

For Immediate Release

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PREVIOUSLY UNRECORDED BRANCUSI SCULPTURE TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S

**Impressionist and Modern Art
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New York – A superb, previously unrecorded sculpture by Constantin Brancusi, one of his most celebrated compositions, *Bird in Space* (estimate: \$8,000,000-12,000,000), will be offered as one of the highlights in Christie's evening sale of *Impressionist and Modern Art* on May 4. The sculpture comes from a European Private Collection where it has been since 1937, having previously been in the collection of Léonie Ricou, a turn of the 20th century Parisian collector and friend to many artists in addition to Brancusi – Picasso, Modigliani and Gonzalez in particular.

The recently rediscovered *Bird in Space*, carved in 1922-23, can rightfully be considered as a keystone in the history of 20th century sculpture, reflecting a crucial turning point in Brancusi's sculptural evolution and in his extended series devoted to the bird subject. The present sculpture stands between the version belonging to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the one at the Fondation Beyeler, Switzerland. With these other two known early versions, the present sculpture marks the very beginning of Brancusi's *Birds in Space*.

Apart from its art historical importance however, the most striking element in *Bird in Space* is the very sophistication and delicacy of its execution. The subject of the bird is so closely captured within the carved marble, that even the stone's white veins play an important role, cleverly linking the two parts of the body into a unified whole. From whichever angle the sculpture is observed, there is a wonderful sense of balance and refinement, taking full advantage of the third dimension.

Léonie Ricou, a Parisian with a deep passion for contemporary art and literature whose portrait was painted by Modigliani and Picasso and sculpted by Brancusi, was in close and regular contact with

both the established and the promising artists and writers of her time. She held *salons* at her Boulevard Raspail home and socialized with the likes of Guillaume Apollinaire, Modigliani, Villon, Gleizes, Léger, Derain and Picasso.

Until now, the existing literature and correspondence supported that Ricou owned 3 works by Brancusi: a *Maiistra* in polished bronze, a *Baiser*, and most probably a *Muse endormie*. The rediscovery of *Bird in Space* now establishes that the collection held four Brancusi sculptures. With her second husband, the Belgian Alexandre Stoppelaere, Ricou acquired the present sculpture and had it shipped to Brussels in 1928. After Ricou died in circa 1930, the sculpture remained with Stoppelaere until 1937, when it was sold to a predecessor of the present owner. Amazingly, the original crate, first used when the piece was shipped to Brussels, has survived, preserving the sculpture until its recent discovery.

Auction: Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale May 4 at 7 p.m.

Viewing: Christie's Galleries at Rockefeller Center

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Images available on request

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More information about Christie's sale of *Impressionist and Modern Art* can be found on www.christies.com. All lots from the sale can be viewed online along with full catalogue descriptions on Lotfinder®, which also allows clients to leave absentee bids. www.christies.com provides information on more than 80 sale categories, buying and selling at auction, complete auction results, and Christie's international auction calendar.