

# CULTURE TYPE

## NOVEMBER 10, 2021

### AUCTION RESULTS: REGGIE BURROWS HODGES MAKES METEORIC DEBUT IN LONDON, PAINTINGS BY 3 YOUNG BLACK ARTISTS SET NEW RECORDS, PLUS CHRIS OFILI'S 'TRIPLE BEAM DREAMER' SOLD

by Victoria L. Valentine



Phillips London Auction underway on Oct. 15, 2021, with a detail of “Fashion Icons” (2020-21) by Serge Attukwei Clotney in the background. | © Haydon Perrior, Thomas De Cruz Media. Courtesy Phillips

THREE YOUNG BLACK ARTISTS set new auction records at the 20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale at Phillips London. Rocketing far beyond their estimates, paintings by Jadé Fadojutimi, Tunji Adeniyi-Jones, and Serge Attukwei Clotney, sold for about 10 times expectations set by the auction house.

Marking his auction debut, a figurative painting by Reggie Burrows Hodges had a similar result. “For the Greater Good” (2019) was estimated at about \$40,000-\$70,000 and sold for more than \$600,000. Fadojutimi, Adeniyi-Jones, and Clotney are aged 28 to 36. By contrast, Hodges is in his mid-50s.

“Triple Beam Dreamer,” a major painting by British artist Chris Ofili was also offered at the Oct. 15 auction. Selling for nearly \$1.4 million, the painting was among the top 10 lots in the sale (No. 7). Works by David Hammons, Mickalene Thomas, Cinga Samson, and Titus Kaphar hit the auction block, too.

The Evening Sale featured 43 lots. Seven artist records were set. The sales total was \$34,691,060 (25,251,900 British Pounds), with a 93 percent sell through rate by lot and 96 percent by value.

Evening auctions have generally been reserved for premium works of art by critically recognized artists with long established careers and value bases. The tradition has shifted.

Increasingly, works by popular up-and-coming artists (which in the current climate often means young Black artists) are highlighted in Evening Sales and frequently front loaded in the early lots. Recently produced paintings, sometimes bought and sold in the same year, are regarded not for their cultural value—as expressions of artists with something to say—but rather for their profit-making potential in response to market trends, with the artist seeing no direct benefit.

Lot 1: SERGE ATTUKWEI CLOTTEY, “Fashion icons,” 2020-21 (oil and duct tape on cork board, 180.3 x 120.7 cm (71 x 47 1/2 inches). | Estimate \$41,273-\$55,031 (30,000-40,000 British Pounds). Sold for \$468,045 (340,200 British Pounds) fees included. RECORD

This was the case with the Phillips auction, which opened with Clottey’s “Fashion icons” (2020-2021). Inspired by photographs, Clottey’s portraits explore image making, often invoking fashion in the construction of identity. The Ghanaian artist is based in Accra.

The most striking result among the artists who set new records, “Fashion Icons” sold for \$467,367 (340,200 British Pounds). The new benchmark is more than 10 times the estimate (\$41,273-\$55,031 / 30,000-40,000 British Pounds) and shatters his previous record, which stood at just \$9,600, established earlier this year.

A double-portrait, “Fashion Icons” was featured in the exhibition “Serge Attukwei Clottey: Beyond Skin” at Simchowitz in Los Angeles, where it was on view from April 17-May 8, 2021. The buyer acquired the painting from the gallery and flipped it, consigning the work for sale at auction six months later.

Clottey’s mixed-media paintings are executed with oil paint and duct tape on a cork ground. The materials are significant. The artist has cited the story of Marcus Omofuma, a Nigerian seeking asylum in Austria in 1999, who died in police custody while bound and gagged with duct tape, as his reason for embracing the material. Omofuma’s individual story reflects the wider experience of Africans seeking asylum in Europe, where immigration policies have been less than receptive to Blacks.

Eschewing the violent use of the material, Clottey employs duct tape as a symbol of power and protection. Cork references bulletin boards found throughout his local community, at churches in particular, serving as a tool for public communication, information sharing, and engagement.

Lot 3: JADÉ FADOJUTIMI, “Myths of Pleasure,” 2017 (oil on canvas, 140.5 x 140.5 cm / 55 3/8 x 55 3/8 inches). | Estimate \$110,063-\$165,095 (80,000-120,000 British Pounds). Sold for \$1,610,094 (1,172,000 British Pounds) including fees. RECORD

“Myths of Pleasure” (2017) by Fadojutimi, an abstract painting executed in vibrant red tones, sold for \$1,610,094 (1,172,000 British Pounds). A new auction record for the artist, the result was astronomically higher than the estimate (\$110,063-\$165,095 / 80,000-120,000 British Pounds) and the sixth most expensive lot in the sale.

The price is in the same ballpark as Fadojutimi’s previous auction record (\$1,435,646 / 1,043,500 British Pounds), set earlier this year when “A Muddled Mind That’s Never Confined” sold at Sotheby’s London. The artist donated the painting to the auction for the benefit of the World Wildlife Fund’s “Art For Your World” climate campaign.

Fadojutimi lives and works in London. Energetic and gestural, the British artist’s abstract

works are visual webs of intrigue. Driven by introspection and a quest for self knowledge, her paintings explore mood, memory, and identity. The Institute of Contemporary Art Miami is hosting Fadojutimi's first solo museum exhibition. "Jadé Fadojutimi: Yet, Another Pathetic Fallacy" opens Nov. 30.

