

CHRISTIE'S

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RENÉ MAGRITTE'S *L'EMPIRE DES LUMIÈRES*, 1949 HIGHLIGHTS CHRISTIE'S NOVEMBER EVENING SALE OF IMPRESSIONIST & MODERN ART

- *The Earliest Painting from Magritte's Iconic Series*
 - *Initially Owned by Nelson A. Rockefeller*
 - *To be Sold in New York, 13 November 2017*



Property from an Important Private Collection
René Magritte (1898-1967), *L'empire des lumières*, Painted in Brussels, 1949
Oil on canvas, 19.1/8 x 23.1/8 in. | Estimate: \$14-18 million

New York – On November 13, Christie's will offer René Magritte's *L'empire des lumières*, 1949 (estimate: \$14-18 million) as a highlight of the Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale. The present canvas is celebrated as one of the artist's most iconic works and is the very first example that Magritte completed from his landmark *L'empire des lumières* series. A theme that he would spend the subsequent fifteen years exploring. Coming from a private collection, *L'empire des lumières*, was first-owned by Nelson A. Rockefeller. It was acquired by Rockefeller in 1950, when he was both chairman and president of Chase National Bank as well as the chairman of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. This marks the first time that this canvas has ever been offered at auction. *L'empire des lumières*, 1949 will be on public view at Christie's Hong Kong from 28 September – 3 October.

Sharon Kim, International Director of Impressionist & Modern Art at Christie's, comments, "Christie's is honored to have the opportunity to bring this important work to auction for the first time when the global market is currently exhibiting a strong demand for surrealist masterpieces. This a landmark work in Magritte's oeuvre—

the first complete canvas in the artist's iconic series L'empire des lumières—making this an extremely exciting opportunity for buyers.”

The iconic series, that was launched with this picture, is centered around a concept which explores the harmony and tension between day-and-night, a theme at the very heart of Surrealism. Additional paintings from this series were acquired by many of the greatest private collectors of the 20th-century, including Jean and Dominique de Menil, Peggy Guggenheim, composer Richard Rodgers, and Harry Torczyner, one of Magritte's most dedicated collectors. They also can be seen in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.

Each successive picture displays the key elements seen in the present, original *L'empire des lumières*—a nocturnal street scene in a placid, well-maintained quarter of town. This quiet view was similar to Magritte's own rue de Essegheem in Brussels, with eerily shuttered houses, windows faintly lit from within and a single lamppost, shining forth like a beacon. The hour is late, and most of the occupants are presumably asleep. Only the onlooker is witness to the bizarre vision above—a night sky with neither moon nor stars, lacking the least hint of darkness. For as far as one can see, a blue sunlit sky with lazily drifting white clouds fills the ether expanse. In the characteristic, straightly descriptive manner in which Magritte painted this scene, all is as natural—but in myriad connotations, also as paradoxical—as night and day.

The beauty and revelation of *L'empire des lumières*—perhaps what contributed to its enduring status—is that Magritte reconciles the traditionally opposing elements of earth and sky, night and day, darkness and light to the underlying harmony found in these contrasts. “After I had painted *L'empire des lumières*,” Magritte explained to a friend in 1966, “I got the idea that night and day exist together, that they are one. This is reasonable, or at the very least it's in keeping with our knowledge: in the world night always exists at the same time as day. (Just as sadness always exists in some people at the same time as happiness in others.) But such ideas are not poetic. What *is* poetic is the visible image of the picture” (quoted S. Whitfield, *Magritte*, exh. cat., The South Bank Centre, London, 1992, no. 111).

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Public Exhibition:

Hong Kong, 28 September-3 October
Additional Dates to be announced

Auction:

Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale
13 November 2017, New York

About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction, private and digital sales in first half of 2017 that totalled £2.35 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.

Alongside regular sales online, Christie's has a global presence in 46 countries, with 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, and Shanghai.

**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and are reported net of applicable fees.*

Images available on request

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