

An Exclusive Tour of the (RED) Auction at Art Basel

Sir David Adjaye and Theaster Gates walk through the works they curated for an auction that raised \$10.5 million to fight AIDS Wednesday night.

→ by ANN BINLOT
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The interior of the (RED) Exhibition, curators Sir David Adjaye and Theaster Gates (embed).

Red Exhibition for Miami Design District,

By ©Robin Hill (exhibit); Courtesy of Sotheby's (Gates and Adjaye).



rchitect Sir **David Adjaye** and artist **Theaster Gates** hail from vastly different parts of the globe—Tanzania and Chicago, respectively—but their homes are united by one specific crisis: AIDS. Sixty-six percent of new HIV infections happen in sub-Saharan Africa, while in Chicago, more than fifty percent of people living with HIV are black.

So when the architect and the artist joined forces at Art Basel this week, it was for a cause. The two curated the third-annual **(RED)** Auction, which supports the organization co-founded by **Bono** in its fight against AIDS. The event was held in Miami's Design District on December 5 in conjunction with Gagosian and Sotheby's at the Moore Building, made possible by **Craig Robins**. Both Adjaye and Gates have personal connections to the disease; Adjaye has friends who have passed away from it.

“The connection that I feel is that there are moments where the lack of equity, and the resources that are available for people who live with the disease, live with the virus—that's the part that I'm super-invested in,” Gates said in a conversation before the auction. “Like how do we create longer lives for more people? And especially people of color, which the virus seems to be affecting the most.”

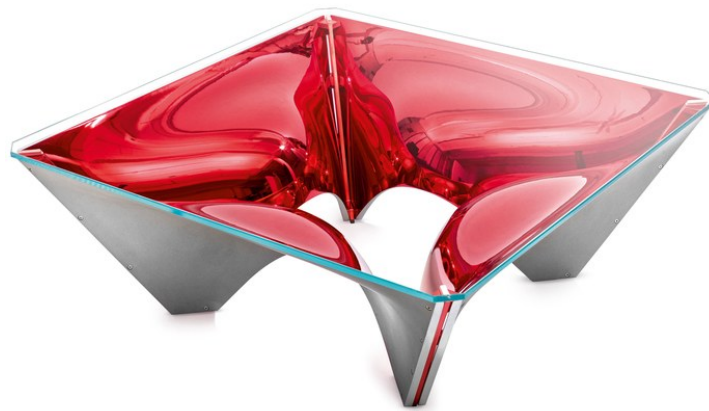
Adjaye added, “We've been spending much more time in Africa working on the continent, and just hearing the stats about women, and mothers—the uptake of the AIDS virus amongst mothers on the continent is really disturbing to me, and the idea of being able to get these drugs, to be able to get them to these communities, it's kind of also one of the reasons why I got involved. It's like, O.K, we gotta bring some awareness to this issue.”

The pair curated the items in the auction, which will be exhibited in the Moore Building through December 7. They came up with the theme “Red and Light” before reaching out to both their and (RED)'s vast all-star network of artists, architects, and designers, who include **Ebony G. Patterson**, the Zaha Hadid Foundation, **Jenny Saville**, **Marilyn Minter**, **James Casebere**, **Christian Louboutin**, **Jeff Koons**, and more.

“When David and I were talking, we were just thinking—what are things that connect our two vocations?” Gates said. “And light was something that would offer us a broader spectrum of the kinds of artists who could participate on the project.”

“Also, it felt like light would be a way of re-shedding light on the subject matter that everyone thinks is sort of solved,” Adjaye added. “It seemed like a really great way to put the spotlight back on this subject matter, to say it’s not gone away, we have to deal with it, and that felt like a nice underlying message.”

The live auction raised \$10.5 million on Wednesday night, but those who didn’t have a chance to attend the event can still bid on the [\(RED\) Online auction](#) through December 7 at 4 P.M. Eastern. Below, a look at some of the auction’s highlights, with commentary from Gates, Adjaye, and Sotheby’s auctioneer **Oliver Barker**.



Washington Corona (RED) Coffee Table by David Adjaye

“I came up with this concept when I was working on the Smithsonian [National Museum of African-American History and Culture] a few years ago—not this version—and when I was doing it, I was obsessed with the idea of how do you capture light in a form?” Adjaye said. “How do you literally, physically capture light in a form? So I started with bronze and golden light, but when we started talking about this project, I thought, oh my god, this project, this idea of red light, maybe I can use this as a way to encapsulate the sort of thesis that we set up, and to make this luminous red volume which captures light and refracts it in four directions, four cardinal directions, was really the kind of mood, and it encapsulates the whole thing.”



***...bearing witness...*, by Ebony G. Patterson**

The young Jamaican artist Ebony G. Patterson is having a moment right now, with an exhibition at the Pérez Art Museum Miami, and a display featuring her art at the **Christian Louboutin** store in Miami's Design District. Her work often deals with making the invisible visible. "So good," said David Adjaye as we viewed the piece. Gates added, "She's just so fantastic. This is back to David's point about light. Not just physical light, but the ability to see people and see a problem, or see a solution, so it's a very strong work."



