing is explicitly sexual about a wife serving her husband coffee, and the attention to detail in the decorative items like the coffee pot, plates, vases, and inkwells shows dedication to showing how an actual Turkish home may look. *The Hearth* is one of Hamdi's earlier works, created in 1879 in the final years of his time in the Ottoman bureaucracy. As one of the artist's earlier genre scenes, Bonhams' specialists assigned the Hamdi an astounding estimate range of £1.2 million to £1.8 million. The respective minimum estimates of just Hamdi and the Lewis harem scene comprised 60% of the total minimum presale estimate. When the Hamdi failed to garner enough interest from buyers, the sale was toast. Despite twenty-three of sixty-nine lots selling within their estimates, giving Bonhams' specialists a 33% accuracy rate, the failure of the Hamdi tanked the total. With ten lots selling below their estimates and seventeen selling for above, Bonhams achieved a 72% accuracy rate. Against the total low estimate of £3.1 million, *The Hearth* going unsold brought the total down to £2.12 million / \$2.7 million.



Souvenir de la Rotte, près Rotterdam
by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot

Deeper Thoughts

Rijksmuseum Unveils Rare Vanitas Still-Life



Vanitas Still-Life
by Maria van Oosterwijck

Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum has recently unveiled one of its latest acquisitions: a masterpiece by one of the most important female painters of the Dutch Golden Age, Maria van Oosterwijck.

On Tuesday, March 4th, the Rijksmuseum put *Vanitas Still Life* by Maria van Oosterwijck on display for the first time. While the museum owns a few works connected to the artist, it currently has no paintings by Van Oosterwijck, making this the only one in the collection at the moment. The painting has been undergoing extensive restoration since the museum acquired it in 2023. Examinations of the work reveal many changes and underpaintings. For example, there was initially supposed to be an hourglass on the table and a snake slithering through a crack in a wall in the background. The initial purpose was made possible by [the Women of the Rijksmuseum Fund](#) as well as the museum Friends' Lottery.

Maria van Oosterwijck became renowned in her own lifetime as a still-life painter specializing in floral still-life paintings. She is commonly considered not just one of the most important female painters of the era, but one of the most renowned Dutch Golden Age artists in general. She developed an impressive demand for her work among the European elite, including royalty. Some of her clients included King Louis XIV and Cosimo III de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany. Nowadays, her works are highly sought after by Old Masters collectors not only because of her renown but also because of the rarity of her works. She was known for her incredible attention to detail, so she did not create as many paintings as other comparable artists. Currently, only about thirty of her paintings are known to exist, including work owned by the Mauritshuis in The Hague, Florence's Palatine Gallery, and the Royal Collection in London.

The work on display at the Rijksmuseum is interesting because it combines a floral still life and a vanitas painting. This genre of still life was popular in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. Artists creating these paintings would select a series of items to be assembled together in the painting to represent themes of materialism and wealth alongside decay, time, aging, and death. Vanitas still life artists would commonly use half-eaten food, timepieces, bones, trinkets, and candles to convey these themes. Flowers were another common component, but very rarely were flowers the main focus of the painting. In the Van Oosterwijck painting at the Rijksmuseum, the bouquet is front and center, featuring roses, tulips, irises, and a sunflower. A skull lies on the table beneath it as if it is wearing a garland crown. The painting also features an orange with a bite taken out of it, a Bible, a jewelry box, and a tablet inscribed with the Ten Commandments in Hebrew. The painting is an incredibly personal since it shows Van Oosterwijck's piety. She was a deeply religious woman, with both her father and grandfather being ministers.

According to the museum, the painting is now as close to its original state as possible. It is currently hanging in the Gallery of Honor on the Rijksmuseum's first floor.

FBI Gallery Raid Confirmed As A Stunt

Videos spread all over social media last week allegedly showing FBI agents seizing a painting right off the walls of a Manhattan gallery. However, it all turned out to be a stunt.

Last week, I received messages from people asking me about a Rembrandt painting confiscated by the FBI right off the walls of the gallery in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. I looked at the videos, and nothing seemed right. The videos appeared to have been taken at a gallery opening with many people assembled. Meanwhile, three men in navy blue FBI windbreakers came in, took the painting off the wall, and walked out. Several users posted videos of the incident on social media platforms like Instagram, [most notably David Ma](#).



