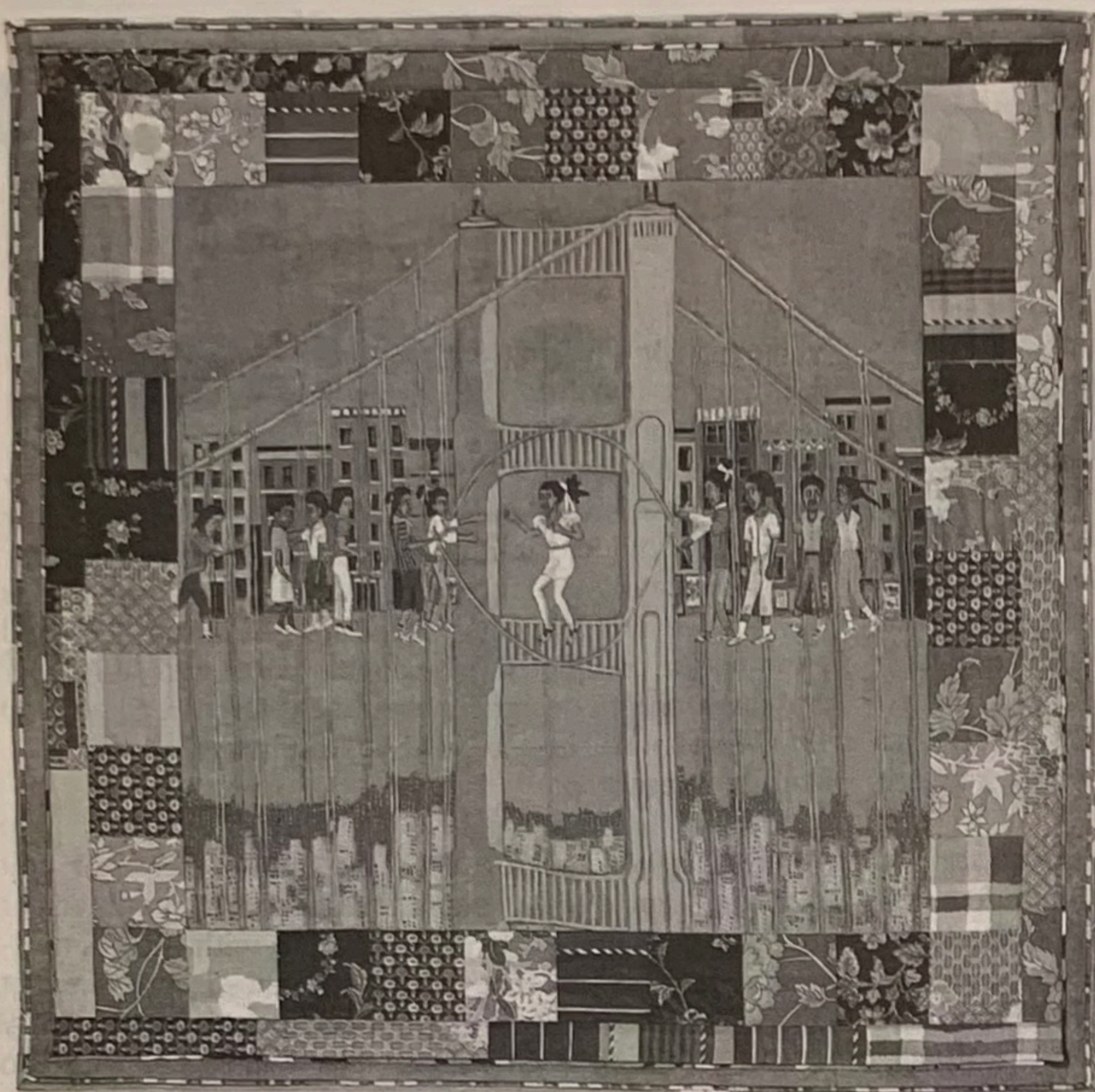


Swann Galleries, New York City

Norman Lewis's Star Continues to Shine at African American Fine Art Sale

by Jeanne Schinto
Photos courtesy Swann



Faith Ringgold (b. 1930), *Double Dutch on the Golden Gate Bridge*, 1988, acrylic on canvas and painted, dyed, and pieced fabric, 68½" x 68¼", \$209,000 (est. \$150,000/250,000).

Swann's African American fine art sale on April 7 proved the continuing star power of Norman Lewis. The auction house offered seven works by the 20th-century New York Abstract Expressionist, and all sold remarkably well, often many times over estimate. These works included the catalog's cover lot, a 1947 untitled oil painting on masonite board that fetched \$149,000 (including

buyer's premium). The bidder in the room was a dealer, said Swann's department specialist Nigel Freeman. Swann has sold many

has seeming armies of them set against a ground of sandy beige, rust, smoky blue, and dark gray.

Swann reported record prices for several other artists, including Frank Bowling, Felrath Hines, Robert Neal, Allan Freelon, and Palmer Hayden. The painting by Neal, 1939, untitled (*Fisherman's House at River's Edge*), in oil on canvas, was the first work by this artist at auction. Results for paintings by Sam Gilliam and Hughie Lee-Smith were also notable. All told, the auction realized \$1,831,747 (est. \$1,333,000/2,011,000) with 99 (or 81.8%) of 121 lots sold.

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At a Swann sale on September 15, 2015, a story quilt by living artist Faith Ringgold, *Maya's Quilt of Life*, sold for \$461,000 to the

