

For Immediate Release

4 January 2006

Contact:	Christina Freyberg	020 7389 2117	cfreyberg@christies.com
	Stephanie Manstein	020 7389 2962	smanstein@christies.com

SINGULARLY SURREAL AT CHRISTIE'S



Giorgio de Chirico
I pesci sacri, 1919
Estimate: £1,100,000-1,500,000



Salvador Dalí
Galatée, 1954-1956
Estimate: £800,000-1,200,000

The Art of the Surreal Christie's King Street 6 February 2006

London – A strong selection of important Surrealist paintings will be offered at Christie's in *The Art of the Surreal* evening auction on Monday 6 February 2006. This will take place immediately following the *German and Austrian Art* and *Impressionist and Modern Art* evening auction. Surrealist Art is a growing part of 20th century art collecting and over the last year, Christie's has confirmed its dominant position in this field. The February 2005 sale was a resounding success and realised the highest ever total for this category, setting a new world record for Yves Tanguy, whose *Les derniers jours*, 1944, sold for £4 million.

"Christie's important sales of Surrealist Art have enjoyed phenomenal successes and established current auction records for many celebrated artists. Among the most exciting work offered in this sale is an early 1919 painting by Giorgio de Chirico, 'I pesci sacri', which was formerly in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art New York. Other highlights include works by Dalí, Domínguez, Ernst, Arp, Matta, Masson, Magritte and Delvaux," said Olivier Camu, specialist in charge of the sale.

A superb oil on canvas by Giorgio de Chirico, *I pesci sacri* (The Sacred Fish) (estimate: £1,100,000-1,500,000) leads the sale. It is arguably the final work of de Chirico's first series of great metaphysical masterpieces painted towards the end of the Great War in the winter of 1918. It stands at the cross-roads between a mysterious sense of the past and the uneasy atmosphere of the present. The work depicts two herrings drying amidst a strange assortment of still-life objects. Like many of de Chirico's early metaphysical paintings, the title of the work and its subject matter are strongly influenced by Ancient Greece.

One of the other exciting highlights is Salvador Dalí's *Galatée*, an oil on canvas from 1954-1956 (estimate: £800,000-1,200,000). In this large work, Dalí portrays his wife and muse, Gala, in the guise of a classical Greek beauty Galatea, levitating in space over the bay of Port Lligat. Like many of his important paintings from this period, the work presents a fusion of religious iconography, 'nuclear mysticism' and his own confused personal self-identification with that of his wife Gala. While in *Mirage*, dated from 1946 (estimate: £250,000-350,000) Dalí uses the conventional notion of a mirage as seen in the desert, as a metaphor for a girl's illusion of love.

Max Ernst's *La forêt*, 1925 (estimate: £350,000-450,000) is one of the very first of his paintings to use *frottage*, the accidental technique of taking rubbings from natural forms. Here, Ernst builds up a strange and mysteriously leafless forest made up of only three vaguely anthropomorphic trees, by scrubbing and scraping paint over a canvas laid over pieces of wood in order to reproduce the natural patterns of its grain.

The sale features a number of works by Jean (Hans) Arp, the highlight of which is an important and colourful wood relief executed in 1928, *Construction: balcon II* (estimate: £500,000-700,000). As the title suggests, this is the second and more developed of two abstract works with oval forms. Other works include *Constellation*, a wood relief from 1932 (estimate: £250,000-350,000) where Arp has created a work consisting purely of simple forms derived, but not copied, from nature, and *Bouteilles-nombril* (estimate: £150,000-200,000) an earlier wood relief from 1926, that was formerly in the collection of the Arp family.

One of the finest and best-known early works by Roberto Matta, *The Morphology of Desire* is also offered for sale (estimate: £380,000-450,000). Painted in 1938, it is one of the first paintings in which Matta put the techniques of 'psychological morphology' into practice.

Started before and finished after Spain's Civil War of 1937, André Masson's *Vue emblématique de Tolède*, painted in 1933-39 (estimate: £600,000-800,000), is probably the artist's most important painting to come up at auction, and is Masson's equivalent to Picasso's 'Guernica'. It charts an intriguing and turbulent period both in the artist's life and in the world around him using the rich worlds of dreams and nature for imagery and inspiration.

A great selection of works by Spanish Surrealist painter Oscar Domínguez is also included in the sale. *Le Lion du désert* is an oil on canvas from 1934 (estimate: £40,000-70,000) in which he transforms the landscape of his native Canary Isles into an eerie and barren desert of the imagination. Domínguez's

invention of decalcomania, literally pressing paint, was to have a huge impact on the Surrealists and an example of this technique can be seen in *Paysage fantastique*, a recent discovery, painted in 1938 (estimate: £80,000-120,000). Also offered, is an extremely rare surrealist objet, *Cajo con piano y toro (tableau objet)* (estimate: £40,000-70,000) which was executed in *circa* 1936.

A group of four René Magritte works also feature, including one early oil of 1927, *La fin des temps*, (estimate: £150,000-200,000) and a wonderful 1948 gouache of *Le Domaine d'Arnheim*, a celebrated subject (estimate: £120,000-160,000).

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Images available on request

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Notes to Editors:

In 1989 Christie's conducted the first auction of Dada and Surrealist Art, and since February 2001 has held annual sales of *The Art of the Surreal*. During this time, Christie's has established the current auction record prices for paintings by Magritte, Domínguez, Miró, de Chirico, Delvaux, Dalí, Ernst and Bellmer as well as eleven out of ten of the top fourteen prices for Magritte, five out of the top six for Miró, eight out of the top ten for Max Ernst and the top five prices for Delvaux. The February 2005 sale was a huge success, and established a new world auction record for Yves Tanguy's *Les derniers jours*, 1944, which sold for £4,040,000.