ARTS

Inside Art

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A Lilac-Hued Bacon
At Christie’s

Have a Francis Bacon to sell? London is where many auction house experts are advising collectors to try their luck. “We’ve seen extraordinary prices paid for Bacons in London in recent years,” said Brett Gorvy, international chairman of Christie’s postwar and contemporary art department. “Americans have competed as aggressively as buyers from emerging markets.” And with so many rich Russians and Middle Easterners putting down roots in London, it’s the obvious place to sell.

That explains the image on the catalog cover for Christie’s Feb. 14 London sale of postwar and contemporary art. It’s a 1963 portrait of Henrietta Moraes, the model and friend of Bacon’s, reclining naked on a white bed in a room with a deeply saturated lilac wall and a bright red floor. Bacon generally painted his subjects from photographs rather than from life, and for this picture he commissioned his friend John Deakin to shoot Ms. Morales in 1961. Christie’s estimates the painting will sell for about $23 million to $30 million.

The record price for a Bacon painting at auction is $86.4 million, achieved in May 2006 when Sotheby’s in New York sold a 1978 triptych, supposedly to Roman Abramovich, the Russian oil magnate. Christie’s in London sold “Triptych 1974-77” that same year for a robust $54.5 million and a year later auctioned “Three Studies for a Self-Portrait” (1975) for $34.4 million. And in June Christie’s London sold “Study for a Portrait” (1955) for $28.7 million.

Mr. Gorvy isn’t saying who is selling “Portrait of Henrietta Moraes,” but art experts familiar with Bacon’s work said it was Sheldon Solow, the New York real estate developer and well-known collector who bought the painting from Ernst Beyeler, the Swiss dealer, in 1983.

Mr. Solow is not known as an auction seller but at 83 is re-evaluating his collection. The Bacon portrait is not all. Mr. Solow is said to be selling at Christie’s next month. Two other works from his collection are coming to auction on the evening of Feb. 7: a 1925 Matisse painting, “Painting-Poem,” which is expected to fetch $9.9 million to $13.8 million; and “Reclining Figure: Festival,” a 1961 sculpture by Henry Moore, expected to bring about $5.5 million to $8.5 million.

The paintings are on view at Christie’s in New York until Tuesday.

Art Fairs on Tap

It may seem as if the art world is in the winter doldrums, but organizers of New York City’s contemporary art fairs are gearing up for the onslaught of events in March and May.

Those putting together the 14th edition of the “Artery Show — Contemporary,” which runs from March 8 to 11 on Pier 94, are eager to make a better impression than they did last year. “Our aim is for comfort and hospitality,” said Paul Morris, the fair’s founding director. They hired the Brooklyn architects Bade Stageberg.

Christie’s is selling Bacon’s “Portrait of Henrietta Moraes” for about $23 million to $30 million.

Getting Involved at Bard

As it enters its 20th year the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., is beginning a Next Decade Campaign with more than $2 million in gifts that includes a $500,000 challenge grant from its co-founder Marieluise Hessel. The aim is to raise $5 million in the next year.

Beyond its fund-raising efforts the center is presenting shows over the next year intended to capture more than the usual art crowd. One is “Liam Gillick: 199A-199B,” a survey of this British conceptual artist’s seminal projects. Filling the 15 galleries of the Hessel Museum from June 24 through Dec. 17 will be Gillick works that mostly rely upon audience participation.

Like another artist of his generation, Rirkrit Tiravanija, who involves the public when he does things like serving curry in galleries (as he did recently at the Museum of Modern Art), Mr. Gillick is planning to organize a series called Every Day Holiday, in which different social clubs around the college will be invited to celebrate their causes or group identities in the museum. There will be a Fireman’s Day as well as a Gluten-Free Vegan Baking Day and a Sacred Heart Singing Day.

“The important point is to show that the experience of art isn’t a passive one anymore,” said Tom Eccles, director of the center.