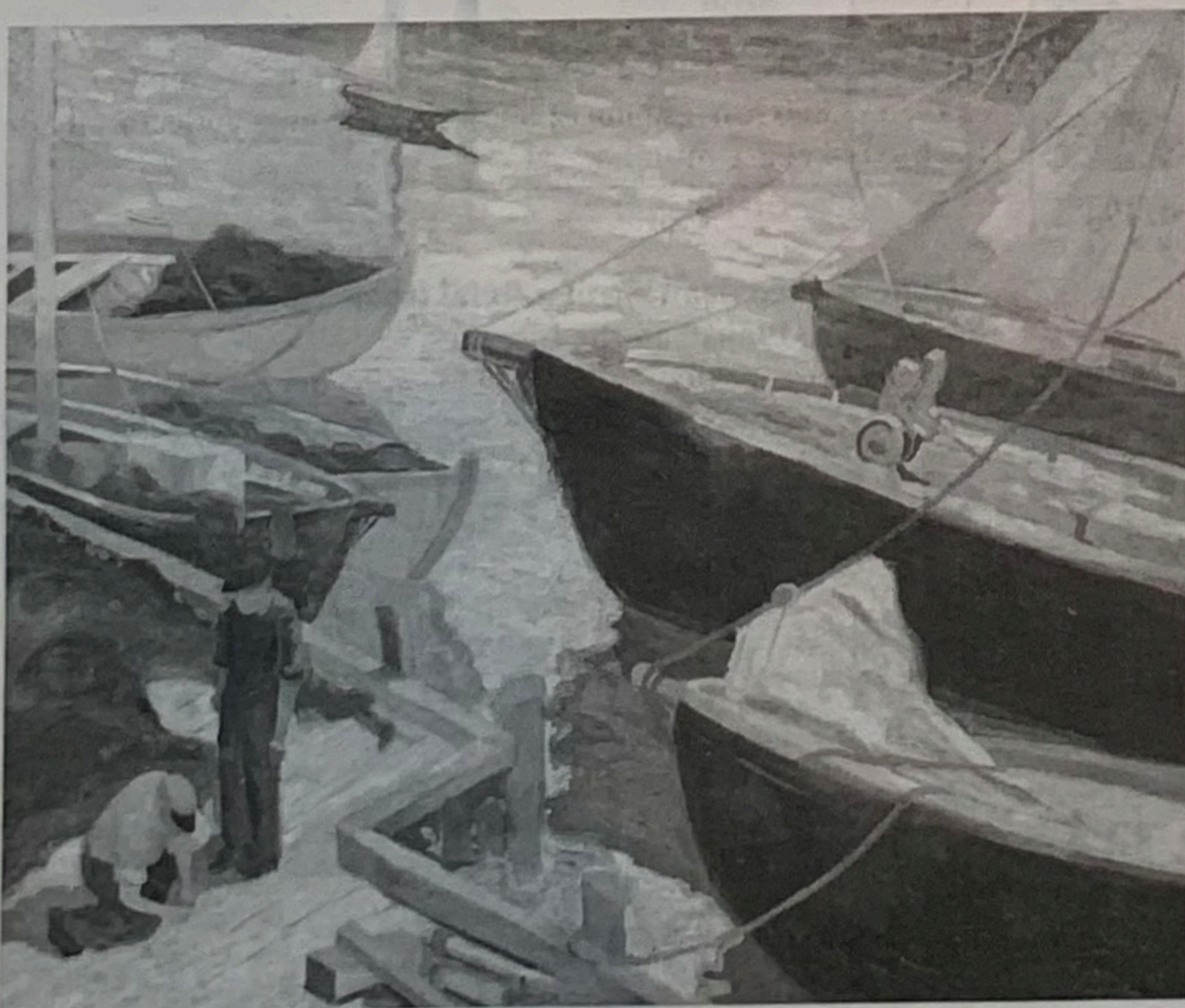


Hughie Lee-Smith, untitled (*Young Man in a Slum*), circa 1960, oil on linen, 26" x 36". This mid-career work by Lee-Smith displays his quintessential themes: urban decay, disillusioned, isolated youth, and modern existentialism. The painting sold to a collector for \$106,250 (est. \$40,000/60,000).

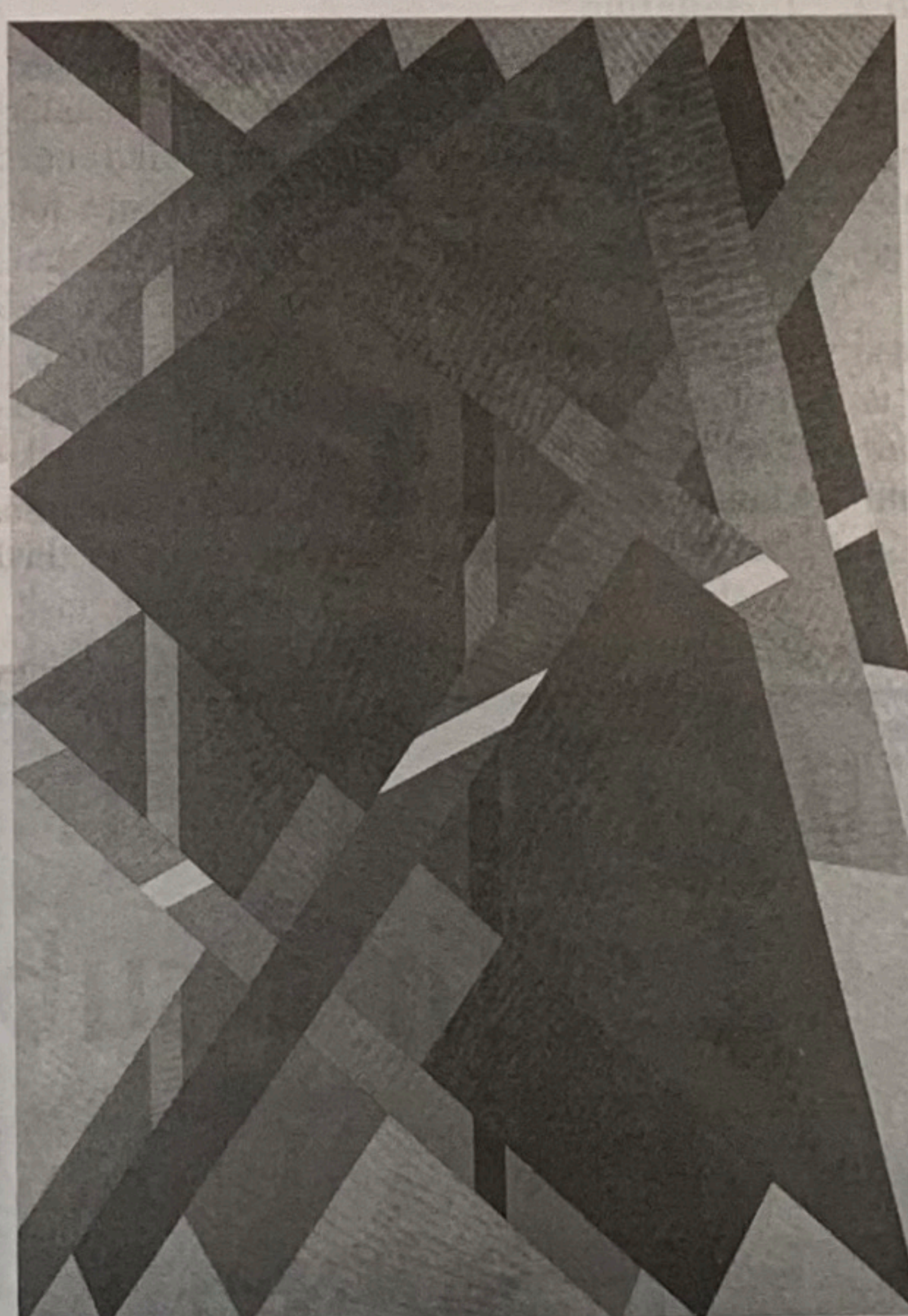
record-setting paintings by Lewis over these last few years. This time the auction house set a new record price for a Lewis work on paper when an untitled work (*Processional Figure Composition*) in oil, pen, and ink sold to a dealer on the phone for \$87,500. Dated "June 1956," it is an exceptional example of a so-called little figure painting by Lewis. Typically these works consist of patterns of tiny, people-like calligraphic scribbles that are both mysterious and mesmerizing. This one

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas. It was made for Maya Angelou. (See *M.A.D.*, December 2015, p. 26-B.) This time, Swann offered a Ringgold story quilt from an anonymous private New York collection. Titled *Double Dutch on the Golden Gate Bridge*, it's part of Ringgold's important "Women on a Bridge" series, one of which is in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Estimated at the same level as *Maya's Quilt of Life* (\$150,000/250,000), *Double Dutch* sold to a collector on the phone for \$209,000. Between the two results there is obviously a significant dollar difference. But Maya's quilt, sold along with 43 other artworks from Angelou's estate, garnered huge amounts of pre-auction press attention and consequential bidding interest.

