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CHRISTIE'S

Contact: Hannah Schweiger +44 (0) 207 389 2964 hschweiger@christies.com

CREATIVE VITALITY ROOTED IN TRADITION SOUTH ASIAN MODERN + CONTEMPORARY ART AT CHRISTIE'S

- The most important work by Tyeb Mehta from his groundbreaking *Mahishasura* series to lead sale



London – Notable international exhibitions of Indian art will be held in Brazil, Tel Aviv, America and Denmark this year, following the inaugural Indian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011 and exhibitions at the *Pompidou Centre* and *Musée Guimet* in Paris. In this dynamic context, Christie's is proud to present the annual London sale of *South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art* on 11 June. The inspiring group of 112 lots spans the Indian modern masters through to distinguished contemporary artists, epitomising the creative vitality of art rooted in rich traditions. The top lot is *Mahishasura*, 1996, by Tyeb Mehta, the most important painting from this groundbreaking series to come to auction (estimate: £1.2 million – £1.8 million, *illustrated left*).

Yamini Mehta, Senior Specialist, Director of South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art: "Christie's is delighted to be offering the seminal painting, 'Mahishasura', by Tyeb Mehta; one of the artist's best and most iconic works to come to auction. This auction is the most varied in the category to date, in terms of price levels – with estimates ranging from £1,500 to £1.8 million; media featured - from paintings, collage, neon and sculpture through to photography; and the accessibility of works. We welcome collectors of all ages to explore and celebrate the field, with a spectacular selection of works by the Indian Modern Masters: Tyeb Mehta, Syed Haider Raza, and M.F. Husain and a strong group of contemporary works by Bharti Kber, Shezad Davood, Thukral + Tagra and Jagannath Panda, among many others. Emphasizing the growing interest in art from the region, the sale also features a special selection of Pakistani art as well as contemporary photographic works, most notably from India's best known contemporary artists featured in the *Khoj Portfolio*."

INDIAN MODERNISM The revered painter Tyeb Mehta spent the majority of his life contemplating the human condition; his subjects sometimes illustrating his disillusioned vision of the modern day world. Heavily inspired by ancient mythology and Hindu literature, *Mahishasura* recounts the legend whereby the Brahmin Demon-King Rambha produces an invincible son through his union with a she-buffalo. Mehta fuses ancient imagery with simplicity of form, colour and line, resulting in powerfully modern works full of fresh vitality. Stylistic devices evident in the present work - such as the simultaneity of perspective and figures, the juxtaposition of linear and volumed representation, and varying frontal and profiled angles of vision - conjure images of Pablo Picasso's pivotal work, *Guernica*. Just as Mehta was inspired by the bull, Picasso also regularly depicted multiple forms of the bull and most often the mythological creature, the Minotaur. The similarities between Mehta and Picasso reflect the dialogue between artists around the 1950s

and 1960s and the strong impact Minimalism, Abstraction and Cubism had on Mehta. Although the symbolism of the bull and the horse in *Guernica* remain ambiguous, the bull in Mehta's works can be seen to symbolise the artist's attempt to shed light on the culture and predicaments faced by the Indian subcontinent and its people, becoming in essence a symbol of the pain and struggle, yet simultaneously of survival. *For more information on this work please click [here](#).*



Among the superb array of other highlights by the **Modern Masters** is *Cinq Sens*, 1958, a quintessential work by **Maqbool Fida Husain** (1915-2011), which was formerly in the collection of the world renowned Italian film maker Roberto Rossellini and his Indian wife Sonali Dasgupta (estimate: £400,000 - 500,000, *illustrated left*). It was a pertinent gift from the artist to his friend, Rossellini, who

left India with newfound love, awareness and creative consciousness. The painting is one of the first evocations of the equestrian theme which the artist proceeded to employ throughout his life as a personal symbol. From the same year is a monumental canvas *Clocher du Village*, 1958, by **Syed Haider Raza**, a founding member of the revolutionary Bombay Progressive Artists' group along with Husain (estimate: £450,000 - 600,000, *illustrated right*). This year, the artist turned 90 and after living in France for over half a century, recently returned to India. This is part of an amazing group of early paintings by Raza coming from private American, Canadian and French collections that reflecting his love of landscape both in his home and adopted countries. The artist fuses stylistic techniques synonymous with French modernism with a vibrant palette that recalls classical Indian miniature painting.



PAKISTAN This sale presents a stellar group of works by artists from **Pakistan**; a young country with an age-old culture that is in a continuous state of flux - as the artists traverse East and West, tradition and modernity, and the local vs. global - where artistic dynamism continues to evolve and shows its greatest promise.



