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Contact: Alexandra Kindermann +41 44 268 10 19 akindermann@christies.com
Matthw Paton 20 7389 2695 mpaton@christies.com

CHRISTIE’S

A RICH OFFERING OF RARE AND
REDISCOVERED RUSSIAN ART
AT CHRISTIE’S IN NOVEMBER

London - On 28 November, Christie's will present an exceptional auction, offering the strongest selection of Russian paintings and works of art on the market this season. The sale will offer rediscovered treasures by many of the most celebrated artists in the field, including Natalia Goncharova, Vasily Vereshchagin, Boris Grigoriev, Filipp Maliavin and Alexander Volkov. This selection is led by Vasily Vereshchagin’s undisputed masterpiece Crucifixion by the Romans (see separate release) offered on behalf of the Brooklyn Museum and by two pairs of exquisite vases produced by the Imperial Porcelain Factory under Emperor Nicholas I. The sale will also feature over forty works of art by Fabergé, many distinguished by their rare Imperial provenance. Highlighted by masterpieces of tremendous importance and scale, the sale brings together outstanding examples of Russian art, much of which is appearing on the market for the first time in decades.

MASTERS OF THE 19th CENTURY

In addition to Vasily Vereshchagin’s epic canvas, Christie’s is delighted to present a number of outstanding 19th century paintings, including the highly exciting discovery of Viktor Vasnetsov’s (1848-1926) truly iconic A Bogatyr. Under the patronage of the Moscow merchants, Savva Mamontov and Pavel Tretyakov, Vasnetsov designed and built a new studio which allowed him to work on a monumental scale, creating works such as his most famous masterpiece, Bogatyr (1876-1898, State Tretyakov Gallery). Vasnetsov returned to the theme of the Bogatyr once more in his 1915 oil depicting the Kievan Rus’ folk-hero, Ilya Muromets, which remains in the collection of the Vasnetsov House Museum in Moscow. A Bogatyr is a version of this monumental painting (estimate: £300,000-500,000), depicting the warrior sitting astride a rearing horse. Painted in 1920, the work has remained in the family of the present owner since the 1920s and has never before been presented to the market either privately or at public auction.
Rufin Sudkovskii (1850-1885) is one of the most celebrated Russian maritime painters of all time. The enormous scale of *A storm by Odessa* (estimate: £1,000,000-1,500,000) enabled Sudkovskii not only to emphasise the vastness of the sea, but also to express the vigorous force of nature. Sudkovskii was, without doubt, heavily influenced by Aivazovsky. However, in contrast to the heightened romanticism and painterly mastery, characteristic of Aivazovsky's seascapes, Sudkovskii's works are distinguished by their leaning towards reality, their truthfulness to nature. Like Aivazovsky, Sudkovskii depicted the sea in a variety of states – from absolute calm to raging tempests, the waves crashing into one other with all their ferocity. Formerly in the distinguished collection of Paul Pavlovich Demidoff, 2nd Prince of San Donato (1839-1885), *A storm by Odessa* was exhibited in St Petersburg in 1882, the year after its execution.

**HIDDEN JEWELS TO APPEAR AT AUCTION FOR THE FIRST TIME**

Natalia Goncharova’s (1881-1962) *Printemps* (estimate: £400,000-600,000) is a signature canvas that depicts blossoming trees, a symbol of re-birth and a recurring motif in her work. A gift from Goncharova to the father of the present owner, Ronald Alley, who was a close friend of the artist and Keeper of Modern Collections at the Tate from 1965-1986, *Printemps* is a powerful characteristic example of Goncharova’s work, executed in her distinctive neo-primitive style.

The November sale will also mark the first appearance at auction of Marie Vassilieff’s (1884-1957) highly important painting *The dance (recto)* and *A cubist portrait (verso)* (estimate: £400,000-600,000). Vassilieff arrived in Paris in 1905 on a grant from Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, moving permanently to the City of Lights in 1907. In 1910 she founded the *Académie Russe* which in 1912 became the *Académie Vassilieff*, a key meeting-place for the Parisian Avant-Garde. Picasso, Léger, Braque and Modigliani were often to be found there. Surrounded and inspired by the movement's masters, Vassilieff embraced Cubism, as illustrated by the early composition, *A*
cubist portrait, which was painted in 1913. However, her personal style was already discernable by this point; where analytical Cubism focused on ochre and grey, Vassilieff explored a bright chromatic palette with vibrant blues, reds and yellows. Her work embodies a sublime fusion of her native Russian sensibilities with the energy and experimentation of Paris in the early 20th century.

Painted in 1927, a magnificent self-portrait by Filipp Maliavin (1869-1940 / estimate £150,000-200,000) immediately recalls the vibrant compelling canvasses the artist painted prior to his emigration in 1922. Maliavin stares intently at the viewer with a look of intense concentration. His face is depicted with masterful psychological insight, reflecting his education under Ilya Repin at the St Petersburg Academy. Held in a private Italian collection for two generations, exhibited in Paris and in Milan during the artist’s lifetime, this masterful self-portrait is the most exciting painting by this brilliant artist to appear at auction in recent history.