Hoopla is nice, but even without it Swann confidently continues to bring excellent examples of African American fine art to market. This marked the department's tenth year of sales. For more information, phone Swann at (212) 254 4710 or see the website (www.swanngalleries.com).



Allan Freelon (1895-1960), *Baiting Trawls*, 1930-35, oil on canvas, 30" x 36". This painting of fishing boats in Gloucester, Massachusetts, sold to a collector bidding as an absentee for \$37,500 (est. \$30,000/40,000). Freelon spent summers in the artists' colony in Gloucester from 1924 through the early 1930s.

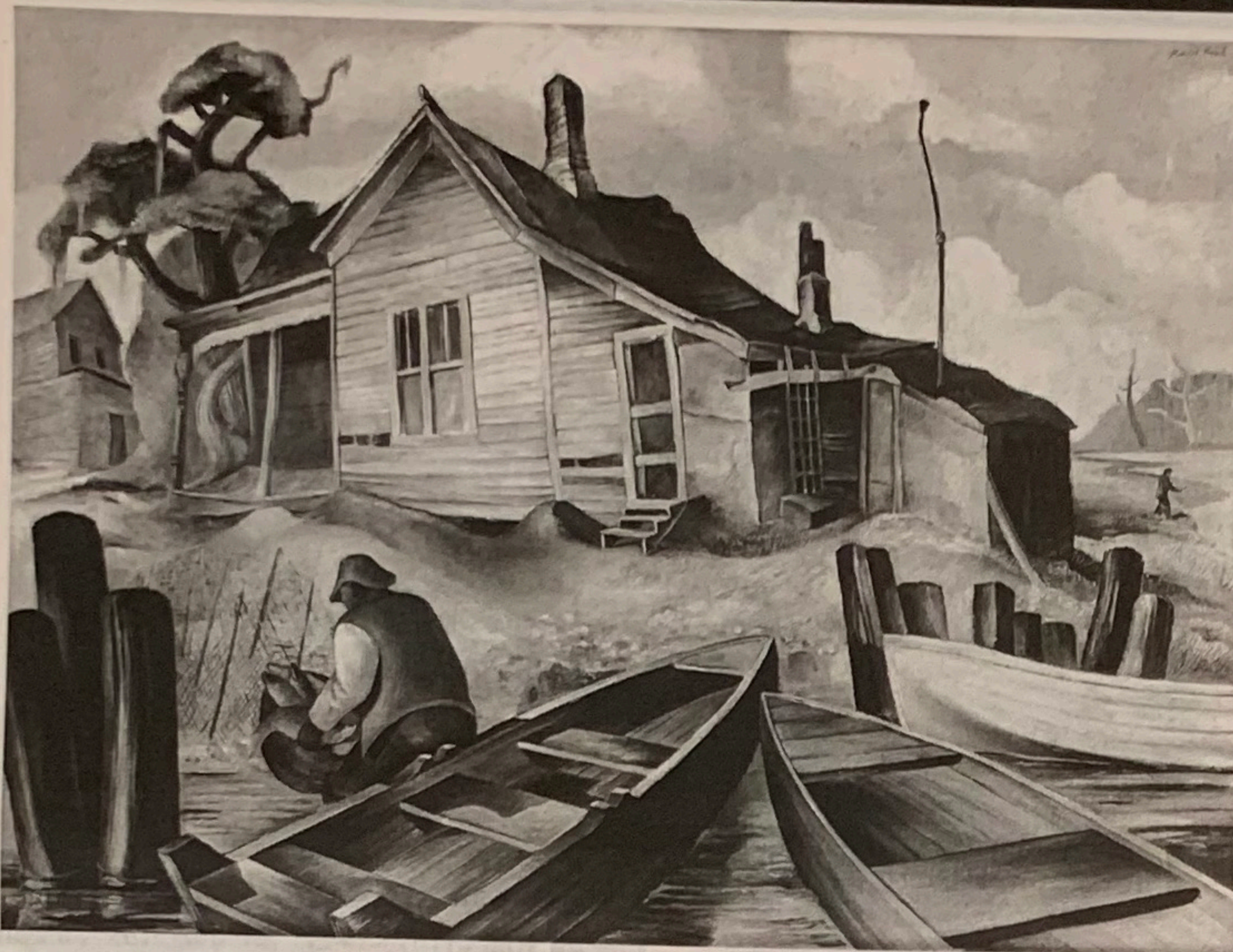


William T. Williams (b. 1942), *Chuckerbootstar Last*, 1972-73, acrylic on canvas, 84" x 60", \$75,000 (est. \$50,000/75,000). The painting was a collector's purchase. It had been originally offered at Swann's sale on October 3, 2013, with a higher estimate (\$75,000/100,000), and it was unsold.

