

ART & AUCTION

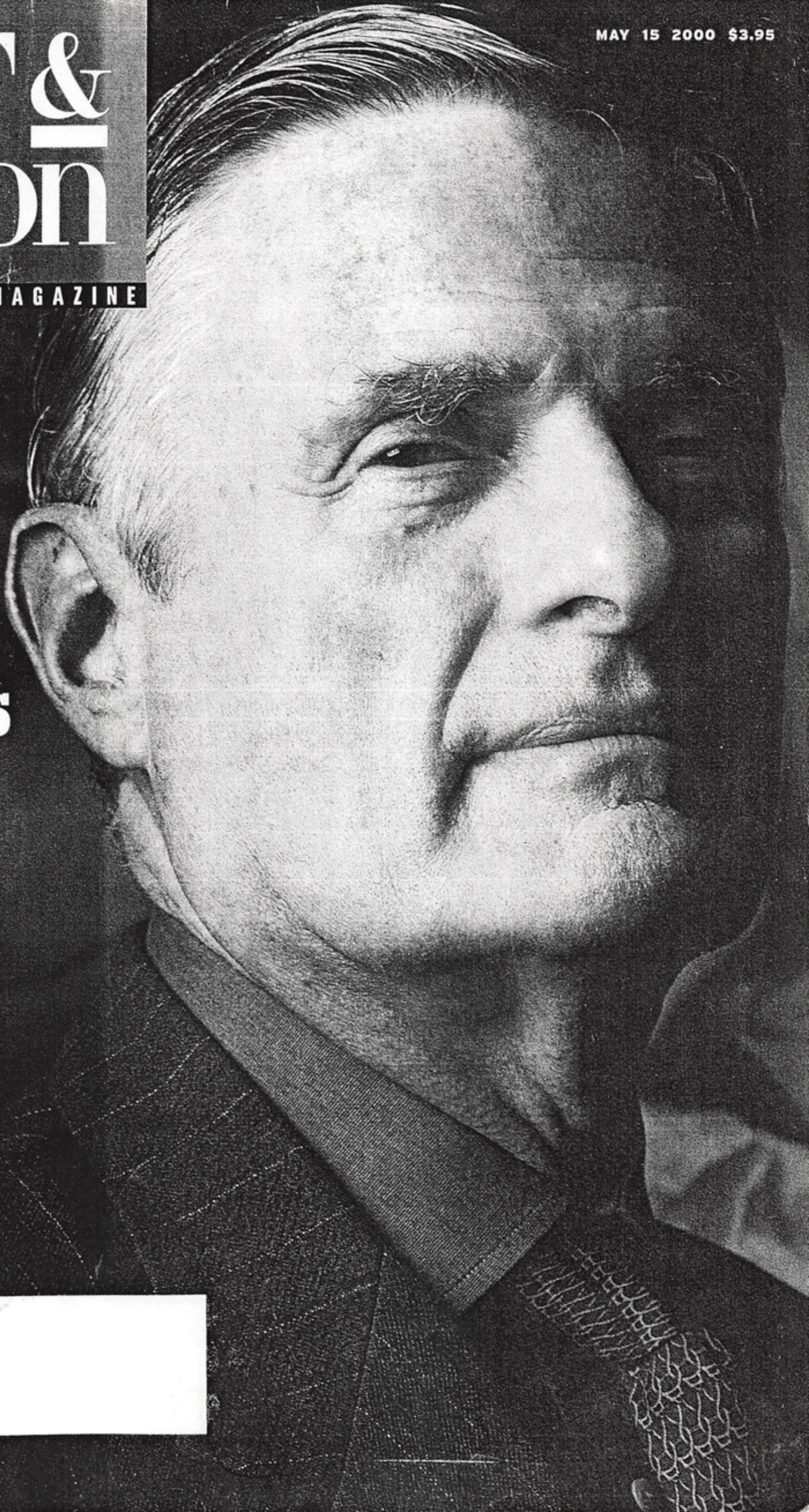
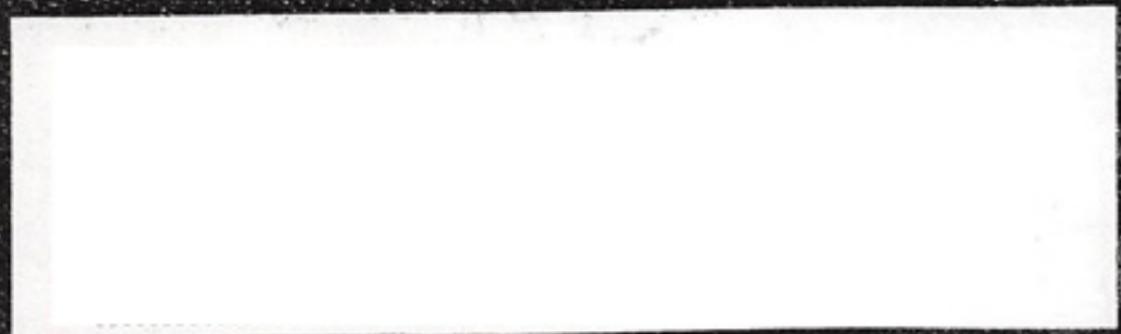
THE INSIDER'S NEWSMAGAZINE