Indigo by Marilyn Minter

“Marilyn Minter, is, when you see her, absolutely not the person in mind you expect to create these kind of extraordinary, evocative, sexually inspired works,” said Barker. “These are deeply desirable.”



***Energy of Love (Painted Universe Mandala SF #4F, REd, Natural Ground)* by Jennifer Guidi**

“This is a wonderful painting by **Jennifer Guidi**, who is **Mark Grotjahn’s** partner, and who has become, in her own right, a really significant artist, and she works with Gagosian gallery,” said Barker. “These works are practically impossible to find.”



***A Flag for the Least of Them* by Theaster Gates**

The piece broke Gates's auction record, selling for \$807,000. "When I first started making these tapestries, initially they felt very much about an American struggle, and I'm trying to combine my interest in a black American history with the history of painting and of art, so it's like you got a civil-rights question, and then you have the question of Abstract Expressionism and Color Field, and I think for me, there are these moments where the complexities and the depth is often like the dirt of things, so it's like this piece is at the same time hyper-used yet super dignified," said Gates. "I think there are times when we imagine or question AIDS or the HIV virus as something that's dirty, and we forget that viruses are complex, that they touch all kinds of people for undeserved reasons, and I think that now these color fields are responding to the question or the color, but I'm also thinking about how to be adjacent to the dirt, adjacent to a problem."



***Red Lantern Kid* by Yinka Shonibare**

"So special," said Adjaye of the sculpture, which put the names of people involved in the AIDS fight on the head. "He's a dear friend. He's a Royal Academician with me in London, so I've known him for many years. When I reached out to him he just made this special work for us, which is so, so beautiful, and just encapsulates it all. Isn't it powerful? It's killer. I was so blown away. I was touched. So he's really speaking to the issues in the work, so I was crying when I saw this. The response has just been so amazing."



***Susanna* by Jenny Saville**

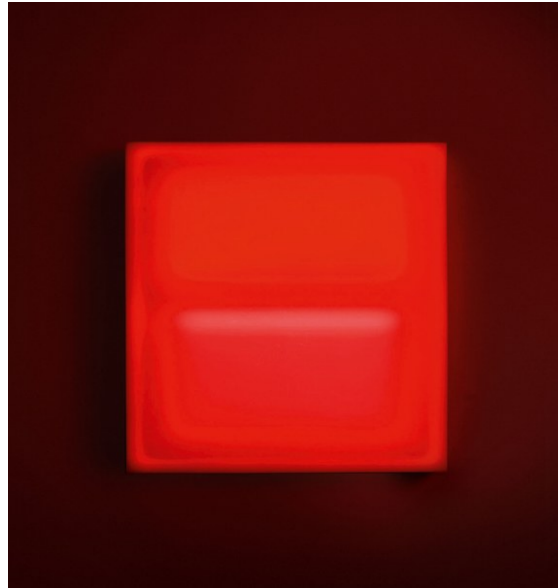
Saville broke auction records for a living female artist when her self-portrait, *Propped*, sold for \$12.4 million at Sotheby's last October. *Susanna* sold for \$735,000 at the auction. "Jenny has been for some time an artist who has been ready to pop commercially," said Barker. "She works in Oxford. She's a very classically-trained artist. She's completely obsessed with Old Master painting, specifically artists like Leonardo [da Vinci] and [Peter Paul] Rubens amongst many others. Her work is often very autobiographical, she's often the topic of the drawing and paintings she produced, but I think these works on paper—where we really see her dexterity as a draftswoman—work in the best possible way. This was one of the very last donations to the auction, but one of the most significant gifts to the sale."

Adjaye added, "We were lucky to have her," he said. "We approached Gagosian and said we would love it, and she just responded really positively. We were like, oh my god, if she did a work for us, we would be blown away, and she did. It's really nice when artists aren't just giving things out of their collection, but producing things. That's what we wanted."



Master and Dynamic X Sir David Adjaye MA770 Wireless Speaker

“Master and Dynamic, who I work with as well, said they want to join in and I was really excited about that,” said Adjaye. “This is a concrete speaker, so I said, *Can we inject a color into the pigment, and really make amazing speaker?* It’s a chunk. This is made to be positioned and left. This is how speakers should be.”



Liminal Gradient for (RED) by Leo Villareal

“It’s an L.E.D. Rothko,” said Adjaye.



Classroom, Casa del Fascio by James Casebere

“James was one of the first people to respond,” said Adjaye. “James is an amazing artist who has influenced artists with this idea of making environmental spaces.”



***Here and Now* by Lorna Simpson**

“Lorna is having a really lovely heyday,” said Gates. “In the 80s when her photographic work was first being produced, she had an amazingly wide reception, but I think she’s revisiting past ways of making, and this piece is just super-stellar.”