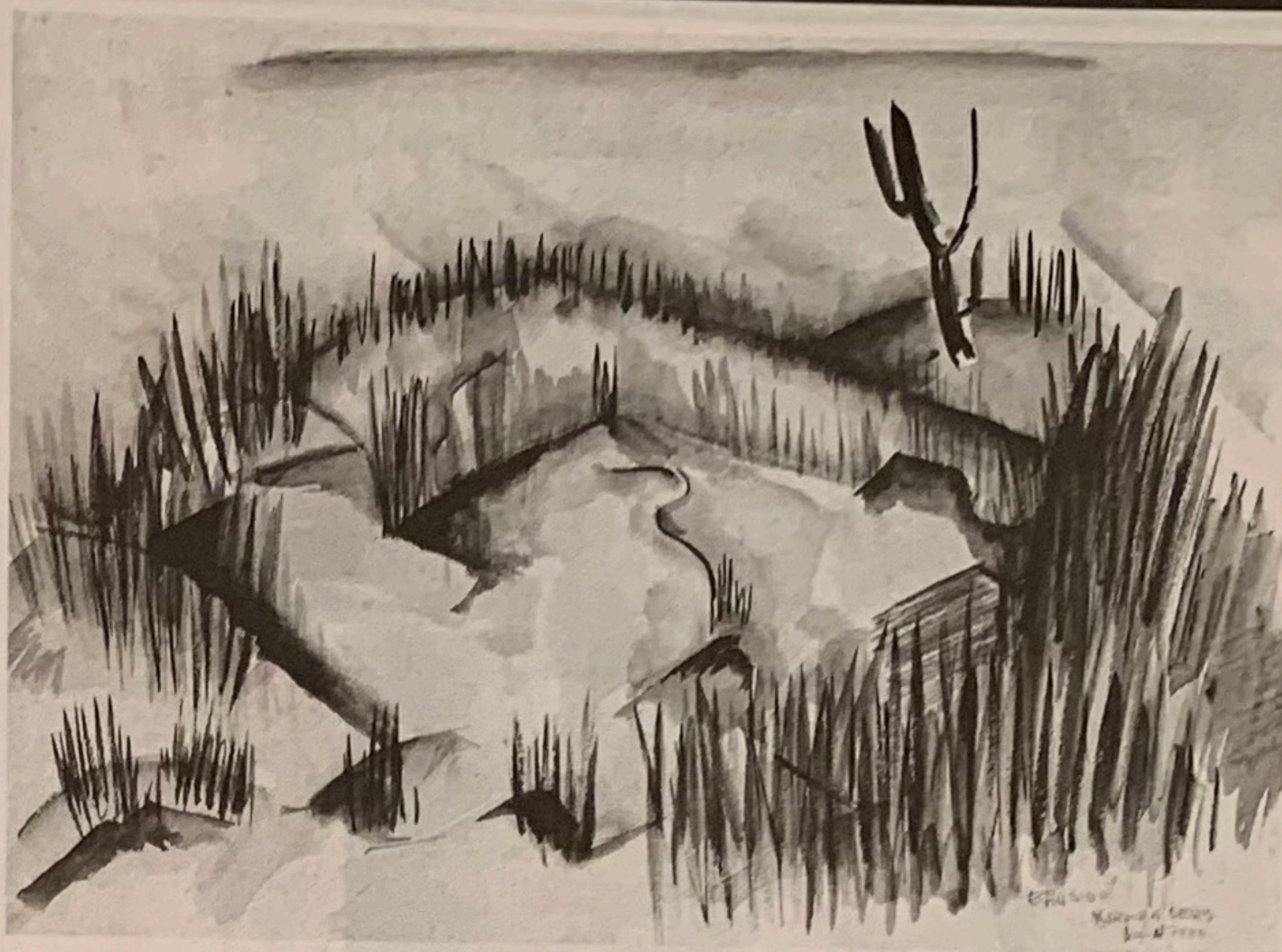


Norman Lewis, untitled (*Figurative Abstraction*), 1945, oil on canvas, 28" x 17", \$75,000 (est. \$75,000/100,000).

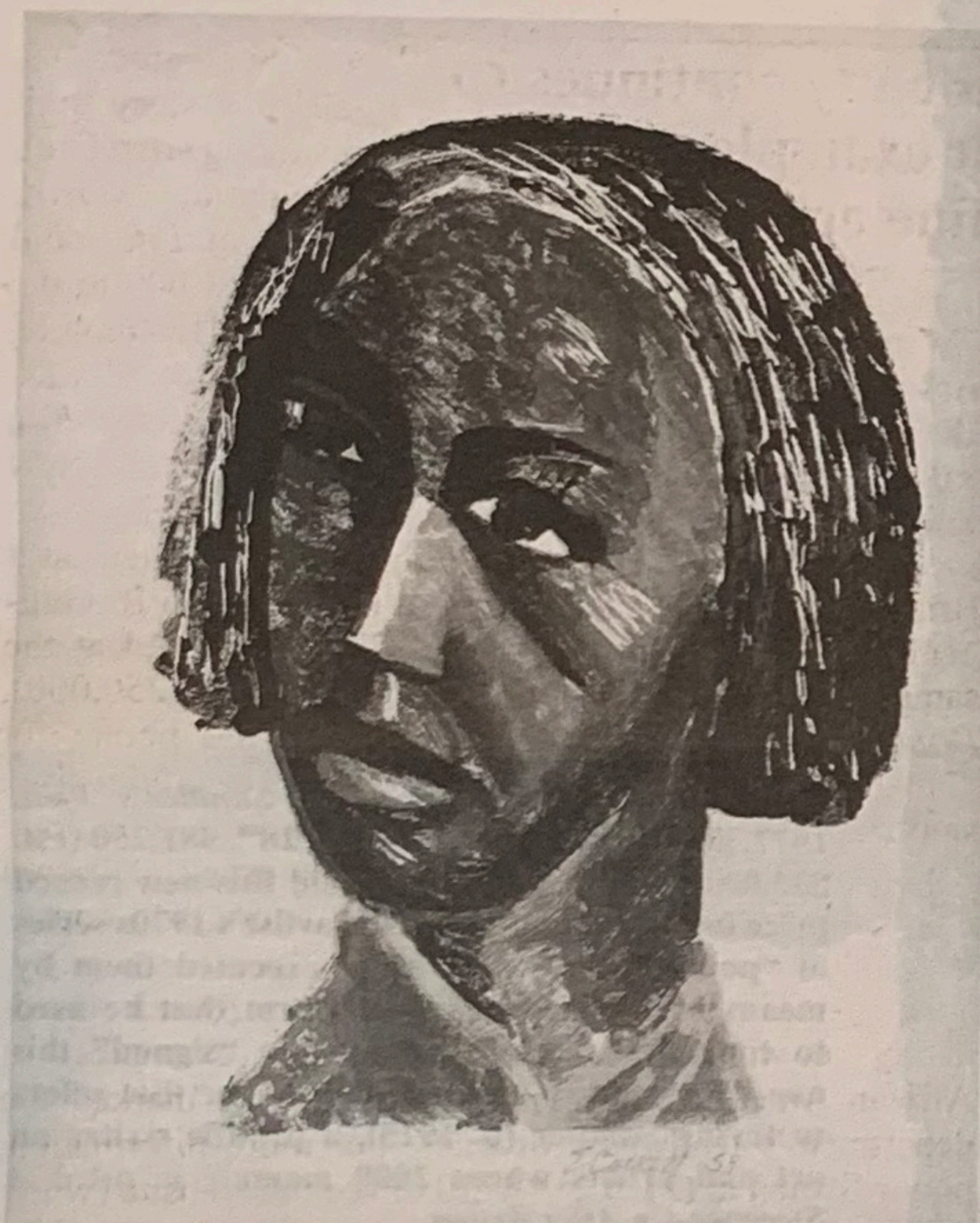
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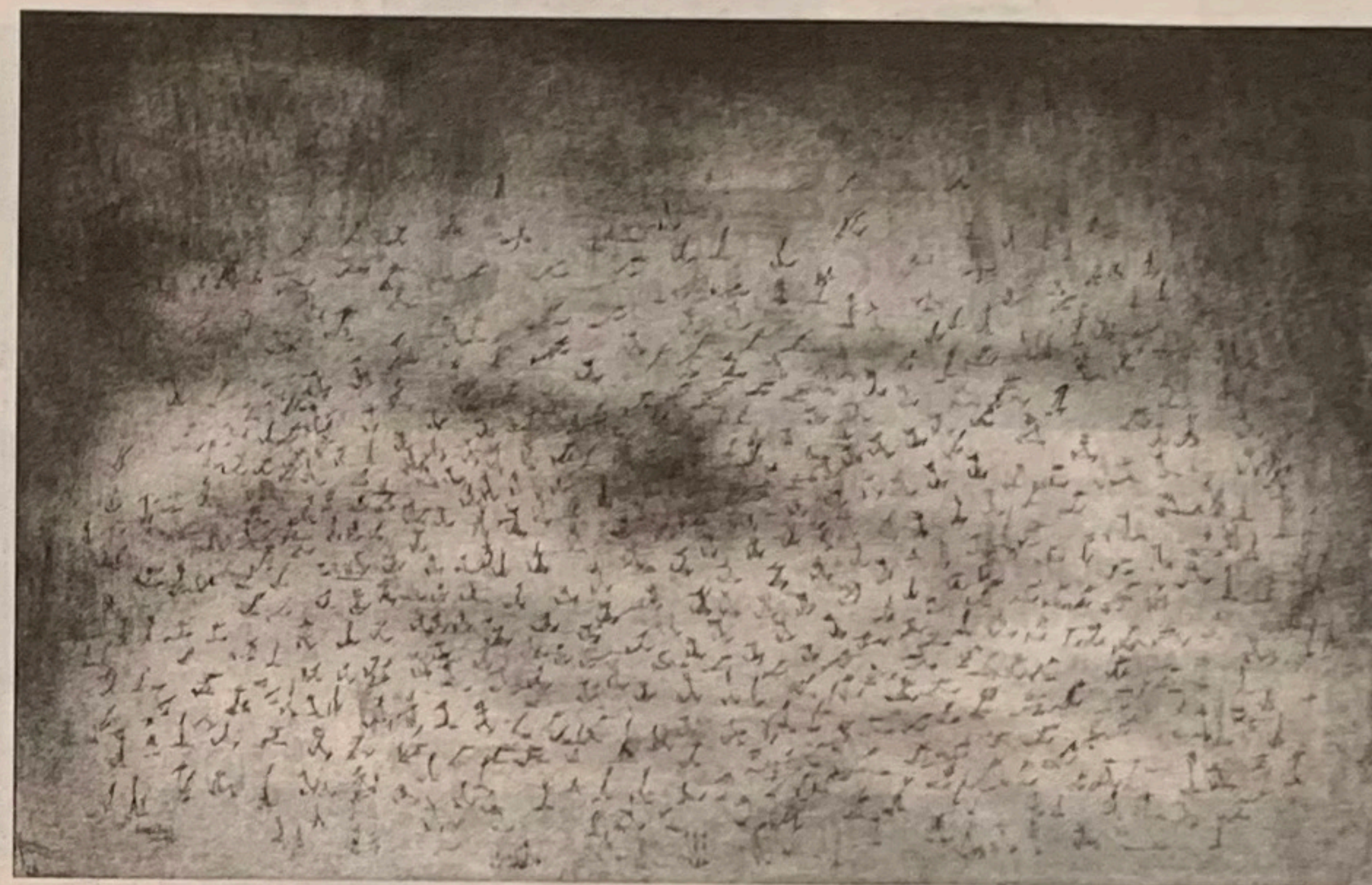
Robert Neal (1916-1989), untitled (*Fisherman's House at River's Edge*), 1939, oil on canvas, 20" x 26", \$27,500 (est. \$10,000/15,000). An unidentified institution paid the price, which has established the artist's first record at auction.



