

Stephen Friedman Gallery

InStyle
Cynthia Erivo Has Taken Her Talents to Sotheby's
Samantha Simon
5 March 2021

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She just curated the contemporary art collection of our dreams.



Image: Terrell Mullin

Between her show-stopping moment at the 2021 virtual Golden Globes and promoting her upcoming National Geographic series *Genius: Aretha*, Cynthia Erivo has been keeping busy. But the actress, singer, producer, and all-around visionary has found the time to take on yet another a new role.

InStyle can exclusively announce that Erivo has brought her impeccable taste to Sotheby's, teaming up with the famed auction house to curate a 16-piece spread. The partnership was a natural next step for Erivo, who's as known for her fearless sense of style as she is for her keen artistic eye. "I think over the last year, I've leaned into art more because I feel like people are using it to express how they are feeling about the world now more than ever; expressing things that they don't have the words for," she told Sotheby's. "We're starting to see, particularly, more Black artists come to the forefront. And that's thrilling because we get to discover these new voices who are usually marginalized."

Naturally, when curating her selection of contemporary art, Erivo chose pieces that accurately mirror today's cultural climate — something she strives to do in her own work, too. "[As performers] our job is to reflect the times," she said. "Otherwise we're not doing our job. I think now artists are doing just that, and I think that's a very special thing."

Erivo's appreciation for fine art dates back to her childhood in the U.K., long before she had a Grammy, an Emmy, and a Tony on her mantel. "Our school used to take us to exhibits [at the Tate Modern]," she said. "I remember sort of falling in love with something that I knew that I couldn't personally do. I've always had an admiration for those who are able to express through paint or charcoal or pencil or ink."

She developed a love of portraiture and realism, both clear themes in her Sotheby's curation. Among the 14 pieces she chose from the bi-annual Contemporary Curated sale (set to take place on March 12th in New York City) are creations by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Romare Bearden, Kehinde Wiley, and Andy Warhol, whose portrait of Aretha Franklin undoubtedly caught Erivo's eye given her upcoming portrayal of the Queen of Soul in *Genius: Aretha*. She also selected two pieces — by Ruth Asawa and Deborah Butterfield, respectively — from a concurrent online sale featuring female sculptors in honor of International Women's Month.

To celebrate the fact that Erivo is always championing women — and especially women of color — in her own work, Sotheby's will be making a donation to a cause that's near and dear to her heart: The Loveland Foundation. Among its many efforts, the organization provides free therapy for Black women and girls. "I think that therapy tends to be a taboo subject amongst the Black community, and often, it's because we don't have the access that we need to it," she said.

As she continues to advocate for mental health, Erivo also highlights the importance of supporting the next generation creatively through art education. "Hopefully at some point, I'll be able to help put some people through

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art school," she said. "Art serves as more than just entertainment and I think that if we can provide young people the access to art and performance, we'll have a happier world. That's for sure."

Untitled (S.653, Hanging Tied-Wire, Double-Sided, Center-Tied, Six-Branched Form Based on Nature) by Ruth Asawa, 1968.



Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$180,000 - \$250,000

Hanging suspended in space, this oxidized copper wire sculpture is part of Ruth Asawa's series inspired by trees and branching forms, specifically of desert plants.

Image: Famous Negro Athletes by Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1981.

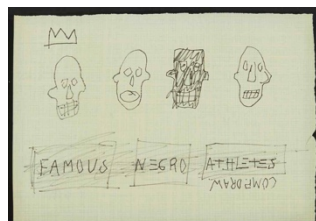


Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$80,000 - \$120,000

Jean-Michel Basquiat often referenced politics as well as his own Haitian and Puerto Rican heritage in his work, and this marker-on-paper sketch—done in the graffiti artist's signature scribbled style—offered commentary on race and sports in the U.S.

Aretha Franklin by Andy Warhol, 1986.



Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$900,000 - \$1,200,000

Known for his colorful silkscreen celebrity portraits, Andy Warhol's painting of the Queen of Soul was completed just one year prior to his death.

Mother and Daughter by Romare Bearden, 1986



Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$50,000 - \$70,000

This acrylic, watercolor, and paper collage is the work of Romare Bearden, who highlighted the complex nature of African-American culture through his rich and layered creations.