**RICHARD
FEIGEN**

Rattling the Art World's Skeletons

Listomania:
The Artists that
Make You Wait

**Latin in
Manhattan:**
Will Frida Break
the Record?



get

THE
WAITING

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BUT MORE THAN

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COLLECTORS GET A CRACK

AT WHAT IN-DEMAND

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POWER AND

RELATIONSHIPS.

BY STEVEN

VINCENT

ONCE CONSIDERED A QUINTESSENTIAL 1980S market phenomenon, the so-called waiting list—the informal pecking order by which dealers prioritize the collectors and institutions clamoring for the works of popular artists in their stables—is back. Collectors are queuing up to purchase John Currin's teasingly retro nudes from dealer Andrea Rosen, Lisa Yuskavage's erotic portraits of women and Karin Davie's swirling abstractions from Marianne Boesky and Inka Essenhigh's lacquered brand of surrealism from Mary Boone. Works by other hot contemporary artists, including Franz Ackermann, Cecily Brown, Gregory Crewdson, Peter Doig, Anna Gaskell, Damian Loeb, Chris Ofili, Laura Owens, Richard Patterson, Elizabeth Peyton and Jenny Saville are equally sought after. And the situation is intensifying. "With the renewed interest in contemporary art, even moderately successful artists have people competing for their works," says Boone. Indeed, echoes Miami collector Donald Rubell, "Two years ago, there were maybe two or three artists who were difficult to get. Now there are 20 or 30."

Although competition for artists' work is nothing new, the waiting list as a measure of dealers' clout vis-à-vis their clients—and thus the arena for many a power play—was last in evidence during the '80s contemporary art boom. As Rubell recalls, "Back then, dealers put red dots on paintings whether they were sold or not. Or they'd tell you work wasn't available when it was, all to create an air of perceived scarcity and urgency around their artists." (This strategy worked, says former dealer and art market writer Josh Baer, who has known of collectors who had no intention of purchasing an artist's work but "went on the waiting list anyway, just to impress the dealer and look like they were players.") "In those days," Rubell continues, "the artists to have were Julian Schnabel, David Salle, Eric Fischl, Anselm Kiefer, Georg Baselitz. It's the

