

F R O N T P A G E

Albright-Knox Sells to Buy

The first of a series of five or six controversial auctions of objects from the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo took place on Mar. 20 and 23 at Sotheby's, New York, with stun-

ning results. On Nov. 10, 2006, the museum announced its decision to deaccession 207 works, estimating an eventual total of some \$15 million, designated to augment an existing acquisitions endowment. In just two rounds, however, the prices achieved vastly exceeded expectations for the entire group. The Mar. 20 auction netted more than \$18 million for 26 early

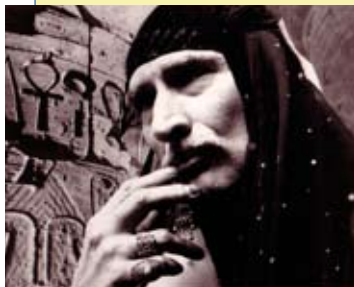
Chinese works, and an additional 11 South Asian objects sold for \$7.2 million on Mar. 23. The remaining items will appear at auctions in May and June this year and in January 2008. The sales have already doubled the endowment, "an enhancement so substantial that it will guarantee a very solid future in developing our collection," says Louis Grachos, director of



Shiva as Brahma, granite, Southern India, 10th century, \$4.07 million.

Film Examines Art-World Provocateur

Jack Smith and the *Destruction of Atlantis*, a documentary focused on the life and work of the eccentric performance artist/filmmaker, is currently screening in art-house venues in the U.S. and abroad. The film was written, directed and co-produced by Mary Jordan, a Canadian-born filmmaker, known for her documentary shorts resulting from extended visits to Africa and Southeast Asia. Here, in her first feature, she takes on a difficult art-world subject, and the result is a striking portrait of the flamboyant and tragic figure who was a fixture in the New York art scene in the 1960s and '70s.



Jack Smith in *Shadows in the City*, 1989, his last screen appearance.

Smith was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1932, and raised in Texas. He came to New York in 1953 and immersed himself in photography, often shooting his friends in flashy makeshift costumes and evocative settings staged in his

apartment. While he regarded himself primarily as an artist, writer and performer, Smith is best known today for his film *Flaming Creatures*, a hallucination of campy exoticism and sexual liberation. Smith was inspired in this piece by Hollywood B-movies of the 1940s and '50s—especially those featuring studio-cultivated stars like Maria Montez—but he added what might be called a Beat-era, proto-hippie, pot-induced spin.

As outlined in Jordan's film, the debut of *Flaming Creatures* in 1963, when Smith was just 30, caused a scandal and precipitated a number of arrests of exhibitors. It was banned in 24 states and four countries and prompted a landmark free speech case heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. At issue were its orgiastic scenes featuring nudity and explicit sexual imagery, and particularly its homoerotic content, which shocked many viewers at the time. Despite its limited screenings, the film made a strong impact on a generation of artists and filmmakers, ranging from Warhol to Fellini, and has since become a classic of underground cinema.

Smith was devastated by the negative reactions to *Flaming Creatures* and also to his never-completed 1964 film, *Normal Love*, which he showed in fragmentary states in art-house venues to even harsher public responses and further arrests. He acquired early on a profound bitterness toward the art world and established cultural institutions, which he retained for the rest of his life.

In subsequent years, up until the time of his AIDS-related death in 1989, Smith combined theater, photography and his inimitable kind of poetry. Much of his background material—costumes, manuscripts, documents, archival photos and ephemera—was presented in a museum survey of Smith's work, curated by Edward Leffingwell, at New York's P.S. 1 in 1997. And periodically, gallery exhibitions related to Smith's work have appeared. Last year at New York's Yvon Lambert, Gwenn

Thomas showed her photos of a 1974 Smith performance in Germany. Jordan's documentary, however, goes much further in explicating some of Smith's category-defying works. Jordan's story benefits from some stunning archival material, including rarely if ever published photos and footage of Smith performing, as well as excerpts from his own films and those of others, for example his first film *Buzzards Over Baghdad* (1952) and his last screen appearance in 1989, as an actor in Ari Roussimoff's *Shadows in the City*. A particularly fascinating segment discusses Smith's troubled collaborations with Warhol.