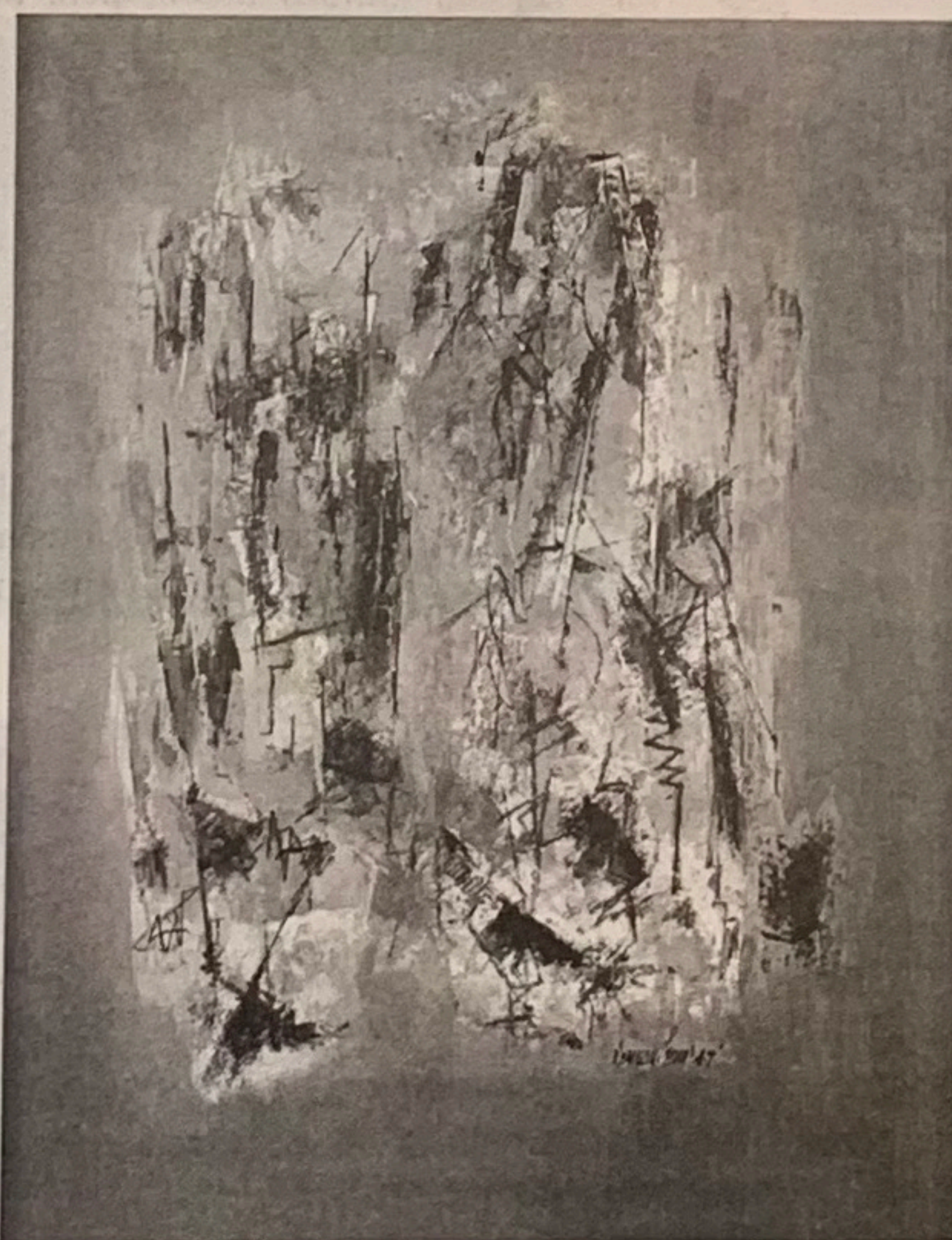
Norman Lewis (1909-1979), *Erosion*, 1938, watercolor on cream wove paper, 14" x 19", \$16,250 (est. \$5000/7000).



