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## MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART AT SOTHEBY'S LONDON

The Sale Returns for a Fourth Consecutive Season on 2 April 2019

Since the Inauguration of the Series, Sotheby's has Achieved Fifty World Records in the Category Championing Artists from Across the African Diaspora and Underscoring a Rising Global Interest



From left to right: Alexander Skunder Boghossian, *Harvest Scrolls*, est. £30,000-50,000; Kamala Ibrahim Ishaq, *Preparation of Incense – Zār Ceremony*, est. £70,000-90,000; William Kentridge, *Head*, est. £30,000-50,000; Hassan El Glaoui, *La Sortie Du Roi*, est. £80,000-120,000; Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga, *Palm*, est. £25,000-35,000; El Anatsui, *Zebra Crossing 2*, est. £550,000-750,000; Maggie Laubser, *Landscape with hut, fowls, pawpaw tree and seated figure*, est. £30,000-50,000.

**March 2019, London:** This April, Sotheby's dedicated sale of Modern and Contemporary African Art will return to London for a fourth consecutive season, following a pre-sale exhibition which will run from March 29 – April 2.

Since the inauguration of the series in 2017, Sotheby's sales in the category have achieved fifty world records, championing the work of artists from across the African diaspora and underscoring the rising global interest.

The international market for Modern and Contemporary African Art is certainly heating up, with exciting conversations igniting across the field, fuelled by milestones including the opening of Zeitz Museum of

Contemporary African Art and the Norval Foundation in Cape Town, growth of international art fairs such as 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London, New York and Marrakech, Art X Lagos, and of course the highly-anticipated Ghana Pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale. Sotheby's own entry into the field further attests the position of modern and contemporary African art firmly in the global market.

Last season's sale at Sotheby's totalled £2.3 million (\$3 million) and attracted collectors from 20 different countries. 2018's sales saw strong results for established artists including Ben Enwonwu (*Obitun Dancer*; £187,500/\$265,744) and El Anatsui (*Tagomizor*; £670,000/\$883,730) to rising stars like Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga, just 27 years old, whose *Mangbetu* soared to five times above the pre-sale high estimate (£65,000/\$92,124).

This year's public exhibition and sale will include a carefully curated collection of paintings, photographs, drawings and sculpture from across the African continent. Witnessing first-hand the growth in demand, audience and variety of works, Sotheby's Head of Department Hannah O'Leary states:

*"When it comes to Contemporary art, people are always looking for something new - a demand which absolutely lends itself to this genre. Spanning over 16 countries, a kaleidoscope of cultures and themes, and comprising the works of both established and emerging artists alike, our Modern and Contemporary African art auction remains one of the most exciting, innovative and relevant sales in the market today."*

*African art has undergone something of a Renaissance in the past decade, signalled by rapidly developing interest from collectors across the globe. Indeed, over a quarter of buyers in last year's sale were from the African continent but the categories collector base spans Asia, Europe, Australasia and North America, and it is fantastic to see African artists surging to the forefront of international collections, both private and public.*

*This is therefore an incredibly exciting time to be dealing with modern and contemporary African art, and there remain some tempting opportunities for collectors to get involved. Our sale features work by some of the biggest names in the field at affordable prices, but, as these works become more and more in demand, it's unlikely to stay this way for long. If you're in London this April, make sure you visit the exhibition – there really is something for everyone to see".*

The exhibition will be open to the public from March 29 – April 2, ahead of the auction at 2pm on April 2 ([catalogue](#))

To download a selection of high-resolution images, please click [here](#).

## SALE HIGHLIGHTS

### El Anatsui, *Zebra Crossing 2*, EST. £550,000 - 750,000



Sotheby's April sale will be led by *Zebra Crossing II*, a bottle cap tapestry by contemporary art superstar, El Anatsui. El Anatsui has explored a wide range of media including ceramics, tropical hardwoods, milk-tin lids and aluminium bottle tops, which the artist uses to make the glittering metallic tapestries for which he is most known. The success of El Anatsui's bottle cap works can be attributed to the artist's ability to effortlessly manipulate the rigid metallic material in a way that creates a finished work that is robust yet malleable, luxurious and incredibly cloth-like.

El Anatsui has enjoyed several ground-breaking exhibitions such as the internationally touring show, *When I Last Wrote to you About Africa* in 2010. The artist's largest survey exhibition to date, *El Anatsui: Triumphant Scale*, curated by Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, opens at Munich's Haus der Kunst this week and will travel to Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha in the autumn. El Anatsui will also represent Ghana at the Venice Biennale this year alongside Ibrahim Mahama, whose work is also included in the auction.

**HASSAN EL GLAOU, LA SORTIE DU ROI, EST. £80,000-120,000**

*La Sortie Du Roi* features the military horses and riders for which El Glaoui is famed. Speaking of his work in 2009, El Glaoui said, "My love of my country has been the defining spirit of my painting. I have recorded our ancestral roots, the flowers in the Valley of the Kasbah and the red Cherifian palaces, the royal courtesies with their long lines of white burnouses and the mounted cavalry and their horses."



A powerful celebration of his homeland, *La Sortie du Roi* triggers a multiple of senses in the viewer: a dusty pink palette indicative of a dry and arid climate, the ice cool shade offered by the white and blue burnouses, and the ghostly, mirage-like wisps of paint surrounding each horse which endow the painting with an electrifying whirr of movement.

