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‘The Sugar Shack’ painting made famous in ‘Good Times’ sells for sweet \$15.2 million



Ernie Barnes' 1976 painting "The Sugar Shack" sold at auction for \$15.2 million on Thursday. (Christie's)

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“The Sugar Shack,” the dance-hall painting made famous for appearing in the credits of the 1970s sitcom “Good Times,” sold at auction Thursday for a record-breaking \$15.2 million.

Ernie Barnes' 1976 acrylic-on-canvas piece showing jubilant Black dancers in a club was also featured in the Evans' family apartment during the TV comedy's fifth and sixth seasons and was used as the cover of Marvin Gaye's hit single “I Want You.” Other works from the NFL star-turned-artist, who guest starred on the show, were occasionally used in the series and sometimes credited to J.J. Evans, the character famously played by Jimmie Walker.

The iconic painting sold in New York for 76 times its estimate of \$150,000 to \$200,000, according to international auction house Christie's. “The Sugar Shack” marked the first appearance of Barnes' work in an evening sale and had 22 bidders interested. It was sold promptly to energy trader and poker player Bill Perkins only 10 and a half minutes into bidding.

“My life has so far been a happy absurdity.....” the Houston-based Perkins tweeted Friday when he was revealed to be the highest bidder.

The collector, who owns several works by Barnes and other prominent Black artists such as Charles White and John T. Biggers, flew to New York for the auction and seemed to be pleased with his new piece's affordability too, according to Artnet.

"I'm walking away with the treasure while everybody is fighting over a Warhol or a Monet," the producer told the site.

Indeed, the same evening auction that saw the sale of "The Sugar Shack" also made headlines for the 12-lot sale of the Collection of Anne H. Bass, which included Edgar Degas' famous 1800s ballerina sculpture "Petite Danseuse de Quatorze Ans" ("Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen"), which sold for \$41.6 million and broke the record for the artist for the first time in almost 15 years, Christie's said. Claude Monet's "Parlement," the top lot of the sale, sold for \$75.9 million that night.

In 2019, the California African American Museum dedicated a retrospective to the late American artist Barnes, who died in 2009. He painted "The Sugar Shack" from a childhood memory — sneaking into the Durham Armory, a North Carolina venue that hosted segregated dances and that still exists. Barnes once said it was the "first time my innocence met with the sins of dance."

"This image has been in my consciousness since I was a kid. I have an emotional connection to it," Perkins told Artnet, adding, "If I did a survey, and I put a picture of the Mona Lisa and a picture of The Sugar Shack side by side, in my group of African Americans, they're going to remember The Sugar Shack more than anything else."

"We were so pleased to see such phenomenal performances by an incredibly diverse group of 20th century artists in our sale this evening," Emily Kaplan, co-head of the 20th Century Evening Sale, said in a statement to The Times.

"We featured works by nine female artists representing a range of artistic periods, two of whom set records — Grace Hartigan and Howardena Pindell. We were also thrilled by the outstanding performance by Ernie Barnes. The Sugar Shack soared past its high estimate of \$200,000 to sell for \$15.2 million, nearly 28 times his previous auction record."

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/tv/story/2022-05-13/good-times-painting-the-sugar-shack-sold-ernie-barnes>