

# CHRISTIE'S

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## DAVID HOCKNEY'S EGYPTIAN VISION A LANDMARK PAINTING

AT AUCTION FOR THE 1<sup>ST</sup> TIME AT CHRISTIE'S LONDON IN FEBRUARY  
FROM AN IMPORTANT BRITISH COLLECTION



David Hockney (b. 1937), *Great Pyramid at Giza with Broken Head from Thebes*, 1963

72 x 72in. (183 x 183cm.)

Estimate: £2.5 million to £3.5 million

**London** – In February 2013 Christie's Post-War & Contemporary Art department will offer for sale *Great Pyramid at Giza with Broken Head from Thebes* (1963). A unique, landmark painting, it stands as the only canvas to commemorate David Hockney's first trip to Egypt at the age of 26. Commissioned by art critic David Sylvester and journalist Mark Boxer at the Sunday Times, the trip came shortly after the artist's graduation from the Royal College of Art. It marks a watershed in his practice in terms of style, scale and composition. Forming part of an important British collection for more than forty years, this is the first time that this painting has ever been seen at auction (Estimate: £2,500,000-3,500,000).

*'Egypt is one of the most thrilling countries I've ever been to in the sense that these monuments are the oldest known buildings anywhere. After all, when Cleopatra showed Julius Caesar the pyramids, they were already two thousand years old and more. It is quite awe-inspiring; not even in China are there things older, and I think you feel connected with them, whoever you are'* **David Hockney, 1993** (D. Hockney, N. Stangos (ed.), *That's the Way I See it: David Hockney*, London 1993, p. 36).

**Francis Outred, *Christie's Head of Post-War & Contemporary Art, Europe*:** *'We are extremely privileged to be offering this landmark painting by David Hockney at auction for the very first time. Great Pyramid at Giza with Broken Head from Thebes holds a unique place in the artist's oeuvre, being the only surviving canvas created following his trip to Egypt in 1963. It represents a watershed moment in the artist's career, situated between Hockney's graduation from the Royal College of Art and his move to the sun-drenched swimming pools of Los Angeles in 1964. At the centre of the composition we find a single hieratic palm tree sprouting up towards the pinnacle of the geometric pyramid at Giza. The style of the painting is unmistakably Hockney, the artist breaking up the foreground with a piece of piping, forming a stark contrast to the broken Head of Thebes lying buried in the sand. In doing so, the artist was drawing a clear link between ancient and modern, the human and natural landscape.'*

*Great Pyramid at Giza with Broken Head from Thebes* follows on from Hockney's well-documented obsession with Egypt developed through his encounter with the ancient Egyptian art he encountered at the British Museum and later at the Pergamon Museum, Berlin, as well as his deep admiration for the poetry of Greek Alexandrian poet Constantine P. Cavafy. This was also a time of popular fascination with 'Egyptiana', culminating in Elizabeth Taylor's leading role as Cleopatra in 1963. The Egyptian inspiration first began to appear in Hockney's work as early as 1961 (with *A Grand Procession of Dignitaries* in semi-Egyptian style), and his trip in 1963 sponsored by the Sunday Times and David Sylvester was the fulfilment of a long-held dream. Whilst in Egypt, Hockney undertook some forty works on paper\*, but no canvases. This painting is the only surviving work to have been completed upon his return to Britain, standing as the most important monument to his trip.

First exhibited at the Kasmin Gallery in London in 1963, other major works from this inaugural solo show are now housed in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Hamburg Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Museum Calouste Gulbenkian and the British Council collection. It was with the proceeds of this highly successful, inaugural solo-exhibition that Hockney made his first trip to California in 1964. Since it was first exhibited in 1963, *Great Pyramid at Giza with Broken Head from Thebes* has formed part of major shows including the Calouste Gulbenkian exhibition of important post-War artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Francis Bacon and Jasper Johns held at the Tate Gallery, London in 1964, Hockney's major retrospective at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London in 1970 and in Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Palais du Louvre in 1974.

\*One of those drawings, *View from Nile Hilton*, was sold for £342,400 (estimate: £8,000-10,000) at Christie's London on 8 February 2001.

## **About Christie's**

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction and private sales in the first half of 2012 that totaled £2.2 billion/\$3.5 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 450 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War and Contemporary, Impressionist and Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. Private sales totaled £413.4 million/ \$661.5 million in the first half of 2012, an increase of 53% on the previous year.

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*\*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.*

**Images available on request**

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