

COLLECTOR

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A Closer Look



Big news in the collecting world this month, folks! But before I spill the juicy details, I want to extend a warm welcome to my new readers and remind everyone that I am always eager for your questions and feedback.

The best way to contact me is via email at msullivan@forbes.com.

This month's letter looks a little different than usual, as it's my second annual "Curators' Choice" issue. I've had a fascinating few weeks picking the brains of museum experts in charge of some of this country's most important American art collections. Since one of the great joys of collecting is discovering little-known treasures, I asked them to shine a light on worthy artists whose careers—or parts thereof—might be languishing in the shadows. I hope you find their picks inspiring. And rest assured, next month the letter will return to normal, with its full complement of features and interviews.

Now, to the juicy news. If you collect photography, Islamic art, art deco furniture, vintage cars, Egyptian antiquities, Fabergé or other *objets d'art*, you may find things getting a tad more affordable. Why? This week London's *Art Newspaper* reported that the world's biggest art collector, Sheikh Saud al-Tani, was arrested in Qatar for alleged misuse of public funds, and placed under apparent house arrest. Yes, the same Sheikh Saud who has gushed cash like a fresh oil well all over the art world for the past decade, spending extravagantly to fill five museums currently under construction in Qatar (where his second cousin is the ruling Emir), and at the same time buying for his own personal collections.

Apparently therein lies the rub. Was the money spent for the museums, or for his private cache? His friends and supporters call the arrest a palace coup. Meanwhile, the Qatari Audit Bureau is looking into fund "misuse and misappropriation" to the tune of \$275 million, *The Art Newspaper* reported. Sheikh Saud's spectacular spending for works of the highest quality regularly broke auction price records, delighting sellers in London and New York. (He once paid 113 times the auction estimate for an item.) His mere presence in the salesroom has been known to send competing bidders (with the exception of another determined Sheikh, Nasser al-Sabbah of Kuwait) heading dejectedly to the door with their paddles between their legs. Sheikh Saud's detention should dampen the ebullience in several collecting markets. Sorry sellers, it's no longer raining money. But for now at least, maybe some other buyers will have a chance. —Missy Sullivan

CURATORS' CHOICE

Hidden Treasures of American Painting

Welcome to my second annual Curator's Choice issue, where I ask museum experts around the country to share their connoisseurship expertise in a particular collecting area. This year's topic: American painting from colonial times up until World War II. It covers a lot of territory, including portraits, genre pictures, grand 19th century landscapes, American takes on impressionism and modernism and Depression-era regionalism.

With quality American pictures coming less frequently to the market—and being fought over by deep-pocketed collectors like Bill Gates and hotelier Steve Wynn—prices have been soaring. According to the *Artprice Index*, artworks by American Impressionists like John Singer Sargent and Childe Hassam cost 130% more than in 1990 and 67% more than in 1996. And that report came out one month before Sotheby's historic sale last December, in which 33 artist price records were shattered, including a Sargent that sold for nearly double its high estimate at \$23,528,000. (For a list of other top prices, see box, page 2). Most coveted: Impressionist pictures and large-scale 19th-century landscapes by Bierstadt, Church, Cole and others.

With so much hunger for quality right now, I believe that curators can help identify potential entry points into the American art market—from overlooked artists to undervalued aspects of established artists' careers. In



The magical mystery tour of California surrealism: Helen Lundeberg's *Microcosm and Macrocosm of 1937*

the following pages, you'll find a wealth of expert picks for hidden gems and underrated artists lurking in some of the country's top museum collections.

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

Ilene Susan Fort
Curator of American Art

• **HIDDEN GEM:** Yun Gee, *Artist Studio*, 1926. This small, colorful picture shows a woman artist painting; you see her smocked back, her picture on the easel and in the background,

continued on page 2

Hidden Treasures of American Painting

her model, a dapper African-American man in a tuxedo. Gee (1906-1963) was a pioneering Chinese-American artist who emigrated to San Francisco from China in 1921 as a young, classically trained art student. He started an artists' cooperative in San Francisco, which became a dynamic hub of the California art scene. Many of the participating artists shared studio space, which may explain the subject matter. While in the Bay area—and later in New York and Paris—Gee experimented with modernist styles, and became known for colorful, fractured cubist paintings. In Paris, he hung out with cubist artists and with the poets Gertrude Stein and Paul Valery. He was the first Chinese artist to exhibit in the avant-garde salons.

