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Jeffrey Epstein-Commissioned Painting Heads to Auction, Clearing Directors Squabble Over Brussels Branch, and More Juicy Art World Gossip

Plus, who showed up at the Met's opening for their Harlem Renaissance show? What notorious "good guy" of the art world threw the party of the week?

By Annie Armstrong
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FROM THE NOT-SO ESTEEMED COLLECTION...

Ah, art advisors. The best are absolutely obsessed with finding the perfect pieces for their clients. While your average advisor will scout galleries, auction houses, and the fair circuit for artworks, I know several extraordinary professionals who will go the extra mile, poring over obscure corners of the internet to find gems. A **Marc Chagall** on **TheRealReal**! A **Warhol** polaroid off eBay! Hard work tends to unearth material that is at least interesting.

To wit, advisor **Daniel Oglander** was recently perusing LiveAuctioneers's website when he randomly stumbled across an . . . eye-catching lot: an untitled painting by **Limor Gasko** listed simply as "**Jeffrey Epstein Commissioned Art**." The piece is a stark oil painting of a woman standing nude in a bathroom, facing the wall.

The piece is currently on offer in the "Palm Beach Antique to Modern Estate Auction" at Lantana, Fla.'s **Neely Auctions**. **Mark Neely**, the house's owner, gave it an estimate between **\$4,000 to \$6,000**, and told **Wet Paint** over the phone that he acquired it from a friend who got it at a clearance sale of one of Epstein's storage units.

"Yep, I paid \$4,000 for it," Neely told me. "Who knows where it's going to go... it's got a few pre-bids on it."

The auctioneer said that he also nabbed one of Epstein's computers from his **Palm Beach** house. "Not much on there... at least nothing I could find about **Bill Clinton!**" he said, laughing.

The auction listing says that the piece is an oil on canvas with "minor cracklature" (presumably a Floridian term for *craquelure*) but that it is otherwise in good condition. It also generously details its provenance, with a [link to YouTube footage](#) of the **FBI's** raid on Epstein's home.

"This is one of the very few instances where the evil surrounding provenance is contributing to increased value," Oglander joked. Indeed, online bidding has already reached \$5,000—three days before the hammer drops.

You may recall that Epstein's involvement in art has been the subject of scrutiny in the past. The disgraced financier and sex offender was a collector of work by **Petrina Ryan-Kleid**, whose [bizarre and conspiracy-generating paintings](#) he discovered at the **New York Academy of Art's Tribeca Ball**.

The school is also where he found the Brooklyn-based painter Gasko in 1992, who recounted the experience over the phone. "They brought him in to the students so he could buy our work," she said, explaining that creating nude studies was an integral part of the curriculum at the school, which emphasizes technical skills. "Really what he was looking for was cheap nudes." (Gasko has since abandoned her painting practice, and opted to pursue [street photography](#).)

Around that time, Epstein had acquired the New York mansion of clothing kingpin **Les Wexner** (whose name graces the **Wexner Center for the Arts** in Columbus, Ohio), and he hired Gasko to paint a mural there. "Then he calls me and he asks if I can paint from photographs," Gasko said. "I went into his office and he had this photo of a girl in the shower, and he asked if I could paint it. So I said, 'Sure.' I set a price—it was like \$2,800."

That is around **\$6,000** today, adjusted for inflation—just shy of the current top bid, but there is plenty of time for that number to climb.

The obvious question is: Who would want to own a painting commissioned by Jeffrey Epstein? Actually, I do not want to know the answer. But one option would be to acquire it and include it in a display of **Mike Kelley**'s incisive 1988 installation *Pay for Your Pleasure*, which features paintings of artists with their quotes celebrating criminality and calls for "an artwork made by a violent criminal." (A painting by serial killer **John Wayne Gacy** has been used in the past.) It also includes boxes for donations to victims' rights organizations

Kelley was probing our society's willingness to obsess over, and even glamorize, evil. I am in the camp that believes profiting off of a heinous act is a heinous act in itself (though I do have some affection for **John Hinckley**'s charming series of cat paintings). For those with other views, you have until midnight this Sunday to bid.

