

ART+AUCTION

25 Most Collectible Midcareer Artists: Matthew Benedict

- Eric Bryant

The editors at Art+Auction spend a good deal of time each month talking with dealers, auction house specialists, art advisers, and collectors, both gathering market news and trying to discern the larger implications of those developments. Compiling our list of the most collectible artists gives us the once-in-a-year opportunity to put that gathered intelligence to use as we assume the mind-set of collectors.

The individuals whose thinking we have tried to emulate here might be called value collectors. Such savvy buyers balance a nuanced understanding of prices with personal concerns of taste and the search for artworks that will meld with their other holdings to form a coherent story. They know that the market's fluid calculation of an artist's financial worth operates alongside, but not always in sync with, the evolving scholarly and curatorial reckoning of art historical importance. Value collectors recognize opportunity in the moments when the pricing of an artist's work lags behind their likely big-picture valuation. In our estimation, the artists on the following pages find themselves in such a moment.

Unlike emerging talents, for whom it can be nearly impossible to assess long-term significance, and established luminaries, whose valuations are for the most part already aligned, those in midcareer are often under recognized. Thus, it makes sense for us to focus on this category. It was only later that we found ourselves asking the thorny question: Just what is a "midcareer" artist?

Age is a consideration, as is curatorial embrace—measured, for example, by whether the artist has received a major museum retrospective. For me, the most important factor in determining if artists warrant the midcareer designation is whether they have a robust body of work behind them, yet remain driven to explore new territory.

Ultimately, the term midcareer is vague, and the professional lives described on the following pages have few commonalities. Most of the artists selected fall between 45 and 60 years of age, but they range from 38-year-old Xu Zhen, a Chinese Conceptualist, to 81-year-old Marwan, an ex-pat Syrian painter. And most have works in a few institutional collections. Nicola Tyson has spent a quarter century engaging ever more deeply with the specific problem of depicting the human psyche in figurative drawing and painting. William J. O'Brien starts most days at the potter's wheel, then turns to textiles or welding before he finishes off with drawing.

The market has always underappreciated whole groups of artists, so it is not surprising that our search for those whose careers show untapped value led to the inclusion of women, people of color, and lesbian and gay individuals at rates higher than is found in a typical Chelsea gallery roster. Many of those seen here also represent styles or media that the market has downplayed, from the Pattern and Decoration and identity-related art movements to ceramics. We hope the attention given these genres leads readers to other artists who are ready for reevaluation.

We also hope the search for value leads collectors to the space between overexposed trophy makers and overheated young talents, where artists are in the prime of their careers.

Alexander and Bonin

Matthew Benedict | b. 1968 | United States

By Bridget Moriarity

In its September issue, Art+Auction compiled a list of the 25 most collectible midcareer artists working today. This month, ARTINFO will publish one installment from the feature per day. Click [here](#) to view slideshow of works by Matthew Benedict.



A detail of Matthew Benedict's "Étretat," 2011-12., Photo by Joerg Lohse/Courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York

Ever since the 2014 unveiling of a commissioned four-panel mural depicting scenes of Tribeca throughout the years in the back barroom of the trendy Smyth hotel, Benedict has enjoyed new visibility and interest among buyers, says dealer Ted Bonin of New York's Alexander and Bonin gallery. Some are even requesting studies for the mural, executed in gouache on archival bookbinder's board, which range in price from \$7,000 to \$12,000. The Connecticut-born, Brooklyn-based artist, who has attracted a strong collector base in the United States and Europe, works in a variety of media, from sculpture—mostly assemblages of found objects—to drawings, photographs, embroideries, and paintings. "He often uses literature as a starting point, but he ends with an examination of American subculture," says Bonin, citing the artist's consideration of the history of masons through a reading of *Moby-Dick*, which resulted in his gouache-on-panel triptych *Moby-Dick at Breakfast*, 2009. Benedict's themes, he adds, tend to develop over time and oscillate between paintings and objects. In 1993 the artist produced a work called *Gumshoe. B. 1906, D. 1967*, comprising the possessions of a fictional detective. Many of the same props reappeared in a 2000 painting, *Durant*. Then, in 2012, Benedict revisited these works, creating a wall relief using similar items titled *Silent Still Life*. Such objects range in price from \$15,000 to \$30,000. Five years ago, Benedict's paintings sold for \$8,000 to \$35,000; today they vary between \$15,000 and \$50,000, reflecting a slow and steady appreciation. Next spring, Stene Projects in Stockholm will present a solo show of works by the artist, who is co-represented by the Zurich gallery Mai 36.