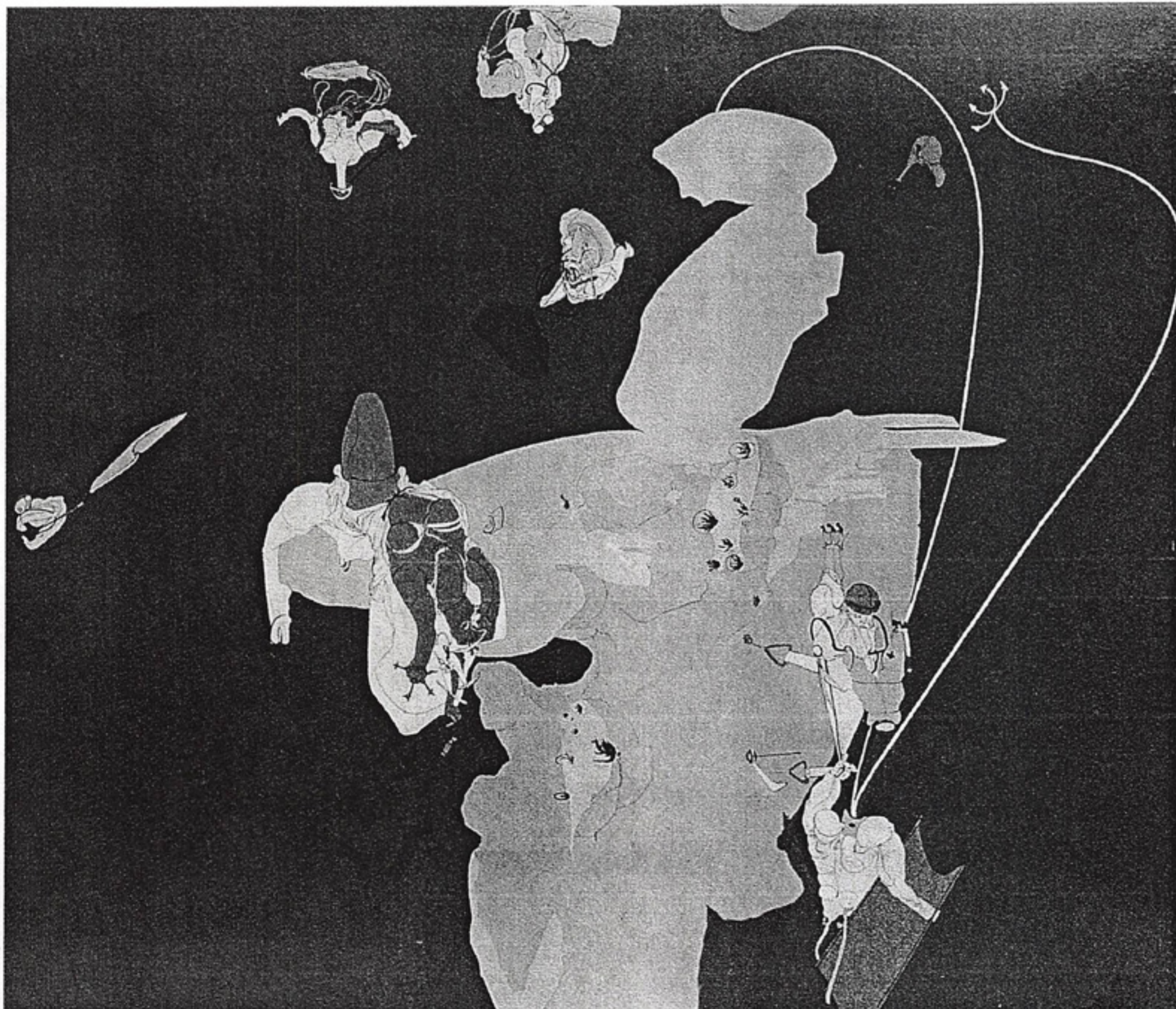
Playing hard to get? Opposite: Lisa Yuskavage's *Double*, 1999, from Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York.



Evening Hamass from Boesky in November 1996 for \$12,000 (similar work is now valued at \$45,000 to \$65,000). Logan bought Patterson's painting *Motocrosser III* from London dealer Anthony d'Offay in November 1995 for less than \$16,000. (Neither Rosen nor d'Offay would reveal the prices currently fetched by Currin's or Patterson's work.)

Another consequence of a collector's long relationship with a dealer (which can extend to financial support, if not outright backing) is that it virtually guarantees that he or she gets to the top (or nearly) of the waiting list as soon as the collector expresses a desire to acquire new, sought-after work. "Collectors think there's a lot of sadism involved in choosing who gets a work, but that's really not the case," says New York dealer Gavin Brown, whose stable includes such artists as Ofili, Doig, Peyton and Rirkrit Tiravanija. (Says one art adviser, "Practically everyone Brown represents is wait-listed.") "I think, 'Who feeds me and helps pay my rent?'" Brown says bluntly, pointing to the fact that a collector's weight increases in proportion to the amount of money spent at a gallery. Similarly, says Zwirner, "I get calls from people asking for works by Stan Douglas or Neo Rauch or Toba Khedoori, and I think, 'When have they supported the gallery in the past?'"

But previous purchases aren't the only way to cement a strong relationship and pass through the velvet rope. Being serious and interested in gallery artists who are not wait-listed is another. For example, Zwirner recalls that at his initial meeting with Logan in 1997, the collector bought a group of "date" paintings by Japanese artist On Kawara for a low six-figure sum. "It was his first purchase from us,"



"There's a waiting list now for practically all the hot artists doing work, paintings primarily, that can go into a living space," says one art adviser.

Opposite: Minotaur with Brushstrokes, 1998, by Richard Patterson, from Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London.

This page, from top: Elizabeth Peyton's Christmas (Tony), 2000, from Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York; Cliffhanger, 1999, by Inka Essenhigh, from Mary Boone Gallery, New York.

