

For Immediate Release

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**THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF R.B. KITAJ, ORIGINATOR OF
THE SCHOOL OF LONDON, TO BE SOLD AT CHRISTIE'S
LONDON IN FEBRUARY 2008**



'Of course it's good fun to play the rebel—I've often said that I feel like I'm some well-paid misfit trudging down the Zeitgeist road and meeting all the art troops marching in the opposite direction (some of whom even wave genially to me)'

R.B. Kitaj, quoted in R. Morphet, *R.B. Kitaj: A Retrospective*, London, 1994

**The Collection of R.B. Kitaj: Thursday 7 February 2008 at 1pm
Christie's London**

London – On 7 February 2008, Christie's will pay tribute to R.B. Kitaj (1932-2007), a celebrated artist and the originator of the 'School of London.' **The Collection of R.B. Kitaj** comprises over 50 works from the painter's personal collection, the majority of which were created by artists he associated with the 'School of London' such as Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach, David Hockney and of course Kitaj himself. The works pay a moving and insightful testimony to the friendships between Kitaj and these fellow artists, many of whom are now major fixtures in the Post-War and Contemporary Art field. This highly personal collection includes rare works, some of them gifts from the artists, and many of them appear at auction for the first time including oil paintings, drawings and prints; the collection is estimated in the region of £3 million.

"Christie's is honoured to offer such a personal and important collection. R.B. Kitaj was an artist whose works dwelled upon and were fuelled by personal and collective experience and memory. Many of these pictures reveal his connections with his friends, friendships and the artists whom he respected and adored," said **Amy Cappellazzo, International Head of Post War & Contemporary Art at Christie's.**

“Kitaj was the first artist to identify a ‘School of London’ and so it is fitting that his collection is being offered in London, a city that he loved and which provided the backdrop for so many of his works and so much of his career,” says **Pilar Ordovas, Head of Post War & Contemporary Art at Christie’s London.**

In 1976, American-born R.B. Kitaj curated an exhibition entitled *The Human Clay*. In his catalogue essay, he referred to himself as a member of the ‘School of London’, a term that then sparked both debate and denial but which now has come to evoke the works of a select group of artists which includes Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Leon Kossoff, Frank Auerbach and R.B. Kitaj.



Within this group, one of the most legendary friendships was that between Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud, who both were close friends of Kitaj. Early on Bacon had declared Kitaj to be the most promising young artist of his day. During the early 1950s, Bacon and Freud were almost inseparable, two forces to be reckoned with both on the Post-War British art scene and in the bars and nightclubs of London. *Francis Bacon, 1951* (estimate: £100,000-150,000) by Lucian Freud (b. 1922) is a fascinating drawing showing a contemplative Bacon standing in a self-conscious and carnal pose (*picture left*).

The Collection of R.B. Kitaj includes 14 works by Frank Auerbach (b. 1931). These provide insight into the friendship between the two artists and into the private world of Auerbach himself such as the frank and arresting charcoal *Self Portrait, 1958* (estimate: £100,000-150,000). Auerbach has long preferred to paint the people in his own tight circle, often rendering the features of the same person again and again. Helen Gillespie was a preferred early subject, featuring in at least three oil portraits by Auerbach painted during the early 1960s including *Portrait of Helen Gillespie I* (estimate: £400,000-600,000) (*pictured right*). Other personal works include *Catherine Lambert, 1983* (estimate: £200,000-300,000) and *Head of Paula Eyles, 1972* (estimate: £200,000-300,000).



Kitaj’s own pictures convey a strong sense of personal experience and memory: his *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror, 1982* (estimate: £30,000-40,000) shows the artist paying knowing tribute to the history of art and self-portraiture. Similarly, *Marynka Smoking, 1980* (estimate: £70,000-100,000), an exquisite pastel, is a beguiling representation of the female nude that

ties into Kitaj's complex inter-layering of memory, experience and his own visual and literary learning.

Kitaj's own features are shown in an absorbing portrait by his former classmate, David Hockney (b. 1937), *Ron Kitaj outside the Academy Vienna* (estimate: £25,000-35,000). Kitaj's influence on many of his classmates at the Royal College of Art in London was vast. This older, profoundly literary and figurative artist was, in the late 1950s, fighting against the prevailing currents. His example profoundly influenced a great number of artists, including Hockney himself. It is telling that almost two decades later, Hockney's intimate portrait shows Kitaj outside the Akademie der Bildenden Künste, where he had studied under Schiele's friend Albert Paris von Gütersloh.

A further selection of works from the R.B. Kitaj Collection will be offered in the London Prints sales in March and June 2008.

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A selection of images is available on request

Notes to Editors

Christie's London Auctions in February 2008 of Impressionist & Modern Art and Post War & Contemporary Art:

- Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale including Art of the Surreal: 4 February 2008
- Impressionist and Modern Art Day Sale: 5 February 2008
- Impressionist and Modern Works on Paper: 5 February 2008
- Post War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale: 6 February 2008
- Post War & Contemporary Art Day Sale: 7 February 2008
- The Collection of R.B. Kitaj: Thursday 7 February 2008

The Post War and Contemporary Art Sales including The Collection of R.B. Kitaj will be on public view from 1 February 2008 at Christie's South Kensington, 85 Old Brompton Road SW7.

All auctions will take place at Christie's, 8 King Street, SW1Y

About Christie's

Christie's is the world's leading art business with global auction sales in 2006 that totalled £2.51 billion / \$4.67 billion. Worldwide sales for the first half of 2007 totalled £1.63 billion / \$3.25 billion, an increase of 32% by £ and 45% by \$ from the same period last year and highest half year sales ever in art market history. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service, and international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's conducted the greatest auctions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and today remains a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 600 sales annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$600 to over \$80 million*. Christie's has 85 offices in 43 countries and 14 salerooms around the world including London, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv,

Dubai and Hong Kong. Most recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging markets such as China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Dubai, Mumbai and Russia. Christie's also offers its clients worldwide access to its sales through Christie's LIVE™, its unique, real-time online bidding service. *Estimates do not include buyer's premium.