Amazingly, a few years ago, a collector found the painting that was shown in Gee's picture—the canvas sitting on the artist's easel. It turned out to be by Miki Hayakawa, a Japanese artist



Innocents abroad? Edward Lamson Henry's meticulously rendered *The Arrival of 1868* shows Americans on "the grand tour" in Italy.

who emigrated to the U.S. in 1911 and became known for her Cézanne-influenced portraiture. The museum is fortunate to now own both of these pictures and we've just hung them in the gallery together. We're trying to look at the early generation of Asian-American artists and bring them to national prominence. Gee is just being rediscovered. The Pasadena Museum of California Art gave him a big show last year.

Record price at auction: \$376,200

Sweet spot at auction: Low to mid five figures

• **UNDERRATED:** Helen Lundeberg (1908-1999). She was part of a group of California surrealists, who actually were dubbed by critics the "post-surrealists." They were the only Americans to issue their own manifesto, as the poets and artists in Europe did. It was drafted by Lundeberg and her then-to-be-husband Lorser Feitelson, both of whom would become highly influential west coast artists. The Europeans, in their manifesto, extolled the virtues of an automatic, unconscious approach to art-making—turning their brains "off," if you will, to be more in touch with their creative depths. By contrast, the post-surrealists admit they were making art quite consciously, thank you very much. But a lot of it is semantics. Differing manifestos aside, when you look at the work, it all looked alike—very mysterious and dream-like, with lots of unusual juxtapositions.

In her surrealist phase, Lundeberg did many self-portraits dealing with the theme of primal creative forces. She was also very interested in the solar system, so you see a lot of planet imagery throughout her career. While the museum has several works by both Feitelson and Lundeberg, it's only in the last decade that we've bought their quintessential post-surrealist works. Hers is *Microcosm and Macrocosm* of 1937 (shown on page 1). It's a moody, hypnotic canvas with planets and primeval flying crea-

tures and a huge mysterious female figure, shown partially, holding a small looking glass. This work was exhibited in a post-surrealist show at the Brooklyn Museum in 1936.

Record price at auction: \$48,300

Sweet spot at auction: Under \$10,000

RECENT NOTABLE SALES

The American paintings market has been on a tear, goosed recently by Sotheby's December blockbuster sale of the Rita and Daniel Fraad collection, the largest single-owner sale of American paintings ever.

\$27,702,500

George Bellows, *Polo Crowd*, 1910
Sotheby's 1999

\$23,528,000

John Singer Sargent, *Group with parasols (siesta)*, 1905
Sotheby's 2004

\$11,112,500

John Singer Sargent, *Cashmere*, 1908
Sotheby's 1996

\$7,922,500

Childe Hassam, *Flags, afternoon on the avenue*, 1917
Christie's 1998

\$7,848,000

Everett Shinn, *Stage Scene*, 1906
Sotheby's 2004

\$7,176,000

Albert Bierstadt, *Yosemite Valley*, 1866
Sotheby's 2003

\$6,166,000

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Calla lilies and red anemone*, 1928
Christie's 2001

THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM

Linda Ferber
Andrew W. Mellon Curator of American Art

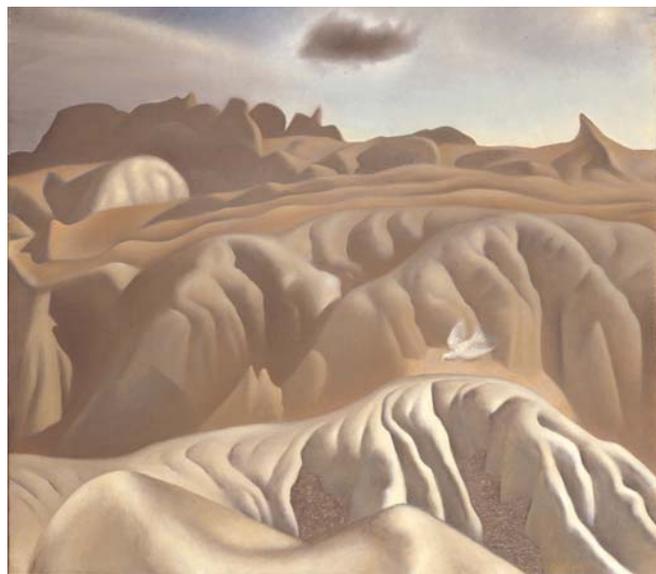
• **HIDDEN GEM:** I've always loved our Luigi Lucioni (1900-1988) called *A Barre Granite Shed* of 1931. It's a factory scene in Vermont, set in a beautiful green landscape. Lucioni, a New England Precisionist, became known for his wonderful still lifes and landscapes. In 1932 he was the youngest artist to have a painting purchased by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, but he's since been somewhat forgotten. We're now starting to see his work being taken seriously again. This piece combines an industrial subject with a lush landscape. While the sharp-edged industrial theme makes you think of artists like Charles Sheeler, there's more juice in this picture. It's faceted, with a real tension between depth and surface that makes it very energetic. The palette is brilliant, very plein air, with fresh greens, clear blues, crystalline atmosphere—you see everything very sharply. It's exquisite.