Zwirner says. "Kawara does tough conceptual work. Kent didn't just come in and ask me for a Tuymans right away."

Another way in for collectors is for them to announce lofty goals for the works they acquire from the gallery. "A smart collector can ask a dealer where the artist would most like his or her work to be—and that's usually in a major institution," says former dealer Simon Watson. "Collectors have even offered to buy two works by a certain artist, and donate one to an institution." Says Logan—who has promised about half of the 700 works in his collection of postwar art to San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art, "If I don't know a dealer, I let him know my intentions early—that I'm not a speculator and that my collection is earmarked for a museum."

This strategy worked for Seattle curator Linda Farris, who last August started ContemporaryArtProject (CAP), a fund in which Seattle investors each pool \$15,000, which Farris uses to buy works (see *Art & Auction*, April 1). After three years, the group has promised it will donate all art to a museum. "My group was so new and unusual, dealers took a wait-and-see attitude," says Farris. "But last spring, we bought Davie's *Distraction* from Marianne Boesky for \$15,000; then, in the fall, Essenhigh's *Supernatural* from Mary Boone for \$15,000." Having thus established her group's seriousness, Farris was thrilled when, in October, Larry Gagosian offered CAP *Boy Trouble*, by the much-sought-after Brown, for \$30,000. "The main thing dealers want," she adds, "is to place their artists in good collections." (Which is one reason, Los Angeles collector Herbert Schorr points out, that being identified when lending works for exhibition is a good way for collectors to ingratiate themselves with a gallery. "During the 1970s and 1980s, we loaned out de Koonings without attaching our names, thinking, who needs to know?" he recalls. "What a mistake! In 1981, when we went to Boone for a Julian Schnabel plate painting, she didn't know us and wouldn't sell us one.")

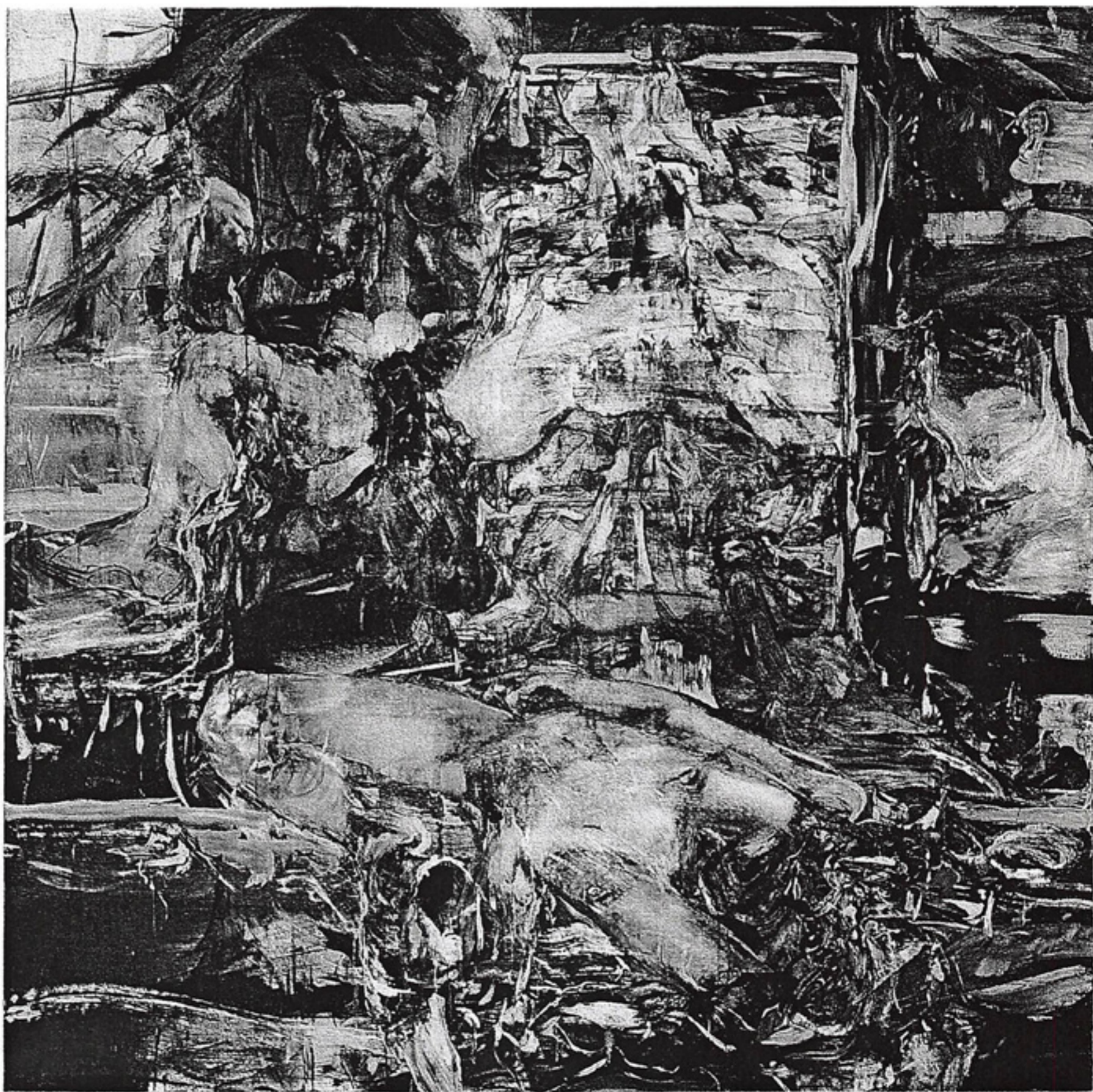
Sometimes, identifying another dealer who represents the wait-listed artist in another city can be an alternative way to acquire work that would never be available in major market centers like New York and L.A. According to Schorr, for instance, the late Chicago collector Gerald Elliott assembled his collection of works by Francesco Clemente largely through Anthony d'Offay in London, rather than through the artist's New York dealer at the time, Sperone Westwater.