Reflecting the breadth of works in this section and the notable influence of traditional miniatures, from left to right: offered from *The Private Collection of Julian Sherrier*, *Untitled (Black and white composition)*, 1965, is by **Anwar Jalal Shemza** (1928-1985), who was recently featured in the 'Migrations' exhibition at the Tate in February 2012 (estimate: £2,000-3,000); *Dying Miniature*, 2008, by **Muhammad Zeeshan** (b. 1980) (estimate: £5,000 - 7,000); *Untitled (Rustam Series)*, 2011, is by **Khadim Ali** (b. 1978) whose work will be featured in *Documenta 2012* (estimate: £6,000-8,000); *A New Degree of Separation/Togetherness*, 2005, by **Talha Rathore** (b. 1969), points to Court painting from Rajasthan and the Punjab Hills (estimate: £3,500-5,000); and *Divided*, 2006, by **Aisha Khalid** (b. 1972) references the artist's meticulously made neo-miniatures in her *Page to Page* albums (estimate: £3,000 - 4,000).

From **Bengal**, highlights include *Visions of Ramdev - Song of the Shimbul Tree*, 2001, by **A. Ramachandran** (b. 1935) (estimate: £150,000-250,000) and *Stiff Necked Hero*, 1982, by **Bikash Bhattacharjee** (1940-2006) who is viewed by many as India's best 'Surrealist' (estimate: £45,000-65,000, *illustrated right*). The subject of this work is modelled after the patriarch played by Marlon Brando in *The Godfather*; it comes with excellent provenance, having formerly been part of one of the earliest collections of Indian art – that of Chester and Davida Herwitz.



CONTEMPORARY The striking works of British-Pakistani artist **Shezad Dawood** (b. 1974), such as his neon calligraphy, *He is successful who grows in purity*, 2007, (estimate: £8,000-12,000, *illustrated left*) reflect a keen cultural awareness, appropriating various forms of popular image making in both East and West. *Veil III*, by **Rashid Rana** (b. 1968) is a breakthrough work that sardonically subverts notions of

portraiture, femininity and modesty (estimate: £12,000 – 18,000, *illustrated right*). **Bharti Kher** (b. 1969) also fuses cross-cultural references in *Border in Red*, 2009, utilising the aesthetic potential of the bindi - an ancient symbol of beauty, marital status and spiritual awareness - to powerful contemporary effect (estimate: £50,000 - 70,000, *illustrated below left*). Kher gently subverts the bindis original associations, deconstructing their religious context and creating an abstract work of visual beauty. The collaborative artists **Jiten Thukral and Sumir**



Tagra, address current issues in urban India through a wide variety of stylistic devices and media. In the diptych *Somnium Genero - Aries 03*, 2006, the artistic duo plays with ideas of Photorealism and Surrealism. Through a strict adherence to naturalism and scrupulous attention to detail they create a virtual reality on their canvases (estimate: £20,000 - 30,000, *illustrated right*).



In 2011, London's Whitechapel Gallery's featured a landmark exhibition, *Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*. This auction features a vibrant section of photography, with many entry priced works coming from artists who have been celebrated internationally. Appearing for the first time at auction are works by: **Dayanita Singh** and **Simryn Gill**. The section is anchored by a rare opportunity for collectors: *The Khoj Portfolio*, 2007, a group of 12 whimsical self-portraits by leading contemporary artists which were originally sold to raise money for the non-profit artists' residency, Khoj. Featured in this group are: **Sheba Chhachhi** (b. 1958); **Shilpa Gupta** (b. 1976); **Gauri Gill** (b. 1970); **Tejal Shah** (b. 1979); **Anita Dube** (b. 1958); **Subodh Gupta** (b. 1964) *detail illustrated right*; **Bharti Kher** (b. 1969), **Pushpamala N.** (b. 1956); **Ravi Agarwal** (b. 1958); **Ranbir Kaleka** (b. 1953); **Sunil Gupta** (b. 1953); **Anup Mathew Thomas** (b. 1977). This portfolio highlights the growing interest in the medium of photography in South Asia.



For full information on all works offered please see the online catalogue:

http://christies.scene7.com/s7/brochure/flash_brochure.jsp?company=Christies&sku=5415_SaleCat&config=Christies/eCat_210x267_Full&locale=en&wb=000000&vc=plugins0%3d/skins/Christies/SWFs/brochureFullScreenPlugin_23032012.swf&viewer=/s7viewers/flash/genericbrochure.swf

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