In addition, voice-overs by Smith selected from some 14 hours of interviews with various critics and friends illuminate his idealized notions of art and his provocative and surprisingly coherent worldview. He declared, for instance, that all museums should be free and all true art belongs to the public. He likened art collectors to thieves who remove artworks from the public domain. In addition, a number of eloquent and often humorous talking heads are featured to give insightful views of Smith's unique character and far-reaching influence. Among them are his sister Mary, writer/filmmaker John Waters, theater director Richard Foreman, Smith superstar Mario Montez, and writer, artist and musician friends Gary Indiana, Sylvère Lotringer, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Uzi Parnes and John Zorn. Jonas Mekas also gamely appears. A champion of New American Cinema, Mekas promoted *Flaming Creatures* and was arrested for its screening. But Smith later turned on him, dubbing him "Uncle Fishhook" and accusing Mekas of swindling him out of royalties from the film.

In the end, *Jack Smith and the Destruction of Atlantis* manages to evoke the quirky and often cantankerous personality of its subject without ever making him seem merely a disgruntled artist and social misfit, as some may think him. Having met Smith in the late 1970s soon after I moved to New York and attempted to assist him with a number of his "slide-show performances," I feel that Jordan's multifaceted and impassioned portrait rings true. Smith, in fact, comes off in the film as an ingenious art-world Cassandra, more relevant today than ever. In his work, he decried increasing conformity in the art world and the hyper-commercialization that seems to motivate if not define much of the art scene today.

—David Ebony

Jack Smith and the *Destruction of Atlantis* (2006, 95 minutes) was written and directed by Mary Jordan and co-produced by Jordan and Kenneth Wayne Peralta. It is distributed by Tongue Press and Monk Media. Executive producers include Ross Morgan, Stephen Kessler and artist Richard Prince. More information may be found on the film's Web site: www.jacksmithandthedeconstructionofatlantis.com.

Flaming Creatures pre-production photo with Smith at right, ca. 1959.



the Albright-Knox. (Prices cited include the Sotheby's commission, which is 20 percent on the first \$500,000 and 12 percent on amounts above.)

The high sums indicate the rarity of some of the works—sought after, as well, for their rock-solid provenances, at a premium in these days of shady dealings in antiquities [see book review, this issue]. "Most deaccessioning," Grachos observes, "is about moving out duplicates or decorative material or stuff you inherit—but this is work of high quality. It was the thing that made our decision so hard." Among the stellar lots was a bronze ritual wine vessel (*fangjia*) from the late Shang dynasty (13th-11th century B.C.), the only known example to be decorated with owl motifs, considered auspicious during that era. It garnered \$8.1 million, over two-and-a-half times its high estimate of \$3 million. Other Chinese works in the sale surpassed their estimates and, three days later, a 10th-century granite statue of Shiva as Brahma sold for \$4.07 million, an auction record for a work of traditional Indian art. The wine vessel went to the Compton Verney museum, a private institution near London—so it has left U.S. shores, presumably for good. The Shiva statue, on the other hand, was purchased by the Cleveland Museum of Art. Most anticipated is a June sale in which arguably the prize piece of the group, a bronze sculpture of *Artemis and the Stag* from the Hellenistic/Roman era, is projected to sell for \$5-7 million.

The November announcement to deaccession was the

Sharing the Wealth in Dallas

▶ result of years of strategizing by the administration and board of directors of the Albright-Knox, stressed by the exodus of wealth from the region, local cuts in funding and steep art-market inflation. With a restricted acquisitions endowment of \$22 million, from which five percent per year may be drawn (\$1.1 million annually), the museum, renowned for its modern and contemporary collections, was being priced out of its long-term commitment to purchase work by today's artists. Led by Grachos, who arrived at the museum in 2003, and Charles W. Banta, president of the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy (the Albright-Knox's parent organization), 34 board members voted unanimously last fall to endorse a plan to sell off a selection of antiquities and pre-modern art, including pieces from ancient Rome, Egypt, India, Southeast Asia, China, the Pacific Islands, Africa, the Americas and Europe. Such works have entered the collection willy-nilly over the years, by purchase or donation; the Albright-Knox has never had curators dedicated to those fields. The museum has kept 80 early examples that were deemed to shed historical or formal light on modern and contemporary works.

The decision to deaccession unleashed a firestorm of protest in Buffalo and beyond (the press release was disingenuously titled "Albright-Knox Art Gallery to Enhance Important Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art"). Selling off objects in permanent collections to raise funds, a practice on the rise in cash-strapped American museums, is often met with dismay by opponents, who bemoan not only the loss of a particular community's cultural assets but also those of society in general, as publicly accessible works slip into private hands. "There are a few very difficult topics for museum curators," says Grachos. "One is the sexual content in work, another is religion and the third is deaccessioning." Recent divestments, such as the widely lamented

Two years ago, in the closing days of a long centennial campaign, the Dallas Museum of Art announced that some 900 contemporary works in three private collections had been promised to the museum in the form of irrevocable bequests. Added to the DMA's existing holdings of 650 contemporary pieces, the gifts from the Hoffman, Rachofsky and Rose families would establish the museum as a major force in the field of 20th- and 21st-century art.

