Pricey Picasso among collection to be auctioned

Christie's says privately held works have a total value of $150 million

Reuters

LONDON — Christie's will offer a private art collection valued at more than $150 million in May, the auctioneer said this week, including a Picasso that is estimated to be worth $70 million to $90 million U.S.

The collection, belonging to a leading U.S. art patroness Frances and Sidney Brody, was described as "one of the most valuable ever offered at auction" and is expected to create a strong demand at auction for rare works of art coming from private holdings. "As witnessed at the recent London sales of impressionist and modern art, the appetite among major collectors for top-quality works of deep connoisseurship continues to reach new heights," said Edward Dolman, CEO of Christie's International.

We have no doubt that the calibre of this collection will ignite collector interest worldwide and yield exciting results in the sale room this May." The highlight of the New York sale on May 4 is Pablo Picasso's Nude, Green Leaves, and Bust from 1922, which is expected to fetch up to $90 million.

The Brodys acquired the depiction of the artist's mistress Marie-Therese Walter in the 1950s from Picasso's dealers. A preview of the May auction will be the first time the Picasso work has been publicly displayed for more than 50 years.

Other major works include Henri Matisse's Nu au coussin bleu (1924), estimated at $20 million to $30 million, and Alberto Giacometti's Grande tête de Diego (1954), which is estimated at $25 million to $35 million.

The body of works formally titled The Collection of Mrs. Sidney F. Brody began when Sidney, a Los Angeles real-estate developer, gave his wife Frances a Henry Moore sculpture for Christmas. "Sid put it under the Christmas tree. And well, by then I guess we were hooked," she recalled in a later interview.

Frances died in 2009 at the age of 91. A portion of the proceeds from the auction will go to the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens in San Marino, Calif., of which she was a patron in later life.

Exhibit shines light on Victoria art

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Down at the Legacy Gallery (and Café) a bold experiment in writing a new art history of Victoria. An exhibit titled Recovering the Wealth is on show, based on 14 paintings from the Michael Williams Collection. The exhibit is the subject, and the result, of work by students of Carolyn Butler-Palmer's curatorial course in the Department of History in Art at the University of Victoria.

First, a bit about the Michael Williams Collection. Williams was an entrepreneur whose real estate holdings in Victoria included many artists' studios, as well as the popular Swan Hotel and Pub. He was passionate about art, in particular local art. He first moved in to the Fran Willis Gallery and was usually first in the door when a new show was hung. And in many cases he was able to drive a hard bargain with his tenants, choosing fresh work directly from the studio. He used the art he bought to decorate his business premises, effectively "buying it for 50-cent dollars."

In this way, he diligently gathered more than 1,100 sculptures and paintings, and displayed them consistently and publicly. After his death in 2009, Williams left them all — and the business and real estate — to the University of Victoria. At once, a new history of contemporary art in Victoria began, parallel and distinctly different from that collected by the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, was created.

The university then created the Williams Legacy Chair in the History of Art department and in 2008 hired Carolyn Butler-Palmer to curate and interpret the Williams Collection. Trained in art history as well asfolio studies, she at once set her students to work on community-based research, with last year's Flanelles show this year they focused on the issue of social justice. A preliminary list of 33 artworks was selected from the collection, which reflected Williams's humanitarian ideals and his interest in the homeless and "insecurely housed."

Collecting art is usually seen as only an activity of the wealthy. Yet Williams's sympathies and support extended to the Apple Tree Gang, who had their headquarters under the Johnson Street Bridge. He was certainly aware that many artists are among the very poor. The final exhibit includes 14 paintings.

These include some from Victoria's previous generation — Max Bates, Richard Cichoszka and Jack Kidder — and Vancouver's New Romantics of the 1980s — Angela Freeman and Vicky Marshall. Williams's Chinatown protege Glenn Howarth, Noah Becker and Michael Lewis are prominently featured, as is the unique genius of Norval Morrisseau. The compelling visionary portraits of Ken Furt might be the hit of the show.

Butler-Palmer's students were each asked to compile a research portfolio on one of the artworks, and the resulting dossier is available to the public. Normally, art history students can do their research about Monet or Da Vinci in the library or online. In this case, the students found they had to engage in original research, collecting oral histories from artists, dealers and people associated with the issues with which the paintings are concerned. "There's这么 little written on any of these artists," Butler-Palmer noted. That is about to change.

Each portfolio is a unique blend of biography and thematic engagement. Each artwork presents a community, the story of its own community, in its own words. The students broke into four groups to create the exhibit. Each group was in charge of the installation. A second team created labels and text panels. A third took the public relations detail, making posters and invitations and handing out information in pre and on television. They also conducted a free-form seminar, the "conversational café." This included some community organizers and people involved on the Legacy site, the original group of 14.

An art historian's too often overlook the creative manifestations of their own community. The details of the local history can be forgotten overnight and be replaced even more quickly.

Retired, a 1983 oil on canvas painting by Vicky Marshall, is one of the works from the Michael Williams Collection on display at the Legacy Art Gallery and Café until May 2.