Storm on the Sea of Galilee
by Rembrandt

First red flag: the FBI doesn't just come in with a few guys. They come in with the cavalry, shutting down the location and removing the confiscated art completely packaged and sealed. [The FBI's 2021 raid on the Danieli Galerie in Palm Beach](#) is a good example. In the posted videos, these alleged

agents simply entered the gallery before a crowd and walked out with the painting. But then there was the other red flag. The work they seized was easily recognizable as *Storm on the Sea of Galilee* by Rembrandt. There's only one problem, though – *Storm on the Sea of Galilee* was stolen in 1990 from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. The Rembrandt was one of thirteen works of art stolen in that heist, along with [The Concert](#) by Johannes Vermeer, [Chez Tortoni](#) by Édouard Manet, and [several sketches by Edgar Degas](#). Collectively, the stolen works are valued at \$500 million, and the Gardner Museum still offers a \$10 million reward for information leading to its recovery. Even in recent years, [different clues and pieces of evidence have surfaced](#), bringing greater clarity or confusion to the tracking down of stolen art. I suspected, therefore, that these recent videos were not showing us a legitimate FBI seizure but something entirely different.

From what I could find, the only publication to look into this incident is *Observer*, which revealed the incident as a work of performance art. An organization called 13 Masterpieces set up a gallery show starting last Thursday, March 13, at the Chelsea Walls Gallery on 10th Avenue. The promotional material very cryptically advertised that the show would feature “legendary artworks that have not been seen by the public for 35 years — until now.” It seems the show consisted of reproductions of the works stolen in the Gardner heist. The organizers were thorough in their attempts to conceal their identities. However, some suspected that the production company DVRG may have been involved. *Observer* eventually confirmed that the staged raid was organized by DVRG in collaboration with the film *Any Day Now*, a fictionalization of the Gardner Museum heist set to come out later this year.

Trump's Colorado Painting & Other Presidential Portrait Stories



Theodore Roosevelt
by John Singer Sargent

A portrait of Donald Trump hanging at the Colorado State Capitol building has been removed after many people online decided the president's depiction was amusing and unflattering.

Apart from when they are first unveiled, presidential portraits don't often receive much attention in the news. Nowadays, former presidents will usually have multiple portraits done, with the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) commissioning a painting for their American Presidents exhibition. The White House Historical Association also curates their own collection of presidential portraits. While they may seem like rather simple paintings, many of them have fascinating stories revealing different aspects of the subject and the painter.

Theodore Roosevelt

Teddy Roosevelt was a man of action. His official portrait, though static, serves as an example of this. Finding himself unsatisfied with an earlier portrait, Roosevelt hired renowned painter John Singer Sargent. The president and the artist spent a good amount of time together, with Sargent following Roosevelt all around the White House, making sketches from every conceivable angle and in every form of light. However, the painter simply could not find a suitable setting or pose for the portrait. Sensing this, Roosevelt paused to address the artist shortly before ascending a set of stairs, placing his hand on the balustrade. Hit with inspiration, Sargent decided this was exactly what he would paint: a president constantly on the move, taking a brief moment to address the viewer. However, Roosevelt's rigorous schedule meant that the president could only pose for Sargent for half an hour each day, right after lunch. Roosevelt reportedly liked this painting far better.

Bill Clinton

While [Bill Clinton's official White House portrait](#) by Simmie Knox shows the president in a very dignified pose, standing before the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office, the painting commissioned by the NPG is slightly more scandalous. The gallery commissioned the portrait from Nelson Shanks. However, it seems the artist may not have been the president's biggest supporter because he decided to include a nod to one of the biggest political scandals of the 1990s. [The Shanks portrait](#) shows the president in the Oval Office's fireplace with his hands on his hips. It's far more casual than the Knox portrait, almost like you've caught him in the middle of something. However, the president is not in the center of the painting; he is slightly on the right-hand side. The left-hand side would be unremarkable if it weren't for a noticeable shadow coming across from just outside our view. Shank later said in a 2015 interview that the shadow represents the Monica Lewinsky scandal that plagued Clinton's presidency during his second term. Shank admitted that he modeled the shadow based on the shadow cast by a mannequin wearing a blue dress, a reference to the infamous dress Lewinsky wore that later served as proof of an affair between the president and the White House intern. It is one of the few portraits kept from display at the NPG.