Record price at auction: \$48,000

Sweet spot at auction: Low four to low five figures

• **UNDERRATED:** Edward Lamson Henry (1841-1919). He's someone whose work of the 1860s and '70s interests me a lot. He was a genre painter whose most interesting canvases straddle the early American genre tradition and the burgeoning one of paintings of modern life. The earlier tradition featured regional, often humorous character types

arranged in stylized vignettes—a semi-mythical world. By contrast, the modern life pictures were always more directly observed and “of the moment,” recognizable to the audience as a slice of their life and times. Henry painted wonderful images of New York in the 1860s and contemporary pictures of the Civil War. He also had an incredible fascination with modern transportation: trains, cars and bicycles. He painted in an extremely meticulous style, a very polished nar-



Haunting hills: Ross Braught's 1934 picture of South Dakota's Badlands recalled for him the dark somber quality of Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6*.

rative realism. And he often worked in a very small, almost miniature scale. We have a painting (11 x 18 inches) called *The Arrival* of 1868 (at left), that documents a coach arriving in a piazza in northern Italian town. As it pulls up, all the usual characters swarm around. It's a wonderful document of Americans in Europe, doing “the grand tour.”

Record price at auction: \$132,000

Sweet spot at auction: Mid five figures

NELSON-ATKINS MUSEUM OF ART

Margaret Conrads
Samuel Sosland Curator of American Art

• **HIDDEN GEM:** Ross Braught (1898-1983), *Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony*, 1935. This view of the Badlands in South Dakota interweaves elements of regionalism, surrealism and spiritualism. And it's just darn good painting to boot. Originally from Pennsylvania, Braught studied in Europe and was at one time part of the Woodstock, N.Y., art colony. He was a wonderful painter and printmaker, especially known for his landscapes.

In 1931, he came to Kansas City to head up the Kansas City Art institute, where he led students on summer excursions out west. In 1934 he took them to the Badlands, where he made

this picture that captures the area's strange, haunting geography. Not only did Braught echo many of the key artistic strains of the day, but he also infused the picture with Christian iconographic allusions, like the dove. Why the musical title? It connects to his interest in the idea of the interconnectedness of color and sound. Tchaikovsky's Sixth, his last symphony before committing suicide, was considered by some to be the composer's ultimate musical expression of “dark” emotions. The Pennsylvania Academy and the Whitney Museum in New York both own works by Braught.

Record price at auction: \$9,900

Sweet spot at auction: Low four figures

• **UNDERRATED:** Albert Bloch (1882-1961). His claim to fame was being the only American member of *Der Blaue Reiter* (the Blue Rider), the turn-of-the-century German Expressionist group that included Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc. Born in St. Louis, Bloch went to Germany in 1908 and stayed through the war. When he returned to the

U.S. in 1921, he spent a quick year in Chicago, then launched the painting department at the University of Kansas. He is less well known because he was hardly involved with the New York art scene after returning from abroad. His signature works were bold, colorful Expressionist images—some figural, some landscape—drawn from theater and from spiritual philosophy.

We have a work of his called *The Three Pierrots, No. 2* that was exhibited in the first Blue Rider exhibition. The pierrot (clown) figures have thick, sensuous lines and bold touches of red and orange that not only help to define their forms visually, but help to express their inner emotion as well. After we did a retrospective of his work in 1997, a few of Bloch's paintings have come out of the woodwork and his prices have experienced a bump. His work is in many notable collections, like the Art Institute of Chicago and the Museum of Modern Art.