Alexander Volkov’s (1886-1957) Kok-Su mountain river (estimate: £300,000-400,000) was painted in 1914 and has remained in the collection of the artist’s family until now. It is one of the earliest works from the artist’s ‘Water and stones’ series, which is linked with Brichmulla, a region in the Eastern part of Uzbekistan. Volkov’s unique style is already discernable in the seminal Kok-Su mountain river with its recognisable bright and exotic colour palette and fragmented mosaic-like black contours.

NONCONFORMIST ART

The November sale includes a carefully selected group of works by the Nonconformists. The section is led by Ilya Kabakov’s (b. 1933) Landscape with pines, which dates from 1989 (estimate: £250,000-350,000) and represents the critical period immediately following the artist’s emergence from the Soviet Union and his confrontation with a new Western reality. The work is part of the 1990 installation He Lost His Mind, Undressed, Ran Away Naked which was exhibited at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York from 6 January to 3 February 1990. Other major artists featured in this section are Oscar Rabin, Vasily Sitnikov and Lidia Masterkova. A younger generation of artists is represented by Svetlana Kopystiansky’s The Story.
RUSSIAN WORKS OF ART

Christie’s sale offers a range of truly exceptional Russian works of art from distinguished European and American private collectors, most of which has never before appeared at auction. The sale is led by two pairs of magnificent porcelain vases manufactured by the Imperial Porcelain Factory during the reign of Emperor Nicholas I. One pair, perhaps the grandest pair to appear at auction in recent memory, is painted with scenes after Philips Wouwerman (estimate: £1,700,000-2,200,000 / see separate release). The second pair relates to a small number of works created by the Imperial Porcelain Factory, which are painted to imitate hardstones. The ground of these vases was painted by the factory artist with gold and cobalt blue paint to simulate the mineral characteristics of lapis lazuli. The reserves of the vases were painted by Shchetinin after pictures in the manner of Jacob Hackert (1737-1807). Hackert was a German painter, who worked primarily in Italy, where he gained a reputation as one of the most distinguished landscape artists of his time. A number of Hackert’s works are held in the State Hermitage Museum and the artist undertook commissions for Empress Catherine II and Emperor Paul I (estimate: £500,000-700,000).

A number of important diplomatic purchases from private collections will be offered on 28 November. Highlights include a number of porcelain pieces from the Gardner order services held in the private collection of the renowned Russian Art collector Marjorie Merriweather Post (1887-1973) and acquired during her husband’s diplomatic service to the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Ms. Merriweather Post collected Russian works of art throughout her life and assembled one of the most important collections of Russian art outside Russia, which she displayed in her private residence and later public museum, Hillwood in Washington D.C. The pieces offered all appear at auction for the first time.

The Italian ambassador to Russia, who was an active collector of Russian works of art at the same time as Ms. Post, accumulated many important porcelain and silver items. Christie’s will offer a number of works from this distinguished Italian collection, highlighted by a set of twelve porcelain plates from the service of St Andrew the First-Called (estimate: £50,000-70,000) and an important silver and niello soup tureen apparently made in 1799 for Count Nikolai Petrovitch Sheremetev (1751-1809), who was one of the most influential eighteenth-century Russian collectors and patrons of the arts.
Two exquisite and newly-discovered clocks with Imperial provenance highlight a diverse selection of over forty works by Fabergé. A jeweled green guilloché enamelled clock, designed by head workmaster Michael Perchin and purchased from Fabergé by the Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna on 31 December 1899 for 700 roubles, has been held in private hands since before the Second World War and will be offered at auction for the first time (estimate: £100,000-150,000). Further distinctive and important works by Fabergé that carry established Imperial provenance include a guilloché enamelled, gold and platinum mounted rhodonite miniature desk clock, the face of which is adorned with rose-cut diamonds (estimate £80,000-120,000). This elegantly designed clock was crafted by Fabergé’s head workmaster, Henrik Wigström, and purchased by Emperor Nicholas II from the firm’s St Petersburg branch on 21 July 1912 for 650 roubles.

Another fabulous Fabergé highlight is a rare silver bottle cooler in the form of a military drum, made by Julius Rappoport (estimate: £300,000-350,000). This impressive bottle cooler typifies regimental commissions by Fabergé and is decorated with oval cartouches, one incorporating the Imperial double-headed eagle, the other with the monogram of Grand Duke Nicholas Mikhailovich beneath the Imperial crown and the third with different military trophies. A cobalt blue guilloché enamelled Imperial presentation cigarette case that was given by Emperor Nicholas II to Commandant-General Carl Carsten Abraham Warberg (1845-1910) following the 1909 Russian state visit to Sweden will also be offered from a private collection in November (estimate: £40,000-60,000).

The sale also features a selection of notable Russian bronzes, including the impressive 170 cm high Mephistopheles by Mark Antokol’skii (1843-1902). Executed in 1883, the idea for Mephistopheles occurred to the artist as early as 1874, when Antokol’skii was at work on Christ before the Judgment of the People. He wrote: “The idea of creating Christ is an idea in half. I would like to create another character, no less strong, but in complete opposition to Christ – it is Mephistopheles.” When the model of Mephistopheles was exhibited in St Petersburg, Germany and Austria the sculpture was hailed by critics for its depth and seriousness. In 1898, Antokol’skii received the Gold Medal for his model of Mephistopheles in Vienna. This commandingly sculpted bronze will be offered at auction for the first time from the collection of Sir James Goldsmith (estimate: £150,000-200,000).