

# NEWS OF THE ART WORLD

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## May Sales: Basquiat, Twombly and the Young Romanian Painter Worth \$2.6 Million

by Judith Souriau | May 24, 2016 | Art market, Home - highlight, News |



Christie's and Sotheby's famous seasonal Post-War & Contemporary Art Evening Sales always feature a long list of modern and contemporary heavyweights, and the New York May sales 10

and 11 May 2016 were no exception, starring lots by the likes of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Cy Twombly, Francis Bacon and Alexander Calder. The aforementioned artists are all deceased, have been on the market for a long time, and many have played an important role in the history of art. However, the leading galleries and auction houses have considerably drawn in their belts in recent years and the young contemporary artists are becoming more prominent at auction, with surprising results at times. So, what of Adrian Ghenie, a Romanian painter borne in 1977, whose 2012 work was fought over by seven bidders at Sotheby's to finally sell for \$2.6 million?

The sale did not set a precedent in fact, since a large format work by the same artist sold for £3.1 million in London in February, which tended to indicate that the estimate of \$200,000-\$300,000 was likely to be exceeded significantly. The artist was a relative unknown in 2013!

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Self-portrait as Vincent Van  
Gogh, Adrian Ghenie, 2012

Adrian Ghenie is a member of the young generation of painters from Cluj, in Transylvania, who won favour with a few critics as early as 2009. Like Serban Savu and Ciprian Muresan, Ghenie is a product of the abandoned paintbrush factory in Cluj, which was transformed into an art school and centre. His work has been promoted in Berlin and international fairs by local gallery Plan B, which he co-founded with Mihail Pop with the aim of gaining international recognition for the Cluj artistic scene. Their endeavour was clearly a success, since Plan B featured at the Armory Show, Frieze and Frieze from 2007-2009 and Adrian Ghenie entered the collection of French businessman François Pinault and American Susan and Michael Hort in 2010. Ghenie's figurative oil paintings, which offer a contemporary portrayal of a form of German expressionism, draws on 20th-Century history (WWII, modern dictatorships and German national socialism are recurring themes) and art history. Van Gogh was an influence in the two paintings sold at Sotheby's this year and he also takes inspiration from Marcel Duchamp and the 1920 Dada exhibition in Berlin. His tortured portraits of dictators are reminiscent of

Francis Bacon's popes, with whom the Palazzo Strozzi Foundation in Florence likened him during his 2012 exhibition. His work featured in an exhibition by the Courtault Institute at the Venice Biennale in 2011 and Ghenie officially represented Romania in 2015 with a pavilion on the theme of Darwin.



It is rare for the market to beat the critics and public institutions in recognising an artist's value. The opposite generally applies and the gradual presentation by respected institutions, international curators and critics is almost always a slow, but sure, way to ensure the posterity of an artist. However, the cogs are turning dramatically faster these days and there are several examples of the market preceding (or making) an artist's reputation, as in the cases of Christopher Wool and Zeng Fanzhi. Does the price reflect recognition? That is the million-dollar question! Reassuringly, Adrian Ghenie's CV, which was posted online by the Pace gallery, features the Liverpool biennial (2008), collective exhibitions at the San Francisco Moma (2012) and at the Belvedere in Vienna (2014), in addition to many, many exhibitions run by commercial galleries. However, you have to wonder when his very first big, collective or personal, exhibitions, starting from 2008, were organized in Zurich and London by Haunch of Venison, which happens to be owned by Christie's.



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