Record price at auction: \$231,140

Sweet spot at auction: Mid five figures

ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART

Susan Faxon
Associate Director and Curator of Art Before 1950

• **HIDDEN GEM:** A very early, lesser-known Edward Hopper (1882-1967) called *Railroad Train*,

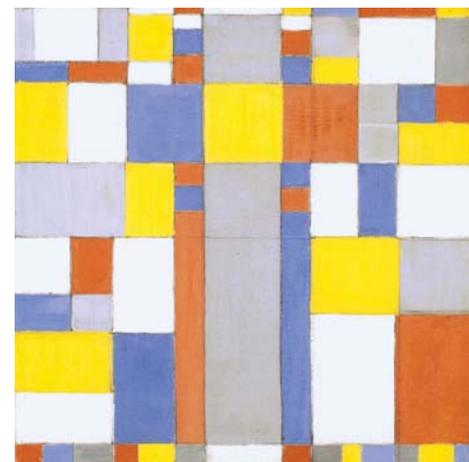
of 1908. Hopper, known for pictures filled with loneliness and foreboding (like the famous *Nighthawks* diner scene), had just come back from Paris and most of his paintings from the period have pale colors and soft, fuzzy edges. They feel preliminary, like he was working through something and hadn't gotten there yet. But in 1908 he put it together in this seminal early work. When we purchased it, his dealer Frank Rehn wrote that he thought this painting “more clearly than any other points the way that Hopper was to pursue.”

In it, he abandons his soft romanticism. The palette is earthy and nearly monochromatic: the dark brown train fits on a bluff defined by taupe and gray-greens. Under that is a band of gold that represents a wheat-colored field. The composition, defined by these horizontal bands, is so reductive and mysterious. You feel Hopper's famous foreboding in this canvas. In later works, his colors will be bolder, and the drama bigger, but this painting truly points the way to that.

Record price at auction: \$2.42 million

Sweet spot at auction: Low to mid six figures

• **UNDERRATED:** Charmion von Wiegand (1896-1983). She's best known for her close friendship with Piet Mondrian in the 1940s and '50s; she even translated some of his essays. You can see his influence in her more rigidly geometric paintings that balance bold blocks of color. Sure, she's been dismissed as stylistically derivative. But she was a fascinating woman in a male-dominated circle, an abstractionist who bridged American and European modernism, very interested in non-western art and Eastern philosophies. Originally a journalist, she served as a correspondent for Hearst papers in Russia in the 1920s and wrote for *The New Masses* before she started painting in 1926. We have a canvas called *Untitled (Geometric Abstraction)*, c. 1945 (below). It is intimately scaled, at 12 x 12 inches, a balanced grid, strongly geometric. The blocks of color—red, gray, clear blue, yellow and white—seem to weave in and out. In a lot of her work, she looks for ways to incorporate ideas like sur-



Charmion von Wiegand's *Untitled (Geometric Abstraction)*, c. 1945. Mondrian was a muse.



John Singer Sargent's *Home Fields*, c. 1885. While the market's high-flying Sargent is by no means hidden, it's a rare picture of his that appears without any figures. This one shows his prowess at pushing paint around.

realism and symbolism and dadaism into abstract forms. She and some of her other compatriots will become more interesting as we look more closely at America's artistic relationship with Europe.

Record price at auction: \$15,000

Sweet spot at auction: Low four figures

DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

Graham Beal
Director and President

• **HIDDEN GEM:** John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), *Home Fields* of 1885 (above). Okay, Sargent is hardly hidden. In fact, he's one of America's best-known artists. But when we think of Sargent, we never think of a landscape without figures. This terrific work in our collection is a humble winter view of a field right behind an artist's colony where he was living, in an English town called Broadway, in Worcestershire. The composition is completely asymmetrical, with a ramshackle fence cutting through it, balanced on the left by a patch of trees. I fancy I can see the shadow of the artist in the picture, his head and shoulders.

Other artists were always astonished how Sargent would just march out into the fields, plunk his easel down and paint. His work shows such tremendous spontaneity. You can see it in the brushwork, which here is quite large relative to the size of the painting. I often find Sargent fairly glib in the way he pushes paint around, exhibiting a kind of self-conscious bravura. You can feel the speed with which the paint was applied here, but there seems to be an authenticity,

a real spontaneity in this picture. There's an intimacy and immediacy that you feel more in his watercolors.

Record price at auction: \$23,528,400

Sweet spot at auction: Mid six to mid seven figures

• **UNDERRATED:** Eastman Johnson (1824-1906). Frankly, most of his work I don't like at all. He's best known for his genre works and I find much of it so 19th century in its take on emotions—the way the sentiment is so obvious, and the total lack of irony. But we have a lovely work called *In the Fields* from 1880, which shows people cranberry picking. Johnson kept these works on the wall in his studio; they were never exhibited. This one is all about the figures, and how they are defined by this extreme raking light, a whitish lemony morning light that strikes across the whole composition in a very impressionistic way. Because of the light, you can't really see what is going on in the bottom part. Is it a cliff or embankment? The work has an unfinished quality that's very unusual for him. It's works like this that I find most interesting.

