

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Palm Springs Life
This is how art heals
Steven Biller
6 April 2021

PALM SPRINGS LIFE

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An auction of contemporary art donated from near and far aims to support the Palm Springs Art Museum as it begins its pandemic recovery.

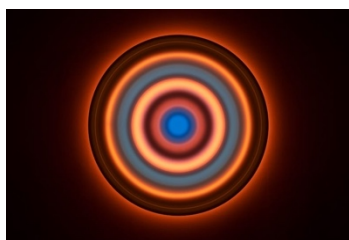


Image: Phillip K. Smith III's LED light work Flat Torus - Variant 3:1 (2020) is 45 inches in diameter. Photographs Courtesy Palm Springs Art Museum

Art Auction '21 opens April 9, and my stomach has been reminding me about it for weeks. The gut-churning anxiety occurs every other year when the Palm Springs Art Museum goes live with its fundraising auction. Last time, it offered works by two artists with international renown who work in and around the desert: John Divola's photograph of a jackrabbit homestead cabin in Wonder Valley and Jim Isermann's colored pencil study for one of his colorful new op-art paintings. I bid on both pieces, entering the highest amount I would pay and hoping that somehow one of them would hammer in my favor.

I've had good luck with museum auctions over the years, scoring a drawing by Marcel Dzama, a collage by Thomas Hirschhorn, and a photograph by Catherine Opie for a fraction of the prices of a gallery or even other auctions. With every dime of the sales contributing to future museum acquisitions, exhibitions, and educational programs, I felt no guilt adding my own collection.

As I waited for the Divola and Isermann lots to come up, collectors were jousting for their favorite artworks. The intensity of the bidding ranged from moderate to fast and furious, with excitement hitting a fever pitch as the auctioneer brought up the "star" pieces. When it was all over, to my surprise, I'd won the photograph and the drawing.

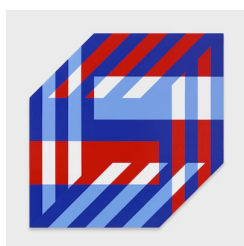


Image: Jim Isermann's 2018 acrylic painting, titled Untitled (7, 3, 5, out), appeared in his solo exhibition at the museum's Architecture and Design Center.

Now, my stomach turns because Divola and Isermann both have works in Art Auction '21, which runs April 9-16 through Sotheby's, and they're hardly the only artists whose work has my attention. This year, the auction is more important than ever.

"The museum's temporary closure as a result of the pandemic has caused an extraordinary financial strain on the organization," says museum CEO and executive director Louis Grachos. "The funds raised through sponsorship and purchase of donated artworks will provide operational support for the museum's three architecturally significant sites — Frey House II, the Architecture and Design Center, and the main museum — and ensure that Palm Springs Art Museum remains the city's leading cultural institution and a world-class destination long after the pandemic subsides."

Grachos and chief curator Rochelle Steiner selected 60 artworks by emerging and established artists from near and far that will sell for anywhere from \$3,000 to \$100,000. In addition to Divola and Isermann, locally based artists include Phillip K. Smith III (light sculpture), Andrea Zittel (watercolor), Aili Schmeltz (painting), Dan

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Anderson (wood sculpture), Gerald Clarke (branding on paper), Penelope Krebs (painting), Luc Bernard (painting), Jonathan Cross (ceramic sculpture), Sara Genn (painting), Ryan Schneider (wood sculpture), and Blake Baxter (painting). Several artists who have part-time desert residences — notably Ed Ruscha, Jack Pierson, Robert Longo, and Rob Pruitt — have also donated artwork to the auction.

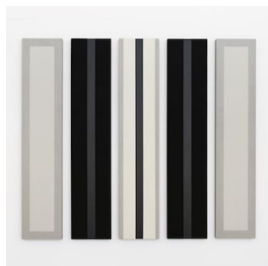


Image: Joshua Tree-based Blake Baxter created the 58-inch-wide Iteration, no. 41 (2020) with sand, spray paint, and acrylic.

Venn, a new painting by Aili Schmeltz, who splits her time between L.A. and the High Desert. “We worked with artists that we would want to have represented in our collection,” Grachos says. “We reached back to artists who Rochelle and I have worked with over the years, and we really benefited from giving the auction a tie to the desert.” The offerings tap into the desert’s minimalist sensibilities with a porcelain

form by Stephanie Bachiero, a geometric painting by Scot Heywood, a wall piece by Robert Moreland, and a painting by David Simpson.

Sculptural offerings include works by Robert Therrien, Teresita Fernández, Do Ho Suh, Nancy Rubins, and light and space artist Helen Pashgian. Other highlights include a grid painting by Ed Moses, a colored pencil drawing by Tom Friedman, a painting by Ryan McGinnis, a woodcut print by Alison Saar, a collage by Arturo Herrera, a light work by Anthony James, ceramic pieces by Liz Lerner and Pae White, and a mixed media work by Barbara Stauffacher Solomon.

I wouldn’t dare say which pieces I’m eyeing, but you can bet I’ve already registered and will be enjoying all the action to benefit the desert’s largest and oldest cultural attraction during the most critical time of its 83-year history.