

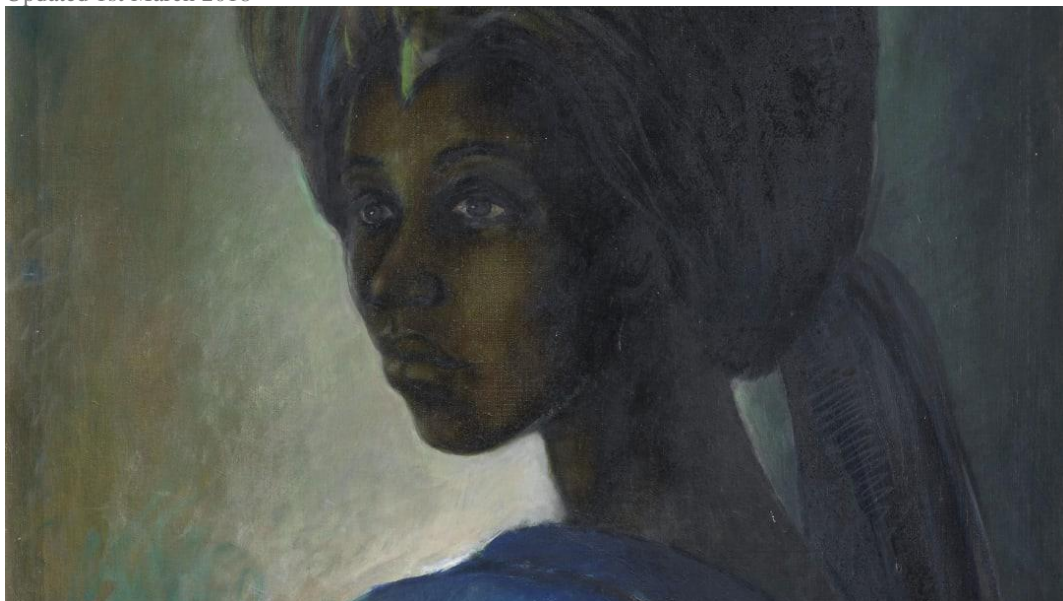
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'Tutu' painting by Ben Enwonwu sells for \$1.6 million

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Credit: Bonhams

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Written by Oscar Holland, CNN Jennifer Hauser, CNN

A famous painting that went missing for decades before turning up in a London apartment has sold for over \$1.6 million (£1,205,000). Often dubbed the "African Mona Lisa," Ben Enwonwu's "Tutu" smashed sale estimates at an auction in London on Wednesday.

One of a triptych of artworks created by Enwonwu during the aftermath of Nigeria's bloody civil war, "Tutu" disappeared shortly after being painted in 1974. Its whereabouts remained the subject of intense speculation for over 40 years before the portrait was discovered in a family home late last year.

Depicting the Ife princess Adetutu Ademiluyi (abbreviated as "Tutu"), the painting was subsequently authenticated and went under the hammer as part of Bonhams' "Africa Now" sale. The London auction house initially predicted a price tag of between £200,000 and £300,000 (\$275,000 to \$413,000), less than a quarter of the final bid.

According to Bonhams, "Tutu" was painted after Enwonwu encountered the princess walking in the Nigerian countryside. The artist created two other pictures of Ademiluyi, both of which remain missing.

The paintings grew in fame not only for their beauty but for the mystery surrounding their disappearance. The eventual discovery of "Tutu" is partly thanks to the efforts of Giles Peppiatt, Director of African art at Bonhams, who for years made it his mission to find them. People brought him a number of prints but they all transpired to be fakes. Then one day in December 2017, he finally found the real thing.



"Tutu" is one of three missing paintings by Nigerian artist Ben Enwonwu Credit: Bonhams

After receiving a tip, Peppiatt made a visit to a "modest" apartment in north London and discovered the painting had been hanging there for the last 30 years. According to Bonhams, Peppiatt said: "I was absolutely staggered when I first saw the piece. The owners, who had inherited it, had no idea of its current value." The family behind the discovery has chosen to remain anonymous.

"On discovering the long-missing work," continued Peppiatt, "I felt a little like Howard Carter peering into Tutankhamen's tomb. When Carter was asked by Lord Carnarvon 'What can you see?', Carter replied 'Wonderful things... Wonderful things.' And so it was for me on that dark December night."

"Tutu" was among 20 Enwonwu artworks made available at the Bonham's sale. His paintings "Negritude" and "The Female Form" sold for £100,000 (\$138,000) and £110,000 (\$151,000) respectively.