The announcement triggered a wave of supporting gifts from others in the city's hardy collecting community, and the Rachofskys sweetened the bequest by adding their vast Richard Meier-designed house, which has been used exclusively for the display of art since its completion in 1996. At a time when it takes only a warehouse and a PR firm to turn a collection into a private museum, the synchronized gifts to the DMA marked a dramatic throwback to an earlier, less overtly narcissistic style of cultural philanthropy. The largesse also amounted to a vote of confidence in that most traditional of civic institutions, the encyclopedic museum, whose geographically and chronologically broad mission has become a hard sell in some cities. The DMA's other strengths include art of the ancient Americas, Africa, Indonesia and South Asia; decorative arts; and 18th- and 19th-century European art, especially French.

A core sample of what is destined to belong to the DMA has been on display in a two-part exhibition, "Fast Forward: Contemporary Collections for the Dallas Museum of Art," which opened in November 2006 and February 2007. (Part II, which focuses on recent art, remains on view through May 20.) Spanning the 1940s to the present, the episodic survey interleaves roughly 300 paintings, sculptures, installations, photographs and videos from the promised gifts with highlights from the museum's contemporary holdings. Guest curator María de Corral was invited to bring an outsider's freshness and neutrality to the task of imposing provisional order on what proves to be a very rich trove.

"Fast Forward" thoroughly covers several generations of painting from Pollock and de Kooning to Peter Doig and Mamma Andersson, though Pop, surpris-

ingly, is virtually AWOL. Significant groups of works by Robert Ryman, Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke punctuate the narrative. De Corral stages a nuanced and illuminating encounter between Arte Povera (a particular strength of the collections) and Minimal art, while aggressive installations by Bruce Nauman, Chris Burden and Doug Aitken occupy separate rooms. The array of sculpture is happily varied. There are twin clocks and a carpet of candies from Felix Gonzalez-Torres, silver chains and silk flowers in dainty wall works by Jim Hodges, a hulking assemblage centered on a grand piano by Matthew Barney and an uncommonly serene stack of soft bricklike modules by Louise Bourgeois. In one of the many instances of sly placement, floor pieces by Ron Mueck and Robert Gober are positioned to permit a comparative consideration of the appearance of inappropriate body hair in recent sculpture. While "Fast Forward" is intended to be anything but regional, de Corral did well to include strong works by Texas natives Vernon Fisher and Nic Nicosia. Smaller pleasures include nearly a dozen Joseph Cornell boxes, a series of intimate photographic vignettes by Saul Fletcher and a couple of Neil Jenney slice-of-nature paintings from the early 1980s that seem new again, sadly enough, in our era of environmental distress.

Even as the pledged artworks are catalogued and celebrated, the Hoffman, Rachofsky and Rose collections continue to grow, and all future acquisitions will be included in the bequest. This anticipated bounty notwithstanding, the museum remains committed to purchasing works on its own behalf, the largest source of funds for contemporary art being an annual auction whose proceeds are shared with the American Foundation for Aids Research (amFAR). After a period of several years in which museum construction was the big story in the Dallas-Fort Worth area (think of Philip Johnson's Amon Carter wing in 2001, Tadao Ando's Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in 2002 and Renzo Piano's Nasher Sculpture Center in 2003), attention is once again squarely on art itself.

—Marcia E. Vetrocq

sale of Asher B. Durand's *Kindred Spirits* by the New York Public Library in 2005—justified by a similar rationale that the Durand and other paintings were peripheral to the institution's principal mission—have raised the hackles of many [see "Front Page," Sept. '05].

In Buffalo, the November announcement prompted a flurry of protests, including the formation in January of a committee calling itself the Buffalo Art Keepers (BAK), determined to fight the sales. (BAK's frequent spokesman is Carl Dennis, the Buffalo-based, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet.) Prior to the announcement, the museum had encountered resistance from donor heirs; they, however, were assuaged by the promise that new acquisitions would bear the names of their philanthropic forebears. But the battle with the public grew increasingly vituperative as the sales loomed, and articles critical of the Albright-Knox's moneymaking strategy migrated to the *New York Sun* and the editorial pages of the *Wall Street Journal*.