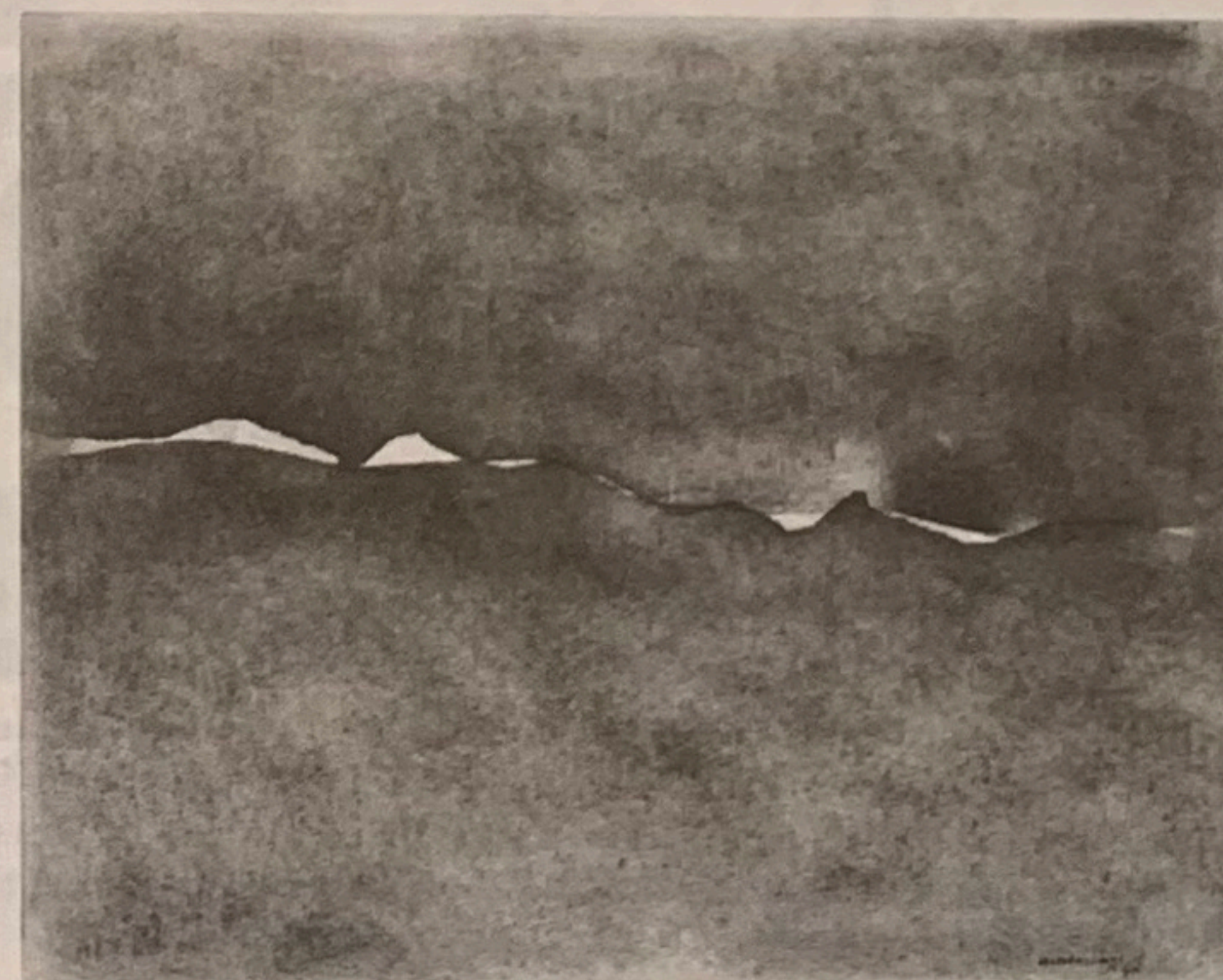
Elizabeth Catlett (1915-2012), untitled (*Head of a Woman*), 1959, oil and oil monotype on cream wove paper, 13 1/4" x 10 1/2", \$37,500 (est. \$30,000/40,000). Oil works by Catlett are scarce; this one went to a collector.



Norman Lewis, untitled (*Processional Figure Composition*), 1956, oil, pen, and ink on cream wove paper, 26" x 40", \$87,500 (est. \$40,000/60,000).



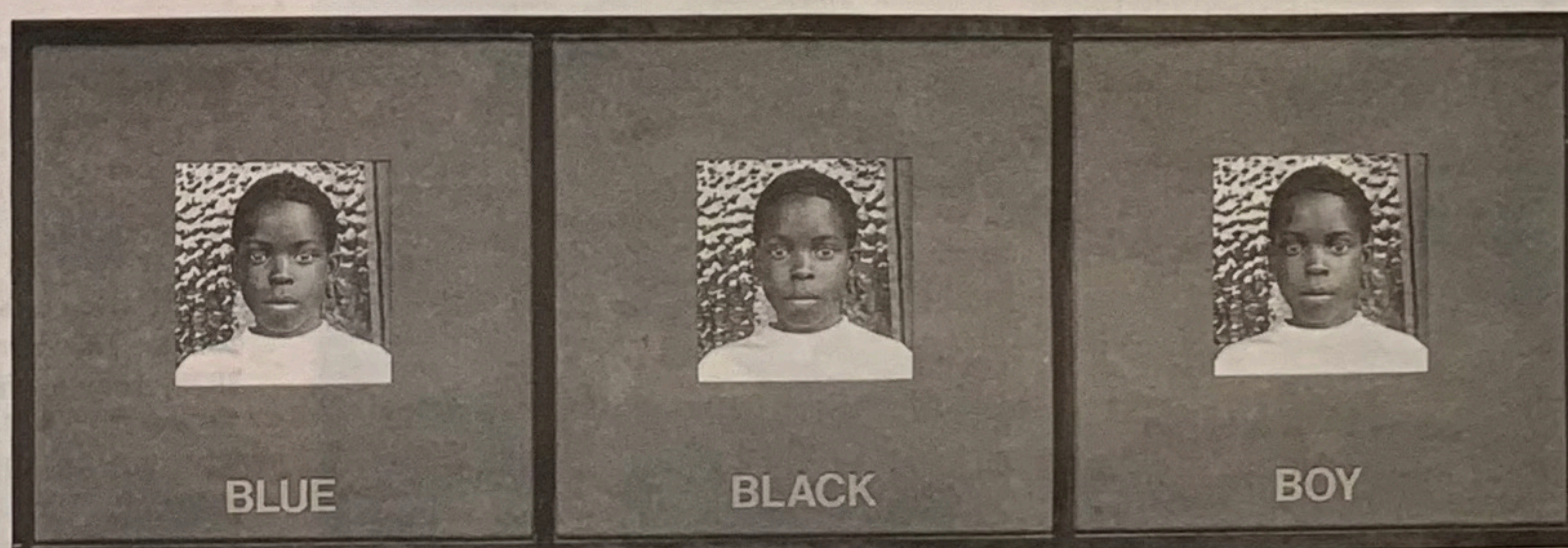
Norman Lewis, untitled, oil on masonite board, 1947, 17 3/4" x 14 3/4", \$149,000 (est. \$60,000/90,000).