Meanwhile, I'll point you back to Neely, who told me that he also handled several items from the estate of the former owner of Miami's **Fountainebleau Hotel**, **Ben Novack Jr.**, whose estranged wife orchestrated his gruesome murder in 2009.

"Yeah that was a weird estate," Neely said. "But at one point, he did own **the Batmobile!**"

A CLEARING SCHISM?

Brussels is a city of diplomatic intrigue, filled with an enormous number of spies, according to a semi-recent report. But its art world has its share of drama, too, and right now it is centered on **Avenue Van Volxelaan**, where the **Clearing** gallery maintains its palatial warehouse space. Depending on whom you ask at Clearing, things might start looking a bit different over there.

Clearing's founder, **Olivier Babin**, opened the Brussels space in 2012, a year after launching the business in his former Brooklyn art studio. Since then, Clearing has established itself as a taste-making venture, fostering the growth of superstar artists like **Harold Ancart**, **Korakrit Arunanondchai**, and **Calvin Marcus**. It's expanded to **Los Angeles**, had a couple of New York spaces before recently landing on the **Bowery**, and in 2017, under the direction of former architect **Lodovic Corsini**, the Brussels arm moved into its current home, which is currently hosting an exhibition of paintings by the late **Loïc Raguénès**.

That space is headed for some sort of overhaul, although the involved parties do not seem to agree on what that overhaul will entail. If you ask Babin, he says that Clearing is going to "focus more than ever on the United States," and that the Brussels location will shift into a more "kunsthalle-like model," which would entail two or three "ambitious museum-style exhibitions per year."

"Maybe 2026 or 2027, we'll expand further in Europe into a different city," the Frenchman said, *avec une wink*. Also according to Babin, Corsini will not be a part of this shift in Europe, and will be moving on to pursue his own projects early this spring.

That's not how Corsini sees it. "I'm not going to comment on a situation that is not clear or resolved," he told me over the phone, but he did say that Babin's plans for the European arm of the business are not plans that he intends to operate under. "He has no authority to do that kind of thing. I'm not going to

go into any specifics," he said. He added, "This is completely and totally wrong. I am not leaving my gallery, no."

I will not place bets on what is going to happen, but I will keep you updated. Watch this space.

WE HEAR

Critic **David Rimanelli** really seems incensed by the photography career of **Annie Leibovitz**... **Alexander Gray**'s new space in Tribeca opens this week, and **Met** director **Max Hollein**, artist **Glenn Ligon**, **MoMA** curator **Stuart Comer**, and collector-philanthropist **Agnes Gund** all stopped by to christen it... Ground control to Major Tom, the **Victoria & Albert Museum** is on the hunt for two dedicated **David Bowie archivists** to deal with 80,000 items of the late, great pop star's ephemera... Step aside, Mr. Koons, **Stacey Engman** is planning to shoot her own NFT art into space this November... **Ghetto Gastro** provided the zesty, earthy bourbon cocktails for the opening of the Met's spectacular new show on the Harlem Renaissance, which were sipped by VIPs like curator **Jasmine Wahi**, *A Beautiful Mind* star **Jennifer Connelly**, Gagosian director **Antwaun Sargent**, dealer **Nicola Vassell**, and super-adviser **Amy Cappellazzo**...

PARTY OF THE WEEK



The evening concluded with an acoustic guitar performance beneath a painting from Wolf Hill's collection.

Photo by Annie Armstrong.

We're back for another edition of Wet Paint's new feature, which awards one art world event per week with the crown of being *the* place you should have been. This week, I'd like to take us on a trip upstate to **Chappaqua**, New York, where Tribeca's real estate tycoon, **Jonathan Travis**, held the semi-annual

opening for the residency program he runs with fellow collector **Ethan Rafii, Wolf Hill**, which culminated this Saturday with a dreamy suite of abstract landscape paintings by **July Guzman**.

Travis, who is notoriously a very good guy, extended his goodness to a pretty spectacular menu for the event with the help of Rafii. I joined painter **Sasha Gordon** over some perfectly briny caviar handrolls, and later, when dessert was passed out, Travis joked that the eggy *pastels de nata* ordered were so rare that "the more of them you eat, the higher their value becomes." Art jokes... Always delightful.

See you next week.