In the lead-up to the sales, the Erie

County legislature and the city council held special hearings, even though they had no jurisdiction in the matter; a city council committee symbolically voted to oppose the move. A last-minute injunction to stop the sales, filed Mar. 11 by BAK in New York State Supreme Court, argued that the deaccessioning was "an illegal 'misappropriation' of the gallery's assets, [which] violates its long-standing bylaws and cheapens its heritage." BAK wanted "to delay the sale," said Dennis, "so some of the strongest items—33, 34, 35 of them—could be spared." A heated debate took place at a museum members' meeting held on Mar. 12, after which the membership voted by 1,224 to 428 to support the board and go ahead with the divestment. On Mar. 16, State Supreme Court Justice Diane Y. Devlin dismissed BAK's case in its entirety, ruling that the museum's governing board of directors "reasonably and honestly exercised their judgment to determine [that the sales are] necessary for the continued existence and notoriety [sic] of the Albright-Knox."

Leafing through Sotheby's lush images of the Chinese works—both catalogue volumes of the sale, which included properties from various sellers, featured items from the Albright-Knox on their covers—is a wrenching exercise. Grachos acknowledges his own distaste for this kind of fundraising option but feels that it's worthwhile. "I don't think anyone wants to go through a process like this. The DNA of a museum director is to collect, not to let go of things." Yet he is adamant that the unique strength of the museum has been its willingness to buy art of the present. "If you're building a collection that's modernist and contemporary," he argued in an interview with Geoff Kelly in Buffalo's *Artvoice*, "you've got to keep moving, you can't just stop collecting. . . . I think at the end of the day if you talk to someone in Moscow or Paris or Prague, they might know the Albright-Knox. Cultural tourists travel to Buffalo to see certain works in this collection. And they are not the antiquities, they're not the Chinese material,



Bronze wine vessel, late Shang Dynasty, 13th-11th century B.C., \$8.1 million.

Richard Rogers Wins Pritzker

British architect Richard Rogers has won this year's \$100,000 Pritzker Prize, given by the Hyatt Foundation. Rogers first gained acclaim for the Pompidou Center (1977) in Paris, which he co-designed with then partner Renzo Piano (who won the Pritzker in 1998). As with the Pompidou, many of Rogers's designs emphasize a building's structural components. The Lloyd's of London headquarters (1986) has elevators and escalators on the exterior, and the Millennium Dome (1999) in Greenwich appears to be suspended from steel supports and cables. More recent projects include the National Assembly for Wales, which features a cantilevered undulating roof sheltering a naturally ventilated glass building. Rogers's terminal at the Barajas airport in Madrid (2005), mixing high-tech steel elements with a soaring bamboo ceiling, reflects his increased focus on sustainable architecture.



Richard Rogers.

In New York, Rogers is currently working on an expansion of the Jacob Javits Convention Center, a complex at Silvercup production studios in Queens, a redesign of the East River waterfront and a building at the World Trade Center site. Indicative of his philosophy of teamwork, he just renamed his firm Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners. The firm also has a policy that sets the highest salary at no more than six times that of the lowest-paid architect.

per year, each trust will be closed when 250 artists have signed up, at which point a new one will be formed. The New York trust is expected to close at the end of 2008 or in 2009.

According to the APT Artist's Agreement, participants will give 20 works over 20 years—two per year for the first five years, one per year for the next five, and one every other year for the remainder. In order to fulfill that requirement, the artists recruited by APT are usually under 40. Each trust will handle about 5,000 works and could feasibly pay out to the participants for decades. In an Apr. 10, 2006, article in the *Financial Times*, executive vice president of finance Dan Galai said that the 500 works that then made up the New York trust were worth about \$5 million (based on the insured amount, not appraisals). APT is no longer releasing the value of works in its possession, but confirmed that each trust should grow to be worth \$50-60 million. While the works remain the legal property of the artists until APT exercises its option to sell, they are deposited with the trust, which pays for storage and insurance and makes them available for loan exhibitions.

Various tax laws have proved challenging in determining how the trusts operate, and the company has moved away from managing a pension account for artists. The setup is similar to buying shares in a mutual fund, with each contribution assigned a unit value that determines a share of the collective pool. While APT tries to select works that have similar market values, the pool units assigned per contribution increases the longer artists have been

in the program, so that their first two contributions equal one point while their last is worth eight. Once sales begin, an annual payout date of Mar. 31 has been established to distribute funds to artists, who receive 40 percent of their own sales, which will be taxed as annual income. The collective pool receives 32 percent, and the remaining 28 percent goes to APT for management and operating expenses, and to its some 30 to 40 investors, most of whom come from a financial background and some of whom are collectors.

