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PICASSO POWER AT CHRISTIE'S



Pablo Picasso, *Homme à l'épée*, 1969,
(estimate: £2,500,000-3,500,000)



Pablo Picasso, *Chat et homard*, 1965 (estimate:
(£800,000-1,200,000)

Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale 7 February 2005

London – Christie's evening sale of *Impressionist and Modern Art* will be led by a number of major Post-War paintings by Pablo Picasso, a period in which the qualities of humour, rebellion and energy characterize the artist's work. Bursting with colour and brio, *Homme à l'épée*, painted in 1969, carries the highest estimate of the group, £2,500,000-3,500,000.

Picasso's dramatic Post-War paintings are currently hugely sought-after by collectors of Post-War modernism. As a consequence prices have risen steadily over the past three years," says Jussi Pylkkänen, International Director of Impressionist and Modern Art. *In the recent Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale in New York, most of the pictures by Picasso that were offered sold far in excess of their estimates. These included his powerful and spectacular 'Mousquetaire à la pipe', painted in 1968 which soared past its \$4,000,000-6,000,000 estimate to sell for \$7,175,700.*

Painted on a grand scale and packed with wall-power, *Homme à l'épée* shows a dashing figure with drawn sword, preparing for action. Picasso used such cavalier motifs a number of times in his later work, these expressions of masculine virility reflecting the tempestuous personality of the artist. In the energy of his 1960s paintings, visible even in the brushstrokes, we see that Picasso was as much a man of action when he was painting as the *Homme à l'épée* himself.

The physicality of the broad, swirling brushstrokes in his *Buste de femme* (estimate: £500,000-700,000), of 1968, conveys to the viewer an idea of the intense, frenetic activity of the painter at work, regardless of his years. In this canvas, Picasso's deliberately limited palette and his monumental depiction of the woman play havoc with our preconceptions of the depiction of feminine grace, gleefully toying with the deepest building blocks of beauty and aesthetics. Another 1960s Picasso, *Chat et homard*, from 1965 (estimate: £800,000-1,200,000), is packed with Picasso's infectious enthusiasm for life. Depicting a hungry cat playing, or perhaps fighting, with a lobster, this canvas is filled with humour. Traditional elements from still life have burst to life - the large scale of the picture heightens its action and drama, while the vivid paint texture adds an extra immediacy. At the same time, it recalls Picasso's earlier paintings of cats, for instance his tormented wartime images of cats devouring birds, revisiting his old theme but filling it with exuberant bravura.

The process of expanding upon and revisiting themes became increasingly important to Picasso during the Post-War period. In 1946 Picasso painted a series of pictures in various media of his lover, Françoise Gilot. As he explored her physiognomy again and again, he introduced an increasing amount of stylization, with *Tête de femme aux boucles vertes* (estimate: £500,000-700,000) marking the culmination of this evolution. By replacing his classical draughtsmanship with near-abstract fields of colour in deep, rich oils, Picasso has taken Matisse's colourism to new and alien domains. Matisse once told Picasso that should he ever paint Françoise, he would colour her hair green. Picasso saw this as a challenge, and here set about creating his own image of the green-haired Françoise.

La cafetière bleue (Cafetière et tasse), demonstrates the chameleon-like ease with which Picasso could redevelop and reinvent his art in order to always be at the cutting edge (estimate: £350,000-550,000). Painted in 1944, it is part of a series in which the artist represented almost the same scene again and again with increasing stylization and colour. The simple objects in this Chardin-esque setting are filled with great verve as the artist's imagination assaults the theme and its possibilities.

Picasso's thirst for innovation began long before the Post-War period: *Nu à la draperie*, painted in 1907 is also offered (estimate: £300,000-500,000). During the period in which this work was painted, Picasso embarked on possibly the greatest revolution that art had ever seen, the invention of Cubism. *Nu à la draperie* relates to the celebrated 'Dance of the Veils' in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, and is clearly a development from his masterpiece, *Les desmoiselles d'Avignon*, painted only weeks earlier. *Nu à la draperie* therefore provides an exciting insight into the early development of Cubism. Influenced by Cézanne, African sculpture and myriad other factors and elements, Picasso was producing a new path, a new mode of representation that would turn figurative art on its head.

It is this zest for revolution that we see repeated throughout Picasso's life, as he constantly strove to discover new ways of seeing, and more importantly, new ways of representing.

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Impressionist and 20th century art at Christie's London in February 2005

Impressionist and Modern Art Evening sale, 7 February

The Art of the Surreal Evening Sale, 7 February

Impressionist and Modern Art Day Sale, 8 February

Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale, 9 February

Impressionist and Modern Works on Paper, 10 February

Post-War and Contemporary Art Day Sale, 10 February