Record price at auction: \$708,000

Sweet spot at auction: Mid five to low six figures

CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

Sarah Cash
Bechhoefer Curator of American Art

• **HIDDEN GEM:** Samuel F.B. Morse (1791-1872), *Portrait Head of Joseph Gales*, 1821-22. Before earning his place in history as the inventor of the electromagnetic telegraph and the Morse code in the 1840s, Samuel F. B. Morse was best known

as a painter and as president of the National Academy of Design in New York City. We have an enormous (86 x 130 inches), very important Morse painting called *House of Representatives*, from 1822, which is a sweeping and majestic view of Congress gathered in the Capitol rotunda. That picture, along with Morse's equally ambitious *The Gallery of the Louvre*, are his two most famous images. But here's the hidden part: In preparation for the massive canvas, Morse set up shop in the Capitol building and painted individual oil studies of each figure. This tiny portrait head (5-1/2 x 3-1/2 inches) is one of only two that have survived. The subject, Joseph Gales, earned his place in history by reporting, compiling and publishing the early debates and proceedings of Congress, providing a crucial record of our nascent American government.

The House of Representatives was neither a financial or critical success. People simply didn't know what to make of it. Was it a history painting? A genre painting? It was a painting about the process of democracy, which was very difficult to show. While this is an icon in the history of American art, few people have seen his intimate portrait studies. Most were lost to history. And this one? Rarely on view.

Record price at auction: \$21,600

Sweet spot at auction: Low four figures

• **UNDERRATED:** Arthur B. Davies (1862-1928), best known as an organizer of the Armory Show. He was a member of the famous early 20th-century group called The Eight, but he wasn't painting the kinds of gritty, urban scenes they are best known for. His work varied widely, tending more toward waifish, stylized nudes and mystical landscapes. Our collection has a good representation of his paintings, including a cubist-informed work called *The Great Mother*,



People know that Arthur B. Davies organized the all-important 1913 Armory show, but few know his own art.

done in 1914, right after the Armory show. And a wonderful nude called *Stars and Dews and Dreams of Night*, c. 1927 (see image at left, below), which was shown in our annual exhibition in 1928. The Corcoran was an early champion of Davies. There's a huge breadth there of quality and subject matter and I think his ideas of mysticism are intriguing. He's definitely ripe for more research and consideration.

Record price at auction: \$108,000

Sweet spot at auction: Low to mid five figures

HIGH MUSEUM

Sylvia Yount

Margaret and Terry Stent Curator of American Art

• **HIDDEN GEM:** Hale Woodruff (1900-1980), *Old Farmhouse in Beauce Valley*, c.1927. One of the most important African-American artists of the 20th century, Woodruff is best known for his mural cycles and easel paintings of African-American historical subjects and regional social commentary. He was also an active and influential painter and teacher for nearly 50 years, starting in the early 1930s. Woodruff made this early painting (below) during his three years of study in France. It's one of four that he presented to the Harmon Foundation which, in its quest to aid and recognize African-American talent, had partially supported his sojourn. And it's a wonderful



Hale Woodruff's *Old Farmhouse in Beauce Valley*, c. 1927. This important African-American artist was taking a page from French master Paul Cézanne.

little work. The landscape's compositional rhythm and rich, saturated color show the influence of Paul Cézanne, a critical model for Woodruff and other modernist painters in these experimental years.

Record price at auction: \$13,000

Sweet spot at auction: Mid four figures

• **UNDERRATED:** Francis Criss (1901-1973). Although he was critically acclaimed during the

1930s for his distinctive blend of realism and abstraction, Criss is less well known today. Born in London and raised in Philadelphia, he trained at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Barnes Foundation and, after his permanent move to New York, the Art Students' League. The High's *Alma Sewing* is Criss's most ambitious and striking work. (It was also my first major acquisition for the Museum, of which I'm justly proud!) While *Alma* may be viewed simply as the artist's model, Criss took care to present her as a skilled professional, surrounded by the tools of her trade. In its celebration of the worker, his painting is a quintessential 1930s expression. But it also makes a personal statement, in the form of a self-portrait that he squeezes into the lower half of the seamstress's lamp.

Record price at auction: \$21,600

Sweet spot at auction: Mid to high four figures

YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY

Jock Reynolds

Director and President

• **HIDDEN GEM:** A little 1922 treasure by Stuart Davis (1894-1964), called *Motif for Combination Concrete (Curve Go Slow)*, one of the first paintings in which he was working through his interpretation of cubism, particularly the work of Georges Braque. It also marks his early use of road signs, which would become a signature motif throughout his career. Just last year, we received a huge collection with four late great Davis paintings, including *Combination Concrete* of 1958, one of his most important late works. Also last year, we bought the full-scale, black-and-white study for that later color version. One of the things we try to do is draw a connection between important works in the collection, and show

how artists develop ideas over time in different colors and media. Having a great art school at Yale, it's very important to our curating and collecting strategy to be able to trace that kind of creative development.