And indeed, in theory,

London's Jay Jopling represents Loeb, Sadie Coles shows Currin and Victoria Miro handles Essenhigh. But in London, too, a waiting list is likely to be in effect. "London dealers have their own clientele to whom they sell popular artists," says New York art adviser Thea Westreich—and with the globalization of the contemporary art market, a very popular artist in New York is likely to enjoy the same standing in London and Paris.

Whatever they do, collectors should not get too cocky in trying to circumvent the waiting list. For instance, going directly to an artist over the dealer's head—therefore negating the latter's power and role as gatekeeper—is a no-no, for both the artist and dealer. Badgering the dealer through constant phone calls is no less counterproductive.

"Collectors who don't support the gallery tend to pester you," says Brown. Boesky notes, "Every single Saturday, I can expect a phone call from this one collector. It's the squeaky-wheel technique." When phone calls fail, there are always bizarre pleas. In the late '80s, Baer remembers, a woman who was desperately searching for work by Annette Lemieux, who was then represented by Baer, pleaded with him, "My husband just died of a heart attack two days ago—don't you think I deserve one of Annette's pieces?" (Baer didn't budge.) When pleas don't work, some collectors turn to threats. "One famous West Coast collector said he'd break



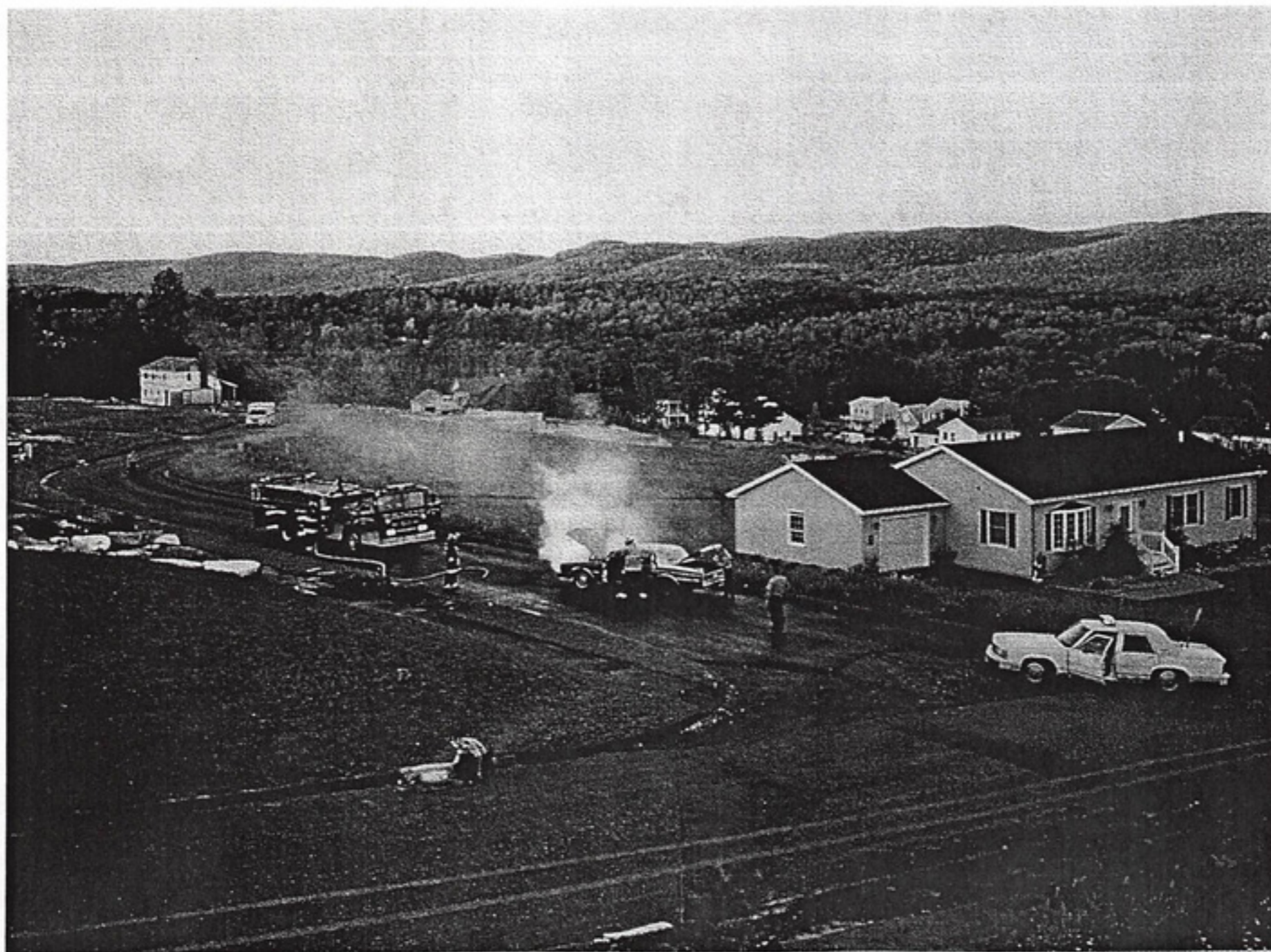


me if I didn't sell him a work by a certain artist," recalls Boone. Needless to say, the collector got nowhere.

Also frowned upon are collectors who hope to get to the inner sanctum through a surrogate. As Zwirner recalls, "Someone looking for a work by Khedoori sent a curator from a West Coast museum to me, saying 'If you don't sell me one of her paintings, how can we continue to work together?'" Boesky remembers a famous artist who called one of the artists in her