Painter El Glaoui has risen to international acclaim and is credited as one of the pioneers of contemporary art in Morocco. The artist expressed gratitude to Winston Churchill for his career; during his visit to Marrakech in the 1940s, the Prime Minister convinced El Glaoui's father, the last Pasha of Marrakech, to allow the budding artist to pursue his artistic vocation. The works of Churchill and El Glaoui have subsequently appeared together in a joint exhibition in London.

**KAMALA IBRAHIM ISHAQ, PREPARATION OF INCENSE - ZĀR CEREMONY, EST. £70,000-90,000**



Kamala Ibrahim Ishaq is recognised as both a pioneering member of the Sudanese art scene as well as a feminist icon and one of the most important female artists operating on the African continent today. The artist was one of the first women to graduate from the College of Fine Arts in Khartoum in 1963. Between 1960 and 1975, the Khartoum art scene was dominated by the renowned Khartoum School, an artistic movement that began in Sudan in the 1960s with the aim of creating a new visual language that reflected a newly independent Sudan. Notable members included artists Ibrahim El-Salahi and Sarah Elmur (and works by both of those artists are included in the auction). In 1971, despite being a prominent member of the group, Kamala left and founded the Crystallist Group, advocating for a new Sudanese artistic aesthetic

that was modeled on diversity and transparency. The present lot demonstrates Kamala's interest in Sudanese spiritual processes, especially a traditional practice called the Zār Ceremony, through which the individual is rid of evil spirits.

Kamala Ibrahim Ishaq's work has been widely exhibited at renowned institutions such as MoMA PS1 (USA), the Whitechapel Gallery (UK), the Sharjah Art Museum (UAE), Smithsonian National Museum of African Art (USA), Camden Art Center (UK), among many others. Read more [here](#).

**CHÉRI SAMBA, J'AIME LA COULEUR, EST. £40,000-60,000**

Chéri Samba is one of the most prestigious artistic figures to emerge out of the Democrat Republic of Congo in recent years. Born in a village 80km outside of Kinshasa, Samba was one of four self-taught Congolese artists who, in a newly democratic 1970s Kinshasa, founded the movement known today as Popular Painting. The genre plays with satire, irony and humour to address everyday life in the capital including social, political and economic issues such as popular customs, sexuality, AIDS, social inequity, materiality and corruption.



Influenced by advertising in the city, the artists combine bright, bold colours with text to create politically charged conversation pieces that address viewers directly and honestly. Drawing on his past training as a comic strip and billboard artist, the artist's work often involves text, outlining a clear message or storyline. He has gone on to exhibit at some of the world's most prestigious institutions including the Foundation Cartier and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Sotheby's is excited to present Samba's *J'aime la couleur*, an unusual and dramatic example of Samba's most iconic imagery.

**EDDY KAMUANGA ILLUNGA, (B. 1991), PALM, EST. £25,000-35,000**

Amalgamating both traditional and 'popular culture' styles, Illunga's oeuvre reflects both the rapid modernisation of Kinshasa, Africa's third largest city and the artist's home town, and the resulting uncertain sustainability of the broader heritage and daily rituals of the Mangbetu people – whom form the subject of this stunning work.

Understanding the present through the past is central to Illunga's practice. The classical poses and rich drapery of the artist's monumental figurative paintings are reminiscent of European Old Masters. Yet, the rubber flip-flops and vibrant swathes of fabrics capture Mangbetu's craft and heritage. What's more, electronic circuitry, the artists trademark patterning, tattoos the figures bare skin, signalling to the digital twenty-first century.

This style of painting originated early in the artist's career, after learning that the Democrat Republic of Congo is one of the world's biggest producers of coltan, an ore strenuously mined by hand that contains tantalum – a key metal for the electronics industry. Shocked by the growing number of South African villages destroyed to exploit these mineral's, Illunga's microchipped figures symbolise the exploitation of both his country and its people, and the harsh reality of globalisation.

With its painterly finesse, complex symbolism and powerful appeal to both eye and conscience, Illunga's work has shot to international prominence. The sale of *Palm* follows the sale of Illunga's *Mangbetu* at Sotheby's in March 2018, which achieved £65,000/\$92,124, storming past the pre-sale estimate of £8,000-12,000.

**IBRAHIM MAHAMA, RAFIA EB X, EST. £20,000 - 30,000**

*Rafia EB X* by Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama is an elegant wall hanging consisting of repurposed burlap jute sacks. The artist is most known for stitching together these jute sacks in order to create large textiles which are often dropped over architectural forms. Imported into Ghana from south-east Asia and then re-used for the exportation of cocoa, charcoal and other crops, Mahama's jute sacks are synonymous with Ghana's trade history and are used to comment on Ghana's economic relationship with the rest of the world, starting from post-colonialization to present day.

Mahama's work ranges from large site-specific installations to more intimate pieces such as *Rafia EB X*. Trained as a painter, Mahama often refers to works such as *Rafia EB X* as paintings, seeking to highlight the elegant form that hangs on the wall whilst also challenging the boundaries of what it means to paint. Mahama will represent Ghana at the Venice Biennale this year alongside El Anatsui, whose work is also included in the auction, in a national pavilion co-curated by the architect Sir David Adjaye.



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