John F. Kennedy

[The portrait of John F. Kennedy by Aaron Shikler](#) is the president's official White House portrait. Jacqueline Kennedy commissioned the painting in 1970, making it one of the few posthumous presidential portraits. Jackie Kennedy intentionally asked for the picture to stand out among others by not having her late husband look in the direction of the viewer. She admitted that she did not want to see her late husband as he had been shown before, "with the bags under his eyes and that penetrating gaze. I'm tired of that image". Instead, Shikler shows Kennedy with his arms crossed, looking downward as if lost in thought or possibly melancholy. The artist stated that he drew inspiration from images of Ted Kennedy at the president's funeral. Even with Kehinde Wiley's colorful portrait of Barack Obama, Shikler's painting remains one of American history's most distinctive presidential portraits



John F. Kennedy
by Aaron Shikler

Franklin D. Roosevelt

The official White House portrait and the NPG-commissioned portrait are often the only paintings worth mentioning in terms of presidential portraits. For Franklin Roosevelt, Frank Salisbury painted [the White House portrait](#) in 1947. The president's NPG portrait by Douglas Chandor [was originally intended as a study](#) for a larger group portrait along with Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin commemorating the Yalta Conference. However, there is another painting worth mentioning. In April 1945, the president's longtime mistress, Lucy Mercer Rutherfurd, reached out to her friend, the portraitist Elizabeth Shoumatoff, to paint the president's picture while he stayed at his house in Warm Springs, Georgia. Shoumatoff agreed to have the president sit for her over two days starting April 12th. The artist completed Roosevelt's face and parts of his torso before the president began experiencing headaches. This was the cerebral hemorrhage that later led to Roosevelt's death at around 3:30pm that same day. Shoumatoff was later involved in a cover-up since the public was unaware of the president's affair with Rutherfurd. The portraitist intentionally omitted any mention of Rutherfurd when she spoke to members of the press. [Shoumatoff's unfinished portrait](#) now hangs at the house in Warm Springs where it was created, serving as a retrospectively somber depiction of Roosevelt's last days. The artist was later commissioned as a presidential portraitist a second time when Lyndon Johnson sat for [his official White House portrait](#).

Donald Trump

The Colorado State Capitol building hosts a small gallery of presidential portraits. Unlike the paintings at the NPG, the Colorado Capitol paintings are somewhat uniform, showing bust-length portraits of every American president against a dark, gray-green background. The Colorado legislature unveiled [Trump's portrait](#) in the summer of 2019. The artist, Sarah Boardman, stated that she intended for the president to appear "thoughtful, non-confrontational, not angry, not happy, not tweeting". However, nearly six years later, the painting has gained the attention of the president's critics and the president himself. Many online comments have remarked that the portrait makes the president appear chubby and docile. Trump also complained, claiming that the painting was "purposefully distorted". The Colorado state legislature's executive committee promptly issued a statement calling for the portrait's removal. Trump initially blamed Colorado's Democratic governor, Jared Polis, for displaying a seemingly unflattering representation at the capitol. However, curating paintings in the capital building is not part of the governor's job. Trump has already received a good deal of criticism for his complaints about such a small issue as a painting in a state capitol building. Social media accounts online have called him "a petty, insecure baby" as well as "the most fragile, sensitive snowflake in history".

British Museum Makeover

Part of the British Museum will be completely redesigned, with the museum administration choosing architect Lina Ghotmeh's designs this weekend.

The building that houses the British Museum dates back to the early to mid-nineteenth century. It was designed by Sir Robert Smirke in the popular Greek revival style, a testament to the architectural trends of its time. Originally intended to accommodate around 100,000 visitors per year, the museum's expansion and increased prominence during the height of the British empire led to a surge in visitors, putting great strain on the structure. The museum has long needed renovation to keep up with the crowds it attracts. The first stage in this redevelopment is redesigning the Western Range, which consists of all the galleries west of the Great Court, the large atrium visitors enter shortly after walking through the museum's front doors. These western galleries feature many of the museum's ancient



British Museum

artifacts, including Egyptian pieces like [the Rosetta Stone](#), Mesopotamian antiquities like [the Assyrian lion hunt reliefs](#), and the highly controversial [Greek sculptures taken from the Acropolis](#) in the early nineteenth century. The museum administration announced in May 2024 that it would accept submissions for new designs for these galleries.