Lot 5: TUNJI ADENIYI-JONES, "Pattern Makers," 2019 (oil/canvas, 78 x 52 1/4 inches). | Estimate \$41,273-\$68,789 (30,000-50,000 British Pounds). Sold for \$416,040 (302,400 British Pounds) fees included. RECORD

The work of Adeniyi-Jones is inspired by ancient West African history, its mythology, and his Yoruba heritage. Born and educated in the UK, the artist is based in Brooklyn, N.Y.

"Pattern Makers" (2019) by Adeniyi-Jones sold for \$415,437 (302,400 British Pounds) setting a new auction record for the artist. The result was about 10 times the estimate (\$41,273-\$68,789 / 30,000-50,000 British Pounds) and twice his previous high mark, established earlier this year, also at Phillips London. "Love Ritual" (2019) brought \$208,422 (151,200 British Pounds) in April, a record at the time.

In August, Adeniyi-Jones joined White Cube, where "That Which Binds Us," his first exhibition with the gallery, opens Nov. 19 in the Bermondsey district of London. "Tunji Adeniyi-Jones: Astral Reflections," the artist's first UK solo show is currently on view at Charleston in East Sussex.

As a selection of African American artists continues to receive wider critical recognition and record-setting results at auction, these new records speak not only to the fascination with the next big thing, but also to the increasing attention experienced by a new generation Black artists throughout the diaspora, from Africa to Europe.

Lot 10: REGGIE BURROWS HODGES, "For the Greater Good," 2019 (acrylic on canvas, 76.2 x 127 cm / 30 x 50 inches). | Estimate \$41,273-\$68,789 (30,000-50,000 British Pounds). Sold for \$606,726 (441,000 British Pounds) fees included. AUCTION DEBUT

"For the Greater Good" (2019) by Hodges also garnered about 10 times the estimate, selling for \$606,726 (441,000 British Pounds). A tennis court scene with two figures bathed in shadows, the painting was the first work by the artist to be offered at auction. The result marked a meteoric debut for the mid-career artist.

Hodges explores storytelling and visual metaphor, often drawing on his childhood. His painterly figures lack facial features, fueling the notion of imprecision when it comes to memory. When he begins working, Hodges covers his entire canvas with black paint. Starting with a black ground, he concentrates on the relationship between his subjects and their surroundings. He has described his process as "developing the environment around the figure so it emerges from its surroundings, examining the possibility that we are all products of our environment." Hilton Als has called his paintings "extraordinarily disciplined" and "rich, mysterious canvases."

Born in Compton, Calif., Hodges majored in theater and film and took African American studies courses at the University of Kansas. He attended on a tennis scholarship. Currently based in Lewiston, Maine, he teaches at the Maine College of Art & Design and has cited artists connected to the state as influences, including David Driskell, Alex Katz, Marsden Hartley, and Milton Avery. Before focusing on his painting practice, Hodges had a multifaceted career. He worked in television and film; co-owned a recording studio;

co-founded the reggae dub band Trumystic, writing music and playing bass; and was a professional tennis coach.

Over the past few years, he's received a succession of notable awards and exhibition opportunities. Hodges received a 2020 Painters & Sculptors Grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation. In 2021, he won a Jacob Lawrence Award in Art from the Academy of Art & Letters. Karma gallery presented his first solo exhibition in New York, earlier this year. A publication accompanied the exhibition, with a catalog essay authored by Als. Next year, a solo exhibition of Hodges's work will be on view at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art.

Lot 27: CHRIS OFILI, "Triple Beam Dreamer," 2001-2002 (acrylic, oil, leaves, glitter, polyester resin, map pins and elephant dung on linen, with two elephant dung supports, 195.3 x 304.8 cm / 76 7/8 x 120 inches). | Estimate \$825,479-\$1,100,639 (600,000-800,000 British Pounds). Sold for \$1,393,995 (1,014,700 British Pounds) fees included

"Triple Beam Dreamer" (2001-01) was featured in "Chris Ofili: Night and Day," the artist's first major solo museum exhibition in the United States. The subject is an otherworldly nude female figure in repose. Executed in a palette of red, black, and green, the landscape evinces an Afrocentric paradise. The mixed-media painting employs oil and acrylic paint, glitter, and leaves all sealed in a shiny coat of polyester resin and perched atop two balls of elephant dung.

Estimated to bring \$825,479-\$1,100,639 (600,000-800,000 British Pounds), the painting sold for slightly more: \$1,393,995 (1,014,700 British Pounds).

According to the lot's provenance, "Triple Beam Dreamer" was acquired from Gavin Brown's enterprise in New York in 2002, the same year it was executed. (The gallery is now shuttered as of summer 2020.) The checklist included in the exhibition catalog for "Night and Day" lists Eileen Harris Norton as the owner and lender of the work. A philanthropist and collector, Norton is a co-founder of Mark Bradford's Art + Practice in Los Angeles.

Ofili represented Britain at the Venice Biennale in 2003. The painting is related to a series of works he presented in the British Pavilion. "Within Reach" was installed in an immersive exhibition space designed by architect David Adjaye. Artist Glenn Ligon references the works in an essay for the "Night and Day" catalog.

"The use of a limited palette is not a new strategy for Ofili. For instance, in 2000, he began a series of red, black, and green paintings, the colors derived from Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association flag," Ligon wrote.

"With their themes of black love and liberation, the paintings were unabashedly Afrocentric, although they also explored the ways that color always exceeds its social and political uses, a concept that Ofili has hinted at through the phrase 'a feeling for a color.' ...[Ofili] said, 'I was trying to push the red as far as it need to go in certain areas before it needed to flip to a green. It's a bit like when you are listening to a great harp solo in an Alice Coltrane track where the strings are really gliding along through the track, and then Pharaoh Sanders might play a horn that kind of interrupts things, and then it falls back into the harp.'"