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A Portrait of My Sweet Sunflower by Vaughn Spann, 2018

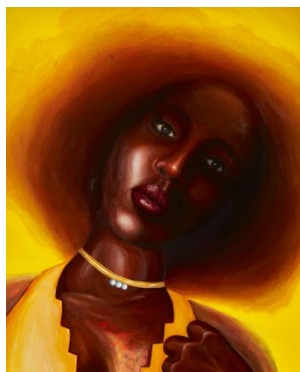


Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$30,000 - \$40,000

A captivating painting by contemporary artist Vaughn Spann, who's known to choose subjects with personal meaning to him and highlights everything from racial injustice to healing in his work.

Passing/Posing 14 by Kehinde Wiley, 2004.



Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$40,000 - \$60,000

In his representation of Black men, New York-based visual artist Kehinde Wiley positions his subjects in the field of power—and he does just that in this illuminating oil painting.

Untitled by Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe, 2019.



Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$40,000 - \$60,000

Ghanaian artist Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe is known for his depiction of Black figures wearing colorful and stylish clothing against a rough background, as seen in this oil on canvas portrait.

Untitled (Anxious Drawing) by Rashid Johnson, 2017.



Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$40,000 - \$60,000

Another work by Rashid Johnson is included in the sale, this one an oil painting that brings the feeling of anxiety to life on cotton rag.

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Passing/Passing (St. Thomas the Apostle) by Kehinde Wiley, 2002.

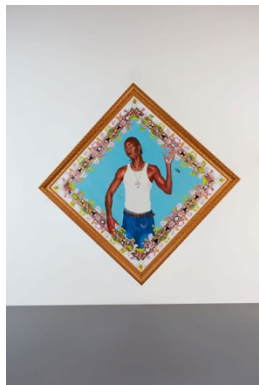


Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$150,000 - \$250,000

Another large-scale portrait by Kehinde Wiley, this painting subverts the idea of Black masculinity in a series depicting young men from Harlem as saints and angels in Renaissance-inspired poses.

Angel Equipment by Robert Longo, 2008.



Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$150,000 - \$200,000

This two-part work from New York-based artist Robert Longo depicts a set of angel wings, drawn to have a chiseled three-dimensional effect in his signature medium, charcoal.

Afrocentric by Shepard Fairey, 2007.



Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$60,000 - \$80,000

Shepard Fairey, a contemporary street artist who gained notoriety with his "Hope" poster for Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, continues to promote social and political awareness in this mixed media collage that includes the phrases "Power & Equality" and "Power to the People."

Cosmic Slop "Fadeaway" by Rashid Johnson, 2014.



Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$60,000 - \$80,000

Rashid Johnson uses a wide range of media and materials to symbolize and address themes of race, class, and shared cultural identities in his work, often created with black soap and wax as in this painting.

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KI. Badende (Small Bather) by Gerhard Richter, 1996.



Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$70,000 - \$100,000

This c-print of a bathing woman comes courtesy of German visual artist Gerhard Richter, known for producing abstract art as well as photorealistic paintings and photographs.

S-Mask (Clay) I by Thomas Houseago, 2011.

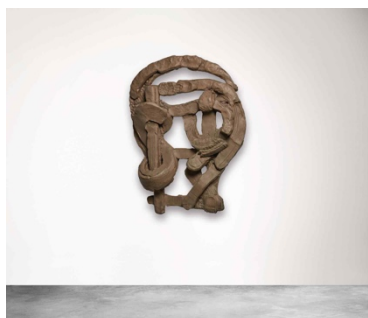


Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$60,000 - \$80,000

Influenced primarily by tribal art from Africa and the South Pacific, British contemporary artist Thomas Houseago's anthropomorphic constructions focus on figurative sculpture, as seen in this disjointed bronze piece created with gold patina.

Target by Tomory Dodge, 2007.



Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$20,000 - \$30,000

Los Angeles-based artist Tomory Dodge embraces the abstract in his oil paintings, like this one, which are based on landscape photographs and often include layered colorful strokes.

Horse by Deborah Butterfield, 1985



Image: Courtesy Of Sotheby's.

Estimate: \$25,000 - \$35,000

Deborah Butterfield is known for her horse sculptures made from found objects, and this one is no different, composed of wood, straw, paper, and mud.