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FROM RAJA RAVI VARMA TO RAVINDER REDDY TREASURES OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART

Modern and Contemporary Indian Art

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New York – The rapidly developing field of Modern and Contemporary Indian art has become one of the art market's fastest growing areas. As market leader in the field, Christie's continues to hold records for sale totals and major artists and caters to an international art market with sales in New York, Dubai, Hong Kong and London. On March 21, the sale of *Modern and Contemporary Indian Art* in New York will feature a long history of South Asian Art starting with a rare work by the early modern icon, Raja Ravi Varma and continuing into the cutting edge contemporary work of artists such as Ravinder Reddy and Chitra Ganesh. The sale is expected to realize in excess of \$8 million.

Tyeb Mehta, at \$1.6 million still the highest selling modern Indian artist at auction, will be in the spotlights again with *Diagonal XV*, a painting he created in 1975 (estimate: \$750,000-1,000,000). Exposure to works by Francis Bacon and a trip to the United States in 1968 where he viewed Western Modernism firsthand, contributed to Mehta's decision in the late 1960s to abandon his expressionistic painting style for a smooth canvas with an emphasis on line and shape over contour. In the 1970s the artist began work on his 'Diagonal' series in which each painting's composition was built around a thick oblique line running right to left, fracturing his figures in a dynamic and tumultuous fashion. *Diagonal XV*, formerly in the collection of Mr. Gurchuran Das, onetime Chairman of Proctor & Gamble in India, is an important example of this series.

Vasudeo S. Gaitonde's, magnificent *Untitled*, 1968 (estimate: \$500,000-700,000) is from the estate of the renowned Krishna Riboud. A descendant of the Tagores, one of India's most renowned artistic families, and married to Jean Riboud, a French industrial magnate, Mrs. Riboud was awarded the *Légion d'Honneur* for her work in the arts. With an ardent passion for Asian antiquities and textiles, she was instrumental in the formation of the collection of the Musée Guimet in Paris. Two works from her collection by Gaitonde were offered last September and this third extremely large and rare work, *Untitled*, 1968, a painting that successfully straddles the duality between density and weightlessness, is among the highlights of this sale.

Francis Newton Souza's *Untitled (Black Nude)*, painted in 1965 (estimate: \$350,000-500,000), is part of Souza's black series, on which he arguably embarked after having seen Goya's *Pinturas Negras*. Suffering from financial difficulties and alcoholism, Souza's all black paintings emerged as a stark and poignant testimony to his personal state and his feelings on the state of art in general. Critics have suggested that Souza's black paintings, a testament to the use of impasto, are the climax of a period of intense artistic creativity for the artist and take a crucial place in his oeuvre for offering a unique and unmediated window into the troubled soul of the painter.

Vasantasena painted by Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906) occupies a unique position in the sale as his work rarely comes to the market (estimate: \$350,000-400,000). Born into one of the prestigious feudal families of Travancore, Raja Ravi Varma grew up surrounded by poets, musicians and painters. Learning the traditional Indian techniques of watercolor, Varma, through his own resourcefulness and innate talent went on to learn the Western technique of oil painting, extremely uncommon in India at the time. In 1893, the artist established the Ravi Varma Oleographic and Chromolithographic Printing Workshop, a printing press focused on bringing art to the masses. Fritz Schleicher, an esteemed printer from Berlin, became the workshop's managing director and *Vasantasena* came into his family's possession through inheritance. *Vasantasena*, which means spring, depicts a beautiful woman in light fluttering robes placed within a landscape which easily resembles the first blossoms of the season. Raja Ravi Varma's well-known paintings of Indian mythological figures redefined the popular imagery available to India's masses and cemented the artist's place as one of the country's greatest painters. He is considered a National Treasure whose works are non-exportable out of India. This is one of the few paintings by this artist in a collection outside of India.

From a Private Swiss collection come works that were formerly in the personal collection of legendary gallery owner, Mr. Kekoo Gandhi of Chemould Gallery in Mumbai. Gandhi discovered and nurtured many of India's renowned artists throughout his longstanding and storied career. This group features some of the most significant works by Syed Haider Raza and Jagdish Swaminathan to come to auction with many of these works previously published and exhibited.

Christie's has achieved world auction records for both the Indian Modernists such as Mehta, Gaitonde, Syed Haider Raza and Ram Kumar, while also showcasing the work of young contemporary South Asian artists. For the first time, Christie's catalogue of Modern and Contemporary Indian Art is featuring a contemporary work: the superb golden *Lakshmi Devi* by cutting-edge artist, Ravinder Reddy (estimate: \$150,000-200,000). Reddy references ancient Indian sculptural traditions in his massive polyester-resin heads. *Lakshmi Devi*, a glamorous golden head of a woman executed in 2003 is a fabulous example of Reddy's 'super-sizing' technique whereby he inflates the busts of traditional Indian goddesses into gargantuan proportions. The artist cunningly imbues his work with a sense of serenity and docility while at the same time these brightly colored and gilded sculptures possess many of the characteristics of Pop Art.

Another important work by Atul Dodiya, who is often viewed as the father of the Contemporary movement in India, is represented with *July*, painted in 1987 (estimate: \$100,000-150,000). The artist's allegorical collages fuse fragments of art historical masterpieces with moments of pop culture, current events and autobiography. Dodiya has become a widely recognized figurehead in South Asian contemporary art, influencing many of the country's burgeoning younger artists. *July* is the first of an important series featuring a stark interior and a single central figure. Taking cues from the two-dimensional works of David Hockney, *July* depicts a typical incident in Indian life during the monsoon season when wildlife and domestic life converge. The contemporary works feature artists Chitra Ganesh, Baiju Parthan, Sudarshan Shetty, Shibu Natesan, Jitish Kallat and T.V. Santhosh amongst others.

Auction: Modern and Contemporary Indian Art

March 21 at 10 a.m.

Viewing: Christie's Galleries at Rockefeller Center, New York

March 16 – 20

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Christie's is the world's leading art business with global auction sales in 2006 that totaled £2.51 billion / \$4.67 billion. This 36% increase over 2005 marks the highest total in company and in art auction 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, jewelry, photographs, collectibles, wine, cars and more. Prices range from \$200 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.

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