Record price at auction: \$2.42 million

Sweet spot at auction: Mid five to mid six figures

• **UNDERRATED:** Walt Kuhn (1880-1949). While he was always well respected, Kuhn never got the

WHERE TO SEE AMERICAN PAINTING

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
www.mfa.org

The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, N.Y.
www.brooklynmuseum.org

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
www.metmuseum.org

Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts
Philadelphia, Penn.
www.pafa.org

The Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, Mo.
www.nelson-atkins.org

Smithsonian American Art Museum,
Washington, D.C.
http://americanart.si.edu

The High Museum, Atlanta, Ga.
www.high.org

Los Angeles County Museum of Art
www.lacma.org

Addison Gallery of American Art,
Andover, Mass.
www.andover.edu/Addison

Yale University Art Gallery,
New Haven, Conn.
http://artgallery.yale.edu

Philadelphia Museum of Art
www.philamuseum.org

Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Tex.
www.cartermuseum.org

National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.
www.nga.gov

Detroit Institute of Art
www.dia.org

same attention that other major painters of the Ashcan school did. We just made a huge acquisition of his *Chorus Captain*, 1935 (see top of page 6) in 2002. It's a wonderful portrait of a dancing girl, who is very defiant, very aware of herself as an object of desire—an interesting image to contemplate. It's an important portrait of his, and we coveted it for a while before it came out of the Thyssen collection. We always go after American portraits because we have a great collection of them, ranging from miniature portraits of signers of the Declaration of Independence up through Thomas Eakins and George Bellows, all the way to more contemporary artists like Chuck Close. We thought this piece



Walt Kuhn's compelling image, *Chorus Captain* of 1935. Look closely and you'll see her flaring nostrils.

would go particularly well with a wonderful Everett Shinn oil painting we received by bequest called *The Orchestra Pit Old Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre*. We've been looking back at how artists were depicting entertainment in the early part of the 20th century. In fact, one of our curators did an exhibition last year on the topic, called "Stagestruck in America."

Record price at auction: \$1.1 million

Sweet spot at auction: Mid five to mid six figures

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

Elliot Davis

John Moors Cabot Chair, Art of the Americas

• **HIDDEN GEM:** *King Lear*, by Benjamin West (1738-1820). He's an important colonial-era American painter who made a splash on the international scene. The John Boydell Shakespeare Gallery in London commissioned this work from West when it opened in 1789. The gallery wanted to promote history painting in England, and Shakespeare was the logical subject. West's monumental canvas (107 x 144 inches), with its life-sized figures, illustrates Act 3, Scene 4 of the play, when Lear is on the heath, being discovered by the Earl of Gloucester. It depicts the different characters in various stages of madness—very theatrical and very dramatic. The painting was the runaway hit of the opening; the gallery made and sold many prints after it. The picture was bought by the American engineer and inventor Robert Fulton, who exhibited it in Pennsylvania and New York before a private collector purchased it for the Boston Athenaeum. It

came to the MFA in 1979 and hung in our library because it was too big for our current galleries. We will have a gallery for it in our new renovated wing.

Record price at auction: \$2.86 million

Sweet spot at auction: Mid five figures

• **UNDERRATED:** Steve Wheeler (1912-1992), a relative unknown who, along with artists like Will Barnett and Peter Busa, formed a group called the Indian Space Painters, now largely forgotten. Born in Slovakia, Wheeler trained at the Art Institute of Chicago School and the Art Students League in New York, and with renowned colorist Hans Hoffmann. Like many artists of his time, he was interested in surrealism and in Carl Jung's writings about common archetypes and how image, symbol and myth interrelate. He knew Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, who were also working through some of these ideas on their way to developing their abstract expressionist styles. But he distanced himself from that movement, which

may explain why he's not better known.

Because he wanted to forge something authentically American, Wheeler turned to native cultures, regularly studying American Indian objects at the Brooklyn Museum and the Heye Collection in New York. The MFA recently acquired a Wheeler picture called *Man Menacing Woman*, from 1943 (*below*). It's a wonderful, richly colored and intricately patterned piece. You can see his incorporation of timeless Mayan, Aztec and Northwest Coast tribal glyphs and symbols. At the same time he is filtering them through his interpretations of cubism and surrealism. ¶c

Record price at auction: No auction records.



