

In Record-Breaking First Night, David Rockefeller Auction Sells \$646 Million Of Art

Inside the plaza that David Rockefeller's father, John D. Rockefeller, built nearly 90 years ago, \$646 million worth of 19th and 20th century art was auctioned off at Christie's Tuesday night, breaking the record previously held by the late fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent's auction, which grossed \$484 million in 2009, for the highest grossing auction by a single owner ever. The Picasso "Fillette à la corbeille fleurie," which was sold for \$115 million to an anonymous bidder on the phone, was the highest grossing sale of the night. Other top-grossing works among the 44 lots included a Monet, "Nymphéas en fleur," which was sold for \$84.7 million, and a Matisse, "Odalisque couchée aux magnolias," which was sold for \$80.75 million.

Tuesday night's sale was the first live auction of the David and Peggy Rockefeller sale. The entire Rockefeller sale, which comprises more than 1,500 lots ranging from a [Rockefeller Center money clip](#) to a [George III Silver Teapot](#) to Georgia O'Keeffe paintings, will be auctioned off over the next three days. There has also been an online auction selling some of the lots that began on May 1 and runs through May 11.

Beyond the big name pieces of art, many of the items in the auction carry personal stories from Rockefeller's life. For example an attic black-figured amphora (presale estimate: \$100,000 to \$150,000) was given to Rockefeller as a reward from his mother when he was a child. Rockefeller noted, "Mother acquired most of this group of Greek vases at sale in New York during the early 1920s. It is my recollection that a few of them had belonged to my grandfather, Senator Nelson Aldrich, who gave them to my mother. In the mid-1920s, in an effort to encourage habits of orderliness in her sons, Mother offered these vases as a prize to the one who was able to keep his room neatest over of my brothers, and have enjoyed owning them ever since. During my last 20 years at Chase, they were displayed in my office at the bank."

The family put the collection up for auction after David Rockefeller died last year at the age of 101; at the time, Rockefeller, who was the last living grandson of Standard Oil founder and America's first billionaire John D. Rockefeller, was the world's oldest billionaire worth \$3.3 billion.

In his will, Rockefeller had outlined his plans to have nearly all of his belongings auctioned off—with all proceeds going to charity. Rockefeller himself selected a dozen non-profits to receive the proceeds, including Rockefeller University, the Museum of Modern Art and the Council on Foreign Relations.

Rockefeller's children each had the option to take up to \$1 million worth of his personal property as a gift. Beyond that, they had to buy any additional items at fair market value. Other pieces of Rockefeller's collection have already been donated. For example, Rockefeller was an avid collector of beetles and his collection of 150,000 beetles

was donated to Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology after his death. A collection of rare books that was owned by his aunt Lucy Truman Aldrich was donated to Brown University.

Rockefeller was a well-known philanthropist. He donated \$150 million to Manhattan's Museum of Modern Art, which his mother cofounded, among other gifts.

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