

CHRISTIE'S

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MAX BECKMANN'S *BIRD'S HELL* TO LEAD CHRISTIE'S *IMPRESSIONIST & MODERN ART EVENING SALE* IN LONDON

BIRD'S HELL IS OFFERED AT AUCTION
FOR THE FIRST TIME

27 JUNE 2017



Max Beckmann, *Bird's Hell*, Oil on canvas, 47 1/4 x 63 1/4 in. (1938, estimate on request)

London – Max Beckmann's *Bird's Hell* (1938, estimate on request) will lead 20th Century at Christie's, a series of sales that take place from 17 to 30 June 2017, in the *Impressionist & Modern Art Evening Sale* on 27 June 2017, when it will be offered at auction for the first time. One of the most powerful paintings that Beckmann

created while in exile in Amsterdam it presents a searing and unforgettable vision of hell and is poised to set a world record price for the artist at auction. Begun in Amsterdam and completed in Paris at the end of 1938, this work ranks amongst the clearest and most important anti-Nazi statements that the artist ever made, mirroring the escalating violence, oppression and terror of the National Socialist regime. The painting will be on view in New York until 17 of May, Hong Kong from 25 to 29 May and London from 17 to 27 June 2017.

Painted with vigorous, almost gestural brushstrokes and bold, garish colours, *Bird's Hell* envelops the viewer in a sinister underworld in which monstrous bird-like creatures are engaged in an evil ritual of torture. Presiding over the scene is a multi-breasted bird who emerges from a pink egg in the centre of the composition. To her right, a crouching black and yellow bird looms over golden coins spread before him, while behind the central figure, a group of naked women stand huddled together. Heightening the sense of hysteria is the group of figures standing within a glowing, blood red doorway to the left of the composition. Guarded by another knife-wielding bird, they return the bird-woman's gesture, their right arms raised in unison in the same furious salute. At the front of the scene, a naked man – the symbol of innocence within this reign of terror – is shackled to a table, held down by another bird that is slashing his back in careful, horizontal lines.

Continuing the Germanic tradition of the depiction of hell, this painting echoes the gruesome allegorical scenes of Hieronymus Bosch's famed *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, while at the same time, takes aspects of Classicism and mythology to turn reality into a timeless evocation of human suffering. In this way, *Bird's Hell*, like Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* or Max Ernst's *Fireside Angel* of the same period, transcends the time and the political situation in which it was made to become a universal and singular symbol of humanity.

Adrien Meyer, International Director of Impressionist & Modern Art, Christie's New York: "*Bird's Hell* was painted in 1938 in Amsterdam as a direct attack on the cruelty of the Nazi regime. A year earlier, Hitler's government had confiscated over 500 of his works from German museums, and included some of these in the notorious *Degenerate Art* exhibition. This emblematic picture has since been unanimously recognized as the *Guernica* of Expressionism. The grasping composition echoes the fantastical world of 16th century master Hieronymus Bosch. The current owner first attempted to buy this masterpiece in 1956 and succeeded thirty years later, lending it since to the most prestigious exhibitions around the world. Its upcoming sale represents a unique opportunity to acquire not only a Beckmann monument but also a true piece of history."

Jay Vincze, Head of Impressionist & Modern Art, Christie's, London: "We are honoured to present such a seminal work by Max Beckmann at auction for the first time. *Bird's Hell* stands alongside Picasso's *Guernica* as one of the most politically charged paintings of its time and it is a rare opportunity to offer a work of such historical significance by Beckmann. For the artist there were two worlds, one of spiritual life and the other of political life. In this painting he is asking the viewer to decide which is more important. It is a terrifying, yet timeless history painting and a masterpiece of the artist's oeuvre."

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Images available on request

About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction, private and digital sales in the first half of 2016 that totalled £2.1 billion / \$3 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Christie's offers around 350 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 & Contemporary, Impressionist & Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. 2016 marks Christie's 250th anniversary. 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. Click [HERE](#) to view a short film about Christie's and the 250th anniversary. Christie's has a global presence in 46 countries, with 12 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Mumbai. Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in growth markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.

**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.*

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