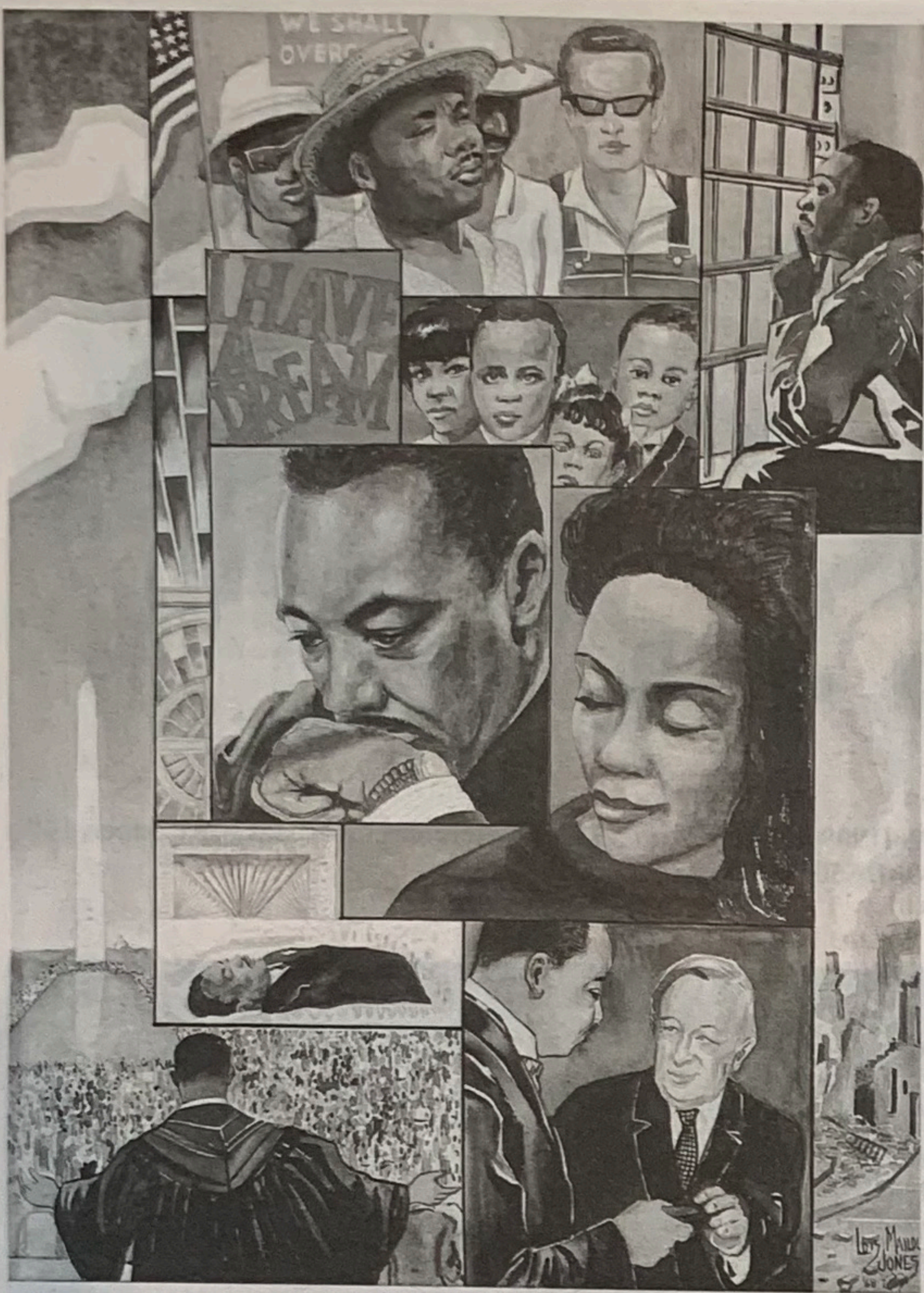
Norman Lewis, untitled (*Cloud Break*), 1964, oil on paper, 19" x 24", \$33,800 (est. \$8000/12,000). The buyer, a collector, made this big purchase online.



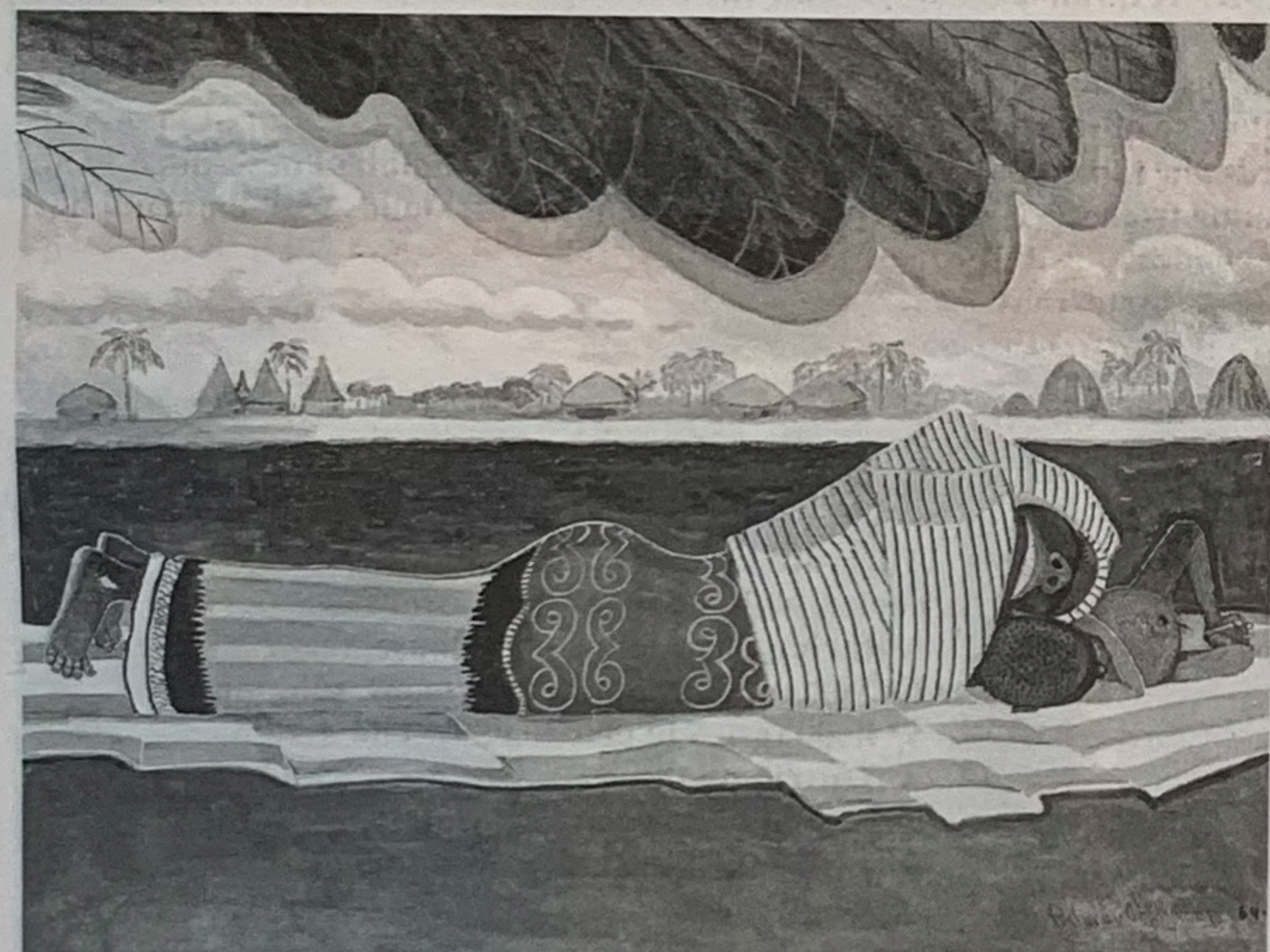
Hughie Lee-Smith (1915-1999), *Portrait of a Boy*, 1938, oil on canvas, 24" x 18". One of the earliest portrait works by Lee-Smith to come to auction, it sold to a collector for \$42,500 (est. \$30,000/40,000).