stable on behalf of a West Coast collector, saying, "Tell Marianne that this is a good collection, and that she should take care of you." Sometimes, the surrogate is even a fellow dealer. For instance, twice in the past few months, says London's Bernard Jacobson, who represents Frank Stella, big-name New York dealers have passed checks to him over lunch tables, hoping that he would ignore longtime associates and consign some of Stella's smaller works to them. (Along with his monumental paintings, which fetch around \$1.5 million, the artist has recently created a series of 15 smaller works, each going for around \$85,000.) "One check was loaded with zeros, the other was simply blank," Jacobson recalls. No deal.

Serious collectors don't engage in these tactics, of course. They don't have to. "I've never pressured dealers or artists; it's totally inappropriate," says Valentine. "There's always more work." And indeed, more than ingratiating tactics or trickery, the secret to getting to the top of the waiting list is patience. "If you're not a well-known collector, take your place in line and get to know the artists," says Logan. And despite the fact that collectors' purchases often establish a strong bond, it would be wrong to assume that wealth alone equals influence, says Boesky. "Art is something that money can't always buy—that's why people get obsessive about it," she explains. "Collectors have to start at the bottom and work their way up."

STEVEN VINCENT is the senior correspondent of *Art & Auction*.



The current reemergence of the waiting list arises from the limited production of market-savvy artists, the globalization of the market and the influx of insecure buyers. Opposite: *Candy*, 1999, by Cecily Brown, from Gagosian Gallery, New York. This page, from top: *Brace*, 1999, by Jenny Saville, from Gagosian Gallery, New York; and Gregory Crewdson's *Untitled*, 1999 (sewer mystery), from Luhring Augustine, New York.