APT will begin to sell works at its discretion, but not before each trust maxes out at 250 artists, and most likely not for 10 years. CEO and president Bijan Khezri said that the advisors—including Pamela Auchincloss, managing director of global operations, and David Ross, chairman of curatorial committees—will take into consideration the current market. Since the trust is concerned with creating value for an artist's work, the sales would not be a disruptive force. APT plans to work with each artist's primary gallery, which will sell the works on the secondary market (and receive a small commission before the proceeds are divvied up), but the trust is also open to being contacted by collectors or dealers directly.

It may take 10 or 20 years before the plan can be evaluated. Undoubtedly, some artists will become more financially successful than others and their works will garner more for the trust. But the structure of APT provides the participants with risk diversification instead of relying solely on their own work and the whims of the

art market in their retirement years. Beyond that, in a flavor-of-the-month market environment that is focused on the here and now, and increasingly driven by the hunt for the next hot thing, the trust encourages artists to think about long-term retirement planning. Many artists are happy about an arrangement that forces them to save work for future sales instead of relying on self-discipline. Others have declined the invitation to join, going with the short-term sure sell rather than waiting years to see if the APT model really works. While it's not uncommon for artists to hold back their own works, which would allow them to take the full profit if the market favors them in the future, APT makes that less of a gamble. —Stephanie Cash

French Island Enterprise

Jean-Pierre Fourcade, French government representative and senator from the Boulogne-Billancourt district near Paris, recently announced an ambitious scheme to revitalize the Ile Seguin. Part of the senator's district, the island in the Seine was once home to Renault automobile plants but languished after the company abandoned it in the 1990s. Since then, a number of proposals for the island have appeared, including one by businessman and art collector François Pinault, who subsequently scrapped plans for a private museum there and instead moved his collection to the Palazzo Grassi in Venice [see *A.I.A.*, Oct. '06].

The new plans, still in the early stages of development, call for a sprawling multipurpose complex to be built on the Ile Seguin, which is home to some 109,000 people. Three separate areas on the island will be designated for academic, scientific and cultural projects. The American University of Paris and New York University have signed a partnership agreement to develop the academic center as a home to a broad range of interdisciplinary pursuits. The cultural center will consist of an art museum and a complex of theaters, cinemas and music halls. Lastly, the scientific center will be the new home to France's National Cancer Institute as well as the National Center for Scientific Research, both relocating from elsewhere in the country.

The \$135-million project has been initiated with about \$65 million in state funds. Local governments have agreed to finance the rest.

they're not the few Egyptian pieces we have. They are the modern works."

No doubt, Grachos's purchasing decisions will be closely scrutinized. "I do realize that people are going to be watching more carefully," he says. "What I learned in this process was that there really is a distrust of contemporary art out there. It made that element surface—disdain is too hard a word—but there is a significant audience in our community who are not willing to accept some of the things we show. I don't know how history will look at us, but I believe the museum will be in great shape for generations." —Faye Hirsch

Altoids Award at the New Museum

New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art, set to open in its new home on the Bowery later this year, and the Altoids mint company have announced the establishment of the biennial Altoids Award. In addition to tongue-scorching mints, Altoids is known for its "Curiously Strong Collection" of emerging artists, exhibitions of which have been featured at the New Museum each year from 2001 to '06. In 2000, the company donated its entire collection to the museum, including works it continues to accumulate.

The prize will be presented to four individuals, who each receive \$25,000. Winners will be chosen by a rotating panel of 10 artists who will each nominate up to five emerging artists from around the country, with the finalists to be selected by three established artists. For the inaugural prize, Paul McCarthy, Cindy Sherman and Rirkrit Tiravanija will choose from a slate nominated by Edgar Arceneaux, Mitch Cope, Trish Donnelly, Harrell Fletcher, Jay Heikes, Matt Keegan, Rick Lowe, Frances Stark, Michelle Grabner, and the team of Allora and Calzadilla. Winners will be announced in early 2008, with an exhibition of their work to appear the following fall.

Artist Pension Trust Update

Almost three years after its launch in New York, the Artist Pension Trust [see "Artworld," Sept. '04] is gaining momentum. Geared for emerging and midcareer artists, it has grown to include trusts in Los Angeles, Beijing, Berlin, Mexico City and Mumbai. The New York trust currently boasts some 180 artists, while Mexico's has 21 and Mumbai's inaugural roster is still in formation. With about 50 artists added