

For Immediate Release

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JUAN GRIS AND PAUL SIGNAC SET TO BREAK RECORDS AT CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK

Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale May 9, 2007

New York – On May 9, Christie's New York will offer *Le pot de geranium* by Juan Gris and *Arrière du Tub* by Paul Signac, two works set to establish new world auction records for the artist. The *Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale* will further include prime examples by Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and René Magritte. The sale also features a group of Van Gogh drawings from a Private American Collection as well as works from the Estate of Hilde Gerst, offered in both evening and day sales.

Juan Gris' s *Le pot de geranium*, 1915 (estimate: \$14 – 18 million) is a virtual guidebook to the artist's compositional practices, preferred subject matter, formal interests and chromatic concerns. The painting showcases Gris in his most richly imagined and profoundly inventive synthetic cubist manner, infused with the brilliance of a master colorist. *Le pot de geranium* was one of the works that was created in 1915, an important year for Gris which saw him reconnect with his art after a period of deep financial anxieties and frustrations. The outbreak of the war had left Gris without a dealer and a regular income since Kahnweiler had to flee Paris. It was only in April of 1915, when Gris and Kahnweiler mutually agreed to suspend their contract, that Léonce Rosenberg stepped in and provided Gris not only with a means of support but also with a new atmosphere of respectability and 'cleanliness' since Rosenberg was French. Gris carried over several significant aspects of his previous collages to his new paintings. He continued to explore the interaction of contrasting objects, he further experimented with the layering of planes but he also started working with rich

and varied colors, giving up on the limited tonalities of the collages. This painting is one of the prime examples showing why Juan Gris is often referred to as Cubism's most exquisite colorist.

A painting of extraordinary luminosity and beauty is Paul Signac's *Arrière du Tub*, 1888 (estimate: \$6 – 8 million). The painting was executed in Asnières, northwest of Paris, where Signac's parents lived. The image Signac renders in this painting is not that of a lush and leisurely paradise – which he does convey in *Avant du Tub*, 1888 – but it illustrates the rapid encroachment of industry. The bridge of Asnières is at the center of the painting and a train crosses it at the far right, moving into the image and evoking both the sights and sounds of modern life. Apart from evoking ambiguous feelings about modernity and the delicate balance between nature and industry, the Asnières paintings are also key works in Signac's oeuvre in that they introduce divisionism, a new technique Signac discovered through Seurat. Although deeply influenced by the Impressionists in general and Monet in particular, Signac developed his own signature style by combining a luminous and colorful palette with a rigorous method of progressively adding smaller strokes of color. In its composition, color and brushstroke, *Arrière du Tub* depicts Signac at the height of his divisionist powers while it also forms a clear bridge between the past and the present, recalling the revolutionary work of the Impressionists while inspiring the Fauves in their continuing quest for freedom of color.

Doris Grosse – affectionately called Dodo – was Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's lover and favorite model during his Dresdner years. Graceful, impulsive, sensual and unselfconscious about her sexuality, Dodo embodied many of the qualities mostly admired by the artists of *Die Brücke* and it is her body, often naked and adorned with exotic attributes, that appears in Kirchner's finest early paintings. An erotic and sensual life-size portrait of Dodo standing naked in Kirchner's Dresdner studio, *Dodo mit grossem Fächer*, 1910 (estimate: \$12 – 18 million) is one of the largest and most accomplished of these great works. The work expresses a dynamic union between primitive and modern, combining Kirchner's absorbed influence of Fauvism as well as showing the angularity and raw expression the artist had found in 'primitive' art such as the art work of the Palau Islands which he had discovered in the Dresdner Ethnographic Museum. On another level, *Dodo mit grossem Fächer* is also a painting describing the interior life of Kirchner's studio, the prime arena in which a fusion of ancient and modern, nature and artifice was deliberately sought. This work precisely expresses the kind of natural ease and spiritual and sexual vitality Kirchner aimed to induce in the neo-primitive decoration of his studio. The importance of the painting to the artist is clear since the work still shows up in photographs taken in Kirchner's Berlin studio, years after he had left Dodo and Dresden.

While residing in Fontainebleau near Paris in the summer of 1921 with his wife Olga and their son Paulo, Pablo Picasso experienced one of many extremely fruitful and creative passages in his career. Not only did he continue his cubist investigations of the previous decade, he also embarked upon a

series of massive, neoclassical female nudes of which *Tête et main de femme* (estimate: \$14 – 18 million), with its massive sculptural forms and enduring physical presence, is a prime example. The painting depicts Olga, who inspired Picasso to make his first neoclassical oil painting in 1917 and whose image continues to permeate his classicism for the next six years. The sources for Picasso's neoclassicism are extraordinarily rich and varied and include Italian elements such as the ruins of Pompeii and the works of Raphael and his contemporaries as well as the French neoclassical tradition of Poussin, Ingres, Puvis de Chavannes and Renoir. *Tête et main de femme* was restituted to the Alphonse Kann family heirs in 2003 and has resided in private collections since.

Painted in 1918, *La femme au collier vert (Madame Menier)*, belongs to Modigliani's most poised and serenely balanced portraits (estimate: \$12 – 16 million). The portrait displays all the characteristics of the signature facial type Modigliani had created after 1916: the elongated oval face, the graceful swan-neck, the sensuous pursed lips and the impenetrable almond-shaped eyes. The light in the work is cool and diffuse, and the sitter's radiant face emerges from the smoky stillness of the background. Madame Menier, perhaps the wealthiest of Modigliani's sitters, was the spouse of Georges Menier whose family owned the famous Chocolat Menier business. Georges had the time and the means to enjoy art and he became one of Modigliani's patrons after the artist's *succès de scandale* in 1917 during which his paintings of nudes had been seized by the police from the Weill gallery. Menier acquired a Modigliani nude and later commissioned a portrait of his wife through Modigliani's dealer Zborowski.

The work of Alberto Giacometti will be represented by two quintessential bronzes, *L'homme qui chavire* (estimate: \$6.5 – 8.5 million) and *Femme de Venise I* (estimate: \$3.5 – 4.5 million). *L'homme qui chavire* renders – in stark contrast to the solid and stable *L'homme qui marche* and *Femme debout* sculptures – a capsizing figure, a drowning man, swallowed up in the abyss and sinking in ultra slow motion. Despite its frailty and vulnerability, Giacometti has managed to invest his *Falling Man* with such heroism that his fall is almost a dance, and one believes for a second that instead of falling he will spread his wings and soar. *Femme de Venise I* is a bronze cast of a series of plaster statues Giacometti conceