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# Here's How Leonardo DiCaprio's Foundation Helps Artists

August 2, 2017 by Marion Maneker



Earlier this week, we asked if Leonardo DiCaprio's charity auctions held in the South of France —the most recent one raising \$30m mostly from art sales—were a good thing for the artists who donated work. After all, US artists make a greater contribution when they donate than buyers do when they purchase at a charity auction because US artists can only deduct the value of their materials as a charitable donation, whereas the buyers can deduct the purchase in excess of fair market value as charitable donation. DiCaprio has done a remarkable job garnering auction records at his charity sales partially for this reason (and partially for the social status conferred on charity buyers who often bid conspicuously.)

All of this is to DiCaprio's credit. Nonetheless, the actor's art advisor, Lisa Schiff, asked to address this question. She made the case directly that what was not being reported was far more interesting than the big names mentioned in Vanity Fair. She points out:

Record prices were set for: **Sanya Kantarovsky**, **Andrea Bowers**, an **Urs Fischer** painting, **Yukimasa Ida**, **Ben Quilty**, **Camillo Restrepo**, an **Adrian Ghenie** collage, **Paola Pivi**, **Max Hooper Schneider**, **Lawrence Weiner**, **Tracey Emin** neon, a **Lynda Benglis** edition, **Rashid Johnson**, a **Cecily Brown** work on paper.

It was an important night for female artists who for the first time figured largely in the auction: The only work bought by the great Japanese collector **Yusaka Maezawa** was the **Jenny Holzer** painting.

Artists from Nigeria, Columbia, Italy, Australia, Japan and Brazil were auctioned for first time in live.

Intrigued by the case Schiff made, we asked her to explain a bit more about how the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation views its relationship to the artists it auctions and promotes:

In both the live and the silent auctions we included artists from all over the world and at varying degrees of exposure and commercial success. For the silent auction, we asked the artists in the live auction as well as curators who we should look at—and we listened. Now in the silent, there are artworks at \$1k to \$100k.

We wanted to give the same visibility to artists who may not make us much money but who we can unite in one platform with more commercially successful artists for two reasons:

1. we want to make affordable but quality artwork available to collectors who may want to engage with the foundation but can't afford to go to St. Tropez, who cant buy at that level or who simply have no interest in that.
2. we wanted to show that our interests are not solely in exploiting commercially successful artists but in trying to position them seriously and as more than just their market.
3. we want visibility for artists who aren't regulars at auction because we believe

in value beyond an auction result. The Japanese collector **Yukio Maezawa** was the winning bidder on a work by **Jenny Holzer**, an incredibly established artist whose market is undervalued but whose critical recognition is vast. **Len Blavatnik** was the winning bidder on a work by **Lawrence Weiner** — an incredibly conceptual artwork that he understood was special beyond any market considerations. And yet he set a record price.

It's a bummer that those who attended the event would only mention artists who have a visible market like "Richard Prince, Damien Hirst, Jonas Wood, Cecily Brown, and Rudolf Stingel." More interesting were the special commissions by Lawrence Weiner, Andrea Bowers, Camilo Restrepo, and Yukimasa Ida among others not to mention the presence of African and African American artists like Yinka Shonibare and Rashid Johnsonson respectively.

Ben Quilty, an Australian artist who is present in every major museum in the Pacific Rim but unknown in the West had a stunning painting and Paola Pivi, a female Italian artist donated an incredible sculpture.

Moreover, the unlimited editions of tattoos and sustainably made bracelets by Lawrence Weiner correlating to the work donated as well as the Tracey Emin special edition of digital works correlating to her neon donation, were nowhere mentioned by Blasberg or anyone else.

Prince, Stingel and Urs Fischer are constantly mentioned only in terms of the "art market" but they are much more than that. Exhibiting them alongside artists who are as critically successful but less commercially successful was deliberate. Fetishized market prowess does nothing on its own. Urs Fischer, Stingel, and Prince have as much to say as Lawrence Weiner, Bowers and Restrepo. We need to see the meaning in the former, and recognize the market value of the latter. Auction results

are not the end all be all.



On that last point, Schiff wanted to respond to point we make at the top of this post about charity auction records often being outliers:

A benefit auction may not hold the same power as a regular auction but it does have impact and for me, a record price for Andrea Bowers (with Weshoyot Alvitre) means a lot. Here is a feminist, activist artist working in tandem with a Native American artist, and all of the bidding was in the room.

We know how taxing and risky it is for artists to donate to a benefit auction. We

recognize it's now at an epidemic level and we can't keep doing it. We decided that after this auction, we would try to come up with new ways of engaging with visual culture that is more about the long game than the short game of benefit auctions.

In Miami, look out for an interesting project at the Perez. But for this last auction—yes, the last one we will do for a while in St. Tropez with art—we went out of our way to make some substantial changes that we thought would give back. At the very least give, we wanted to give artists a platform that was not exclusively transactional and could be additive beyond just an auction result.

If you go to: [www.2017LDFauction.org](http://www.2017LDFauction.org) — you will see that we created a special Foundation website that will later function as an exhibition site.

For now you see objects/experiences, but after the silent auction closes on August 23, only art and editorial will remain without any trace of prices. If you go to “More Info,” each artist has supplied a head shot and a quote about their participation or their thoughts on the environment and included an essay about their work.

Once the bidding is over on August 23rd, there will be one seamless exhibition uniting artists like Simon Denny, Aaijo, Asuka Anastacia Ogawa, and Michael E. Smith on the same playing field with artists like Urs Fisher, Rudolf Stingel, Cecily Brown and Damian Hirst.

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