

# Henrietta Berk, Two Children (red), oil.



## The Bay Area Figurative

Movement was a reaction by Bay Area painters against the previously dominant Abstract Expressionists. The second prominent art movement to originate in America, the Bay Area Figurative Movement spanned the 60s and 70s and was led by graduates of Bay Area institutions such as the San

Francisco Art Institute, UC

Berkeley, and the California

College of Arts and Crafts.

Michaan's Auctions is proud to

offer a fine work by one of its

leading proponents, **Henrietta**

**Berk, Two Children (red), oil**

(\$6/8,000) in our April Gallery

Auction, held on Friday, April

19th.

In this work, Henrietta

Berk has painted a scene featuring two children sitting on a bench at sunset.

They appear to be facing the viewer,

although their faces are hard to

decipher. The older child appears to be a

long-haired girl with one leg crossed and

resting on the top of the bench, while the

other child is much more loosely

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rendered and faces the viewer more directly. The bench appears to be placed in front of an open beach, which is rendered in the same deep red that makes up the sky. The sun, placed in the top left of the frame, is a loose collection of circling strokes in orange. These marks eventually dissolve into the horizon, painted in the same orange, which is separated from the indigo sea by a thin, uneven line of white. The entire painting features a notably textured facture which adds to the vitality of the color selection and uncanny rendering of the children.

This painting appears largely as a study of color, which has been effectuated through an intense combination of cool reds, oranges, and blues. In this painting Berk takes an observation of the uniquely pervasive nature of the red light in an intense sunset and heightens the intensity,

giving us an image that seems to ooze its foreboding presence. The addition of two children within this uneasy landscape only serves to heighten our disquiet, despite the lack of any apparent threat, and is made uncanny by a lack of rendering of the children's facial features, leaving them without eyes to return the viewer's gaze. Overall, this work, beginning from its study of color, effectively creates a world of unease and disquietude solely through its formal characteristics.

The work of Henrietta Berk is defined by its use of intense color, loose rendering of subject matter, and layered facture which gives the canvas a deeply textured surface. She frequently features children as subjects and generally renders her subject matter without facial features, perhaps a reference to the artist's late-life blindness. This piece fits naturally with her broader body of work,

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however it is distinguishable in several notable respects, most evident of which is the dominating presence of red, which, while not unique in her history, was less frequently used than cooler colors such as blue and green. The marine scene is also a rare setting for her work, which usually features rolling hills and agricultural lands.

Henrietta Berk (née Robin) was born in Wichita, Kansas in 1919, and had a difficult childhood marked by stays at the Pacific Hebrew Orphan, Asylum, and Home in San Francisco following the departure of her father from the family. After graduating from Polytechnic High School in San Francisco (predecessor to the San Francisco School for the Arts), she attended San Francisco State University and later the California College of Arts and Crafts, where she became acquainted with many members of the

Bay Area Figurative Movement that she would eventually join. She had her first solo exhibition in 1959 and would come to exhibit her work throughout California. She is considered to be one of the leading members of the Bridge Generation of the Bay Area Figurative Movement and was a prolific painter until her passing at the age of 71 in 1990.



**Henrietta Berk, Two Children (red), oil (\$6/8,000)** will be offered in Michaan's Auctions April Gallery Auction on Friday, April 19<sup>th</sup>. The sale features excellent furniture pieces from the Asian Art Department,

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in addition to important works from notable artists, and a number of fine jewelry pieces from the Fine Art and Jewelry departments. The auction is led by the Fine Art Department, which will be offering oil paintings by George Demont Otis and Gideon Jacques Denny, while the Asian Art Department offers a 12-panel folding screen and a

hanging rug. Also included in the sale are platinum, diamond, and gold items from the Jewelry Department.

Michaan's Auctions catalogs can be viewed on our website ([www.michaans.com](http://www.michaans.com)), LiveAuctioneers, and on our Michaan's Live site. Bid live in our gallery or remotely via absentee, phone, or online.

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