Lebanese-born French architect Lina Ghotmeh, [whose designs were chosen](#), plans on bringing what she calls an “archaeological approach”. And when you look at some of the images of what these galleries will eventually look like, you can sort of understand what she means by that. They look bright and spacious, with an extensive use of stone that brings a simultaneously modern yet ancient feel. They seem almost inspired by the palaces and temples of antiquity from which many of these artifacts originate. Museum director Nicholas Cullinan said the jury selected her designs because of “their beauty, sensitivity and ingenuity”. Her firm’s previous projects include the [Hermès Leather Workshop](#) and [the Estonian National Museum](#). Lina has also received many accolades, including the 2023 Great Arab Minds Award, the 2020 Schelling Architecture Award, and the 2016 Prix Déjean awarded by the Académie d’Architecture. She has also been nominated for the AFEX Grand Prix and the Mies van der Rohe Award.

The British Museum administration has stated that the construction will work to preserve the parts of the building designed by Smirke. They have also assured the public that this project will be executed over several phases, meaning that not all galleries will be closed simultaneously, allowing visitors to visit most of the museum at any given time. These redesigns are part of a larger “masterplan” that the British Museum’s administration unveiled to modernize one of the world’s largest cultural institutions. The plan includes creating a museum energy center to decrease reliance on fossil fuels; in theory, it will save 1,873 tons of carbon dioxide and make the building far more sustainable (that is, if they’ve abandoned their [environmentally unfriendly NFT digitization project](#)). This is rather ironic since British Petroleum [plans on donating £50 million](#) towards the redevelopment project.

\$12 Renoir?



A Renoir?

When people send me recent stories of some amazing find at a thrift store or a garage sale, my first reaction is to be incredibly skeptical. This is the same advice I gave when writing about [the alleged Van Gogh found at a garage sale](#) (which the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam has rejected as an original work by the artist). However, every once in a while, you really do get a story of an amazing find in an unlikely place. That seems to be the case with a drawing, possibly by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, found by an antique shop owner in Easton, Pennsylvania.

Earlier in the week, local news outlets in northeastern Pennsylvania began reporting about Heidi Markow, owner of Salvage Good Antiques. In January, Markow went to a local auction and found a charcoal sketch of a nude woman. Despite not knowing much about the work, she said she was drawn to it and bought it for \$12. Only afterward did she see the faint Renoir signature in the bottom right-hand corner. After a few months of research, Markow, a certified art appraiser, concluded that this might be a genuine work by the Impressionist master. Based on the attention to detail in the shading, she has dated it to Renoir’s Ingres period, placing it at around 1883 or 1884. She has also guessed that the subject may be [Aline Charigot](#), a model that Renoir extensively worked with and later married in 1890. She also appears in Renoir’s 1881 work [Luncheon of the Boating Party](#), where she plays with a dog on the left-hand side. Markow also has stated that markings on the drawing’s verso indicate that the work was likely brought to the United States by Louis Madeira IV, a collector from the affluent Philadelphia suburb of Gladwyne. Madeira was married to Helen Tyson, whose family had extensive ties to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Tyson family donated a substantial amount of European art to the PMA over the years, including Monet’s [Japanese Footbridge](#) and [one of Van Gogh’s sunflower paintings](#). Though Madeira’s name was on the back, he was more well-known as a connoisseur of decorative pieces like silver and porcelain. How the drawing went from the Madeira-Tyson family collection to a local Montgomery County auction is unknown.

Wanting to do her due diligence, Markow reached out to Sotheby’s, who put her in contact with an appraiser. This unknown specialist has reportedly confirmed this is likely a genuine Renoir drawing. Markow has also reached out to the Wildenstein Plattner Institute, turning over the drawing for further study. The WPI is expected to reach a conclusion by mid-April. Markow has stated that she plans to sell the drawing and hopes to receive a hefty sum for her find. If the WPI confirms that this drawing is an authentic work by Renoir, it will be added to the artist’s catalogue raisonné.

An Oldie, But Goodie

Alexander Grant – Scammer
(2022)

On Monday, May 30th, we received the following email:

Hi, I am an avid art collector and I saw your Inventory through the Askart website and would love to know if the under-listed art pieces are still available for sale, Get back to me with the estimated cost in USD plus shipping and do you accept wire transfer?

PITTSBURGH POINT BRIDGE FROM WATER STREET C.1880 (2000)
[John Stobart](#)

AT DAWNS CROSSING
G (Gerald Harvey Jones) Harvey

I'll appreciate your prompt response in this regard.

Sincerely,
Alexander Grant

I was a bit skeptical about the validity of this email, but I figured let's see what happens. So I sent the following reply on Tuesday the 31st:

Thank you for your email.