Looking to Native American art for inspiration: Steve Wheeler's *Man Menacing Woman*, 1943

WHERE TO BUY AMERICAN ART

Adelson Galleries

New York, N.Y.

www.adelsongalleries.com

Spanierman Gallery

New York, N.Y.

www.spanierman.com

Berry-Hill Galleries

New York, N.Y.

www.berry-hill.com

Hirschl & Adler Galleries

New York, N.Y.

www.hirschlandadler.com

Debra Force Fine Art

New York, N.Y.

www.debraforce.com

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

New York, N.Y.

www.michaelrosenfeldart.com

Questroyal Fine Art

New York, N.Y.

www.questroyalfineart.com

Babcock Galleries

New York, N.Y.

www.artnet.com/babcock.html

Hollis Taggart Galleries

New York, N.Y.

www.hollistaggartart.com

Gerald Peters Gallery

New York, N.Y., Santa Fe, N.M., and Dallas, Tex.

www.gpgallery.com

Mark Borghi Fine Art

New York, Bridgehampton, N.Y. and Los Angeles, Calif.

www.borghi.org

Thomas Colville Fine Art

New York, N.Y.

www.thomascolville.com

Godel Fine Art

New York, N.Y.

www.godelfineart.com

MME Fine Art

New York, N.Y.

www.mmefineart.com

Upcoming Sales | What to Buy...and Why

FINE CHINESE CERAMIC AND WORKS OF ART (*Christie's, March 30*)

LOT 229: Rare bronze fangding (ritual food vessel), Late Shang dynasty, 11th c B.C.

DESCRIPTION: Rectangular bowl raised on four tall flat legs cast as dragons, 13-1/16 inches high. • ESTIMATE: \$600,000–\$800,000



TOP LOT This early archaic bronze is particularly rare for its large size and unusual shape (most fangding vessels were circular, with only three legs). Connoisseurs value the attractive silvery-greenish gray patina, the crispness of the cast decoration, the strength of the handles and legs and the vessel's fine overall proportions. Late Shang examples are particularly desirable, as they reflect the beginning of China's great Bronze age. This work is in the class of important bronze vessels that have sold for upwards of half a million dollars. Exhibited at the Cleveland Museum.

LOT 315: Rare Longquan celadon brush washer, southern Song dynasty, 1127-1279

DESCRIPTION: 5-3/4 inches diameter • ESTIMATE: \$40,000–\$60,000

This modest little brushwasher may look unprepossessing, but it's actually a connoisseur's gem, epitomizing the Song "less is more" aesthetic—from the elegant proportions of its form to the subtlety and luminosity of its bluish-green color to the fine, even texture of its glaze, without bubble or crackle. A similar example resides in the National Palace Museum in Taipei. Hails from the Bob Barron collection, known for exquisite monochrome wares of the type prized by the Imperial court and Song dynasty elite. Not seen in the picture: a small glaze chip covered by a gold repair at the rim.

HIDDEN GEM



INDIAN AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART (*Sotheby's, April 1*)

LOT 50: Prajnaparamita, 600–650 A.D., from Gilgit, northwestern India

DESCRIPTION: Copper alloy with silver and copper inlay, 16-1/8 inches • ESTIMATE: \$400,000–\$600,000



TOP LOT One of the earliest known metal sculptures from the Palola Shahi dynasty. With her realistic clothing and jewelry, and inscribed base identifying the donor-queen, this copper beauty is believed to be an exceedingly rare representation of the queen as a deity, possibly Saraswati, goddess of knowledge and learning. The inscribed manuscript she holds points to her role in spreading the edict of Buddhism, which flourished in this period. Totally unrestored, she has only minor flaws: a lower leg crack and missing halo and thumb tip.

LOT 147: Syed Haider Raza, *Refuge*, 1963

DESCRIPTION: Acrylic on canvas, 23-1/2 x 7-3/4 inches • ESTIMATE: \$15,000–\$20,000

A vibrant early work from one of India's most revered postwar artists, best known for his later geometric style. This gem-like canvas is one of his earliest abstractions, made when he was teaching in the U.S., absorbing the influence of masterful abstract colorists like Hans Hoffmann and Mark Rothko. Yet Raza's swirling, saturated hues exude the vivid colors of India. With the market for postwar Indian art on a tear, Raza's geometric works have fetched as high as \$220,000; these earlier abstract ones currently bring in the low to mid five figures.

