

THE LAWTON CONSTITUTION

Peterson breaks a personal record with Phillips art auction

By Gary Reddin

Oct 3, 2021



Robert Peterson is Lawton's prodigal son.

The contemporary painter has risen to prominence in the art world from his studio in Southwest Oklahoma. His works have garnered praise for the way they portray people of color in empowering positions.

Peterson is not unfamiliar with record breaking. In 2016 he was named “Artist of the Year for Southwestern Oklahoma,” becoming the first Black man in the state’s history to hold the title. Recently, Peterson broke another record. This time it was a personal one.

Peterson’s painting “We’re Gonna Be Kings” sold for \$56,700 at the storied Phillips auction house in New York City. Phillips is known internationally as a hub for collectors to bid on some of the most important contemporary works of art in the world.

“Any artist, I think most artists, dream of their work going up for auction at Phillips or Christies. So, to have the opportunity at nine years in is amazing. That doesn’t happen every day,” Peterson said.

The opportunity came after one of his regular collectors, Gardy St. Fleur, reached out to him about working with Phillips for an upcoming auction. A percentage of the funds from the auction would be donated to Project Backboard, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to “renovate public basketball courts and install large scale works of art on the surface in order to strengthen communities, improve park safety, encourage multi-generational play, and inspire people to think more critically and creatively about their environment.”



Robert Peterson, We're Gonna Be Kings

“He has a background of working with charities, and with Phillips he is an art adviser so he would give them recommendations for artists,” Peterson said. “He actually asked me about doing it several months back, but I didn’t start working on it until about two-and-a-half months ago.”

“We’re Gonna Be Kings” started with a vision. Peterson likened it to a kung-fu film when the two heroes are surrounded and must fight back-to-back to come out on top.

“I took these two brothers who I’ve painted before, they are friends of my son. They’re from Cache. Their names are Carlos and Tyler. So, I took them and put them side-by-side representing them facing the world. They must make sure they stand regardless of what comes against them,” Peterson said.

In addition to breaking a personal record, Peterson’s wife and daughter were able to travel to New York with him to watch the piece be auctioned, which made the experience even better, he said.

“I think what this has done is give me more exposure. I’m not pushing for too much to change. I love to create, and I am looking forward to getting back home and creating more,” Peterson said. “Right now, because the work is selling so fast, I’m just going to lock myself in my studio and create what feels good.”