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# Art-World Whale in the 1MDB Net

BY KELLY CROW

Before he appeared on the wrong end of an asset-seizure effort by federal prosecutors, Jho Low was being feted by the art world as one of its biggest patrons.

The businessman was considered a rising star known for chasing after top-dollar works by Pablo Picasso, Claude Monet and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Last year, ARTnews magazine named him among its "Top 200 Collectors."

Now, prosecutors are moving to seize some of his holdings, including a \$35 million Monet scene of Venice called "The Great Saint George," alleging they were bought with money stolen from **1Malaysia**

**Development** Bhd., a government investment fund in Malaysia known as 1MDB.

Representatives of Mr. Low declined to comment. No criminal charges have been filed against him.

Dealers didn't know much about Mr. Low when he burst on the scene three years ago. According to a U.S. Justice Department complaint filed against Mr. Low with the U.S. District Court in California on Wednesday, he opened an account at auction house Christie's so he could attend a May 2013 "11th Hour" charity sale organized by Hollywood star and collector Leonardo DiCaprio to benefit environmental causes.

In a realm where discretion

is prized and bidders often compete with a flick of an eyebrow or subtle nod of the head, Mr. DiCaprio's sale stood apart. Christie's aisles were packed with can't-miss celebrities such as Bradley Cooper and Salma Hayek. At one point, pharmaceutical mogul Stewart Rahr stood up to shout his bid.

Between the auction and Christie's contemporary art sale two nights later, Mr. Low's associates won five pieces for a total of \$58.3 million, the filing said. The biggest among them was his art-world breakout: 1982's "Dustheads," a \$48.8 million portrait of a pair of drug dealers by Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Word got out: Malaysia had

a young billionaire who liked wall-power paintings. Christie's subsequently brokered private sales of two more works by Lucio Fontana and Mark Rothko to Mr. Low and his associates. Soon, dealers were lining up to sell him pieces as well, including a firm called SNS Fine Art with ties to former auction specialists Thomas Seydoux and Stephane Connery.

The filing said an unnamed employee at SNS sold Mr. Low the Monet. Mr. Seydoux said Wednesday he wasn't directly involved in the sale. A message left on Mr. Connery's cellphone wasn't returned.

Christie's said it has a rigorous anti-money-laundering

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