The Stobart is \$58,000
G. Harvey is \$115,000

Shipping costs will all depend on the location ... if you want to give me your mailing address, we can let you know what that is.

A few hours later, "Alexander" replied:

I'll be happy to have these paintings with me next week in time for my lovely daughter's birthday so kindly arrange an Invoice addressed to Pacific Mechanical LLC and also get back to me with Wire Instructions which has to include your Account number, Routing number & Bank address.

My address is below for Calculation of Shipping cost.
2517 Maxine Cir
Sparks, NV 89431-4157

Sincerely,
Alexander Grant.

Later that day, I contacted my bank about the safety and security of our account. The only way you can secure an account is by putting certain safety features in place. Rather than creating an issue with our current account, I decided to open a new one and activated all the features – basically, money can come in, but taking money out needed to pass certain protocols that only we can do. With that now in place, I sent a fake invoice:

Alexander

Attached is an invoice for the two paintings. We will cover the packing; the only additional charge is the freight (which is noted on the invoice). Please let me know when funds are transferred so we can confirm receipt.

Howard

The following day, I decided to give him a little push:

Alex

I want to confirm that you received the invoice for the paintings by Stobart and Harvey? Again, please let us know when the funds will be transferred and the best delivery date?

Howard

On Monday, June 6th, I still had not heard from "Alexander," and knowing he wanted these works for his daughter's birthday (ha ha), I sent the following:

Alexander

I assumed you would be sending the funds last week since you needed the works this week. I guess you are not moving forward with the purchase?

Howard

Well, it did not take long to receive the following:

Hello Howard,

*It is only a temporary delay and our accountant is working on it. Sorry for any Inconveniences.
Sincerely,*

Alexander Grant.

I assumed this would continue for a few more days, but I was wrong. The next morning, we received a small envelope via FedEx from HA Friend & Co, Zion, IL. I opened it and discovered a check (image below) in the amount of \$173,000 (a little short of the full amount \$173,800 which included the shipping). I thought to myself, weren't the funds going to be transferred in? Just one more red flag. I took the flimsy check in my hand and noticed the name of the company on the check was different from all the other names and addresses – Self Insured Group, Oklahoma City – and the bank was BancFirst.



Bogus Check

I decided to call the bank to confirm that the check was fraudulent. Their people were only able to tell me that the company and account number were correct, but the signature on the check did not match anyone in the company. I then called Self Insured Group. After a few attempts, I finally reached a lovely woman who informed me that their account had been hacked and several bogus checks were issued — ours being one of them. She then asked if I would tell her the amount, which I did — that gave her a really good laugh!

I then sent "Alexander" the following:

I received the check today and canceled the sale.

It is not the first time someone tried to scam us with a bogus check, and it will not be the last. I recommend that everyone be a little cautious — remember the old adage — better safe than sorry. On a side note, if anyone would like to own a great work by either G. Harvey or John Stobart, just let us know... they are still available!

A \$360,000 Gaming System – Really?

In the late 1980s, Nintendo and Sony formed a partnership to create the *Nintendo PlayStation*. The idea was to incorporate a CD-ROM into the popular Super Nintendo entertainment/gaming system, but the partnership dissolved, and the prototypes of the gaming system were all thought to have been destroyed. One of the 200 prototypes (created c. 1992), was spared when Ólafur Jóhann Ólafsson, the founder and first president of Sony Computer Entertainment (a division of Sony Corporation), kept it when he left Sony and went to Advanta Corporation in 1997. In 1999 he moved to Time Warner, but appears to have left his gaming console behind.

In 2009, Advanta filed for bankruptcy, an office auction took place, and the Nintendo PlayStation prototype was one of the items sold. Terry Diebold, who worked at Advanta, purchased a bin at the auction that contained the piece for \$75.

The rare Nintendo-Sony system was found in Diebold's attic by his son, and they recently decided it was time to sell the one-of-a-kind item. A number of reports state that he turned down an offer of \$1.2M before putting the game up for sale at auction...REALLY?...you turned down over a million dollars?! So, I guess you now know where this is going – Heritage Auction's presale estimate was in excess of \$300,000, and the lucky new owner probably bought it against the reserve, he paid 'just' \$300,000 (\$360K w/p). And if you are wondering who bought the game...reports state that it was Greg McLemore, the founder of Pets.com; he plans on building a museum to showcase his collection of games, trade publications, and art.



Nintendo-Sony PlayStation

The Rehs Family

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