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## Paper is a cut above

Artists have always prized drawings and collages—now museums and the market are catching on too

By Julia Halperin. From [Art Basel Miami Beach daily edition](#)

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Christopher Wool's untitled work on paper, 1994, sold for more than \$1.5m at Dominique Lévy (K11). Photo: © Vanessa Ruiz

Once tucked into backrooms and dark corners, works on paper have been given pride of place at Art Basel in Miami Beach this year. And they are earning their keep, fetching seven-figure prices. An untitled enamel work on paper by Christopher Wool from 1994 at Dominique Lévy gallery (K11) sold for more than \$1.5m during the VIP preview on Wednesday. The price exceeds the highest public auction record for a work on paper by the artist, \$1.4m, set in May. Meanwhile, Skarstedt Gallery (D10) sold Sigmar Polke's vibrant acrylic on paper, *Ich will den Stall ausmisten*, 1999-2000, for \$1m.

It is hard to imagine that only 50 years ago, curators and collectors were just beginning to regard contemporary drawings as autonomous works. Before the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York established a department of drawings in 1971, its curators considered works on paper primarily as a tool to enhance viewers' understanding of painting and sculpture, the museum's director, Glenn Lowry, wrote in a catalogue in 2005.

Drawings are now often the main event. Galerie Hans Mayer (D7) sold Robert Longo's charcoal drawing on paper, *Untitled (Palm Tree, 6/6/14)*, for between \$300,000 and \$400,000.

Works on paper are also taking centre stage at major museums, with exhibitions including "Henri Matisse: the Cut-Outs" at MoMA (until 8 February 2015) and "Drawing in Silver and Gold: Leonardo to Jasper Johns" at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC (3 May-26 July 2015).

As the contemporary art market skyrockets, collectors who can no longer afford paintings might still be able to buy a significant work on paper. A painting by Ed Ruscha recently exceeded \$30m at auction; one of his drawings, *We're This and We're That*, 1982, sold at Franklin Parrasch Gallery (H8) for \$425,000. "People aren't going to ghettoise a great drawing any more—it's a function of the overall market being very strong," says the art adviser Wendy Cromwell, a former works on paper specialist at Sotheby's.

Still, some wonder why a collector would spend so much on a medium that is fragile and light-sensitive. "Even when they are large in scale, drawings have an intimacy that draws one in," says the collector Mihail Lari. Works on paper are also more sturdy than they seem, says Michael Jenkins, the senior partner at Sikkema Jenkins (L12), which sold a billboard-sized cut paper work by Kara Walker (*Confectionary*, 2014) for \$300,000.

The biggest reason for the growing status of these works is artists' dedication to the medium. "Artists have always been attracted to the materiality of works on paper," says Donna de Salvo, the chief curator of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. When the museum opens in its new building in May 2015, it will get rid of media-specific galleries to eliminate the traditional hierarchy.

### **Picking paper over can vas**

The artist Camille Henrot, whose works sold at Kamel Mennour (M11) for \$20,000 and \$35,000, prefers paper to canvas. "Drawing provides the most direct connection between the idea and a physical object," she says. Pablo Vargas Lugo is "a painter who works with a scalpel", says the dealer Rodrigo Feliz of Labor (N18), who sold two of Lugo's cut paper collages for \$25,000 each. Joan Snyder, whose work sold at Franklin Parrasch Gallery, says paper enables her to achieve singular effects. "You can see the light through it, you can see pencil marks and charcoal—in a painting, all that gets covered up."

### ***New record set for Darger***

An untitled work on paper by Henry Darger, around 1940-60 (above), sold at Christie's, Paris on 2 December for €601,500 (est €180,000-€250,000), a record for the artist and a new benchmark for Outsider art at auction. The reclusive hospital custodian created scores of drawings and watercolours of girls that were discovered after his death. The large example at Christie's is particularly rare. "Only around a dozen of that size exist," says the dealer Andrew Edlin (S5), who is offering works by the artist, including three of Darger's earliest known compositions from 1929.