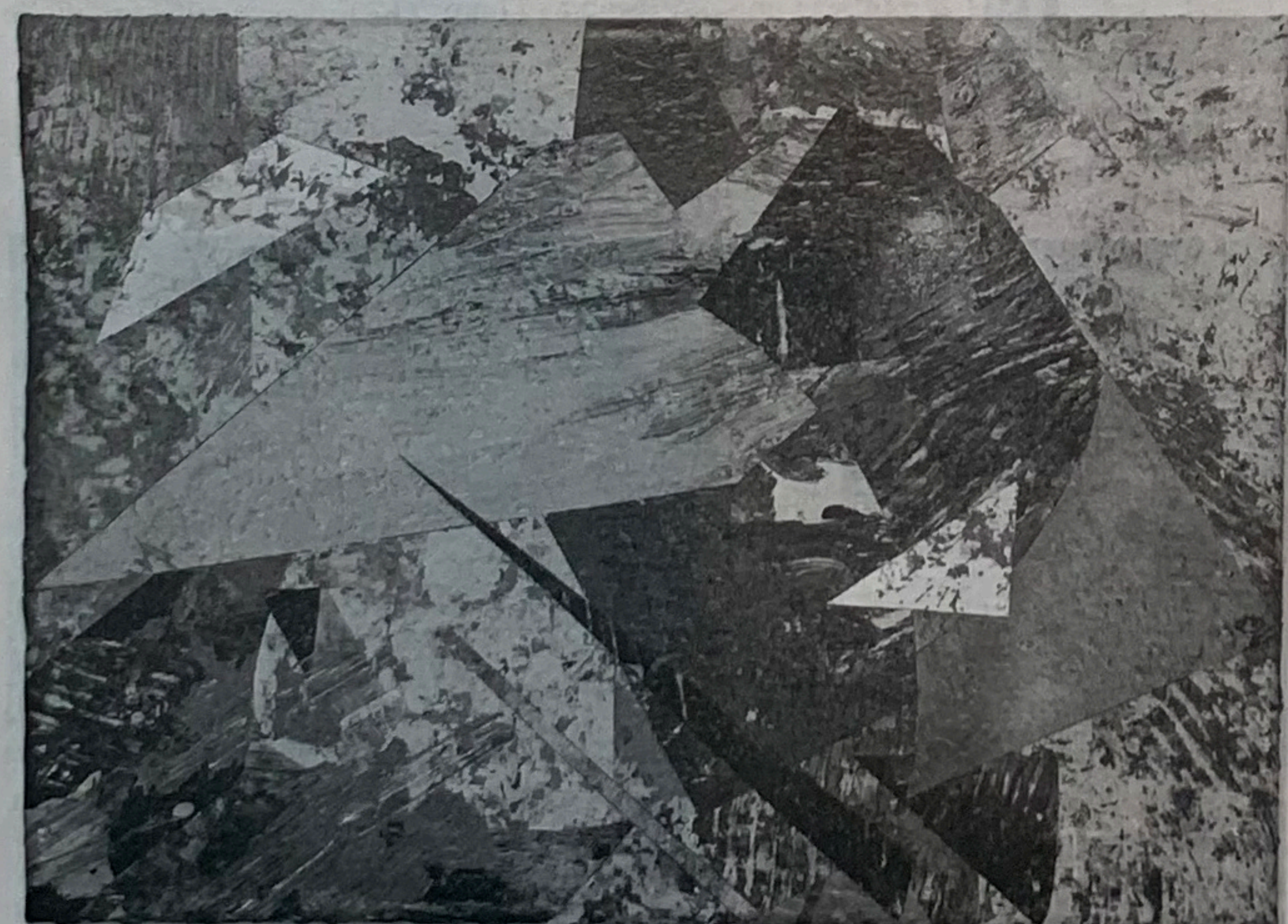
Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953), *Blue Black Boy*, 1987-88, triptych of three nearly identical toned gelatin silver prints with Prestype, 16" x 48" including the frame, \$50,000 (est. \$40,000/60,000). A collector was its buyer. Another *Blue Black Boy* is in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. It was exhibited in 2012-13 as part of the retrospective of Weems's work organized by the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville, Tennessee, that subsequently traveled to the Portland (Oregon) Art Museum, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.



Lois Mailou Jones (1905-1998), *Homage to Martin Luther King*, 1968, watercolor on illustration board, 30½" x 22¼", \$40,000 (est. \$20,000/30,000). The buyer of this widely exhibited painting, Mailou Jones's immediate artistic response to the assassination of King, was a collector.



Palmer Hayden (1890-1973), *The Blue Nile*, 1964, watercolor and gouache on thick wave paper, 21½" x 26½", \$42,500 (est. \$35,000/50,000). An unidentified institution paid this record price for one of Hayden's best-known paintings. It came to the sale from the collection of artist Camille Billops, whose works have been sold by this department.



Sam Gilliam (b. 1933), *Rondo IX*, 1983, acrylic and canvas collage on canvas, 44" x 60", \$93,750 (est. \$50,000/75,000). A dealer in the room bought this first painting from Gilliam's "Rondo" series to come to auction.



Felrath Hines (1913-1993), *Bouquet*, 1957, oil on canvas, 31" x 46¼", \$27,500 (est. \$20,000/30,000). In a private collection in Connecticut since 1960, the painting went to a dealer.



Frank Bowling (b. 1936), *Irv Sandler's Visit*, 1977, acrylic on canvas, 46½" x 28", \$81,250 (est. \$35,000/50,000). A collector paid this new record price for an example from the artist's 1970s series of "poured" works. Bowling executed them by means of a tilting board platform that he used to control the flow of paint. He "signed" this one with a spray-painted stencil. The title refers to Irving Sandler (b. 1925), a prolific writer on art and artists whose 2009 memoir is titled *A Sweeper-Up After Artists*.



Ernie Barnes (1938-2009), *The Rose*, circa 1978, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 20", \$27,500 (est. \$20,000/30,000). This painting, on the catalog's back cover, sold to a collector. The artist-made frame is an homage to Barnes's father, meant to resemble distressed wood from a weathered picket fence. Wood from the family's backyard fence in Durham, North Carolina—built by the elder Barnes—was what the artist framed his earliest paintings with. As he once explained, he liked the idea of seeing his father's handiwork in the Big Apple. "It was perfect. In tribute...Daddy's fence would hug all my paintings in a prestigious New York gallery."