HIDDEN GEM



AMERICAN FURNITURE (*Northeast Auctions, Manchester, N.H., April 1st–3rd*)

LOT 1253: Mahogany cylinder desk and bookcase, att. to Duncan Phyfe, 1835-45

DESCRIPTION: Mahogany, striped maple and rosewood veneers, 94 x 40 x 22 inches • ESTIMATE: \$55,000–\$75,000



TOP LOT Duncan Phyfe was the top-dog furniture designer to New York's elite for much of the first half of the 19th century. Best known for neoclassical and gilt-decorated furniture, he also made large, late pieces like this one that were historically less fashionable. Plain-lined and architecturally inspired, these pieces rely not on carved or gilded decoration, but let the timber do the talking. In this case, it's a spectacular flame-grain mahogany (veneered onto a mahogany base wood) and tiger-stripe maple used for the interior drawers. This piece, from the Richard Kelly collection of late Phyfe furniture, is estimated at a fraction of the price of a top early Phyfe. Will furniture aficionados embrace his late work? Stay tuned.

LOT 1389: Walnut veneer Queen Anne slant-lid desk, 1720-1750

DESCRIPTION: Walnut veneer, 44 x 42 x 22-1/2 inches • ESTIMATE: No reserve

Right before this auction's catalog went to press, a cataloguer found the name Samuel Bacon on one of the **HIDDEN GEM** document drawers inside of this rare early slant-lid American desk. Quick research revealed a Samuel Bacon in Salem, a successful entrepreneur who in 1751 was petitioning to trade with the West Indies. The intriguing connection to this prosperous owner would amp up the value, but more research is necessary. In the meantime, this early slant-lid piece, with its impressively figured flame-walnut veneer, carries no reserve. A recent appraisal (before the Bacon find) set the value at \$1,000, probably because it's been refinished.



MARKET WATCH: RECENT NOTABLE SALES YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Item	Where Sold	Sale Date	Price Estimate/Price Fetched
 <p>EARLY AMERICAN FURNITURE Carved mahogany tea table, attributed to John Goddard</p> <p>BUZZ: The underbidder called it "the holy grail of American furniture." The winning bidder called it "a masterpiece of form and line." Throw in incredible rarity, attribution to the one of the finest early American cabinet-makers and a provenance that has it descending in Rhode Island's oldest and most prominent family (the Browns) since being made in 1760. Toss in two determined dealers with paddles and what do you get? The second-highest price fetched for a piece of American furniture, ever. One of five pieces that sold this January for over \$1 million, it illustrates how much heat there is at the top of the American furniture market.</p>	Sotheby's	1/05	\$2-\$5 million/\$8.416 million
 <p>AMERICAN FOLK ART Fine embroidered wool quilt, c. 1830-35</p> <p>BUZZ: Why, oh why, don't treasures like these ever show up in <i>my</i> attic? Recently unearthed from an attic trunk in Solon, Maine: one of the oldest and finest needlework embroidered wool quilts known. With its spectacular design and highly skilled needlework, the quilt has stayed in the same family since its creation. Surviving quilts from this period are incredibly rare, and ones in such remarkable condition are especially so. Bought by an unidentified museum.</p>	Julia Auctions	1/05	\$30,000-\$50,000/\$97,750
 <p>SPORTS MEMORABILIA Complete set of 1914 Cracker Jack baseball cards</p> <p>BUZZ: Time was, if you wanted a set of 1914 Crackerjack cards, you had to collect them one at a time, and when you found one, it would have some big old greasy caramel stain on it, from floating around in the box. Then last fall, onto the market came this never-before-seen, full set of 1914 Cracker Jack cards, some 144 in all. It's replete with luminaries like Honus Wagner, Joe Jackson and Ty Cobb, along with lesser-known players like Wildfire Shulte and Gavvy Cravath. Best and most surprising of all: these cards were pristine (the Shoeless Joe card alone carries a gem-mint rating of 10), suggesting that they came directly from the factory. This rare cache more than doubled the previous record of \$360,000 for a 1933 Goudey Sports King set.</p>	Mastronet Inc.	11/04	private sale/\$800,000
 <p>AMERICAN PAINTING Georgia O'Keeffe, <i>The Red Maple at Lake George</i>, 1926</p> <p>BUZZ: One day after the spending spree at Sotheby's for the top-flight American paintings of the Fraad collection (remember the \$23 million Sargent?), buyers were still hungry for blue-chip works. This yummy O'Keeffe, painted at the artist's beloved Lake George getaway, is a quintessential canvas: a close-up image of flora, sensuous, seductive and saturated in color.</p>	Christie's	12/04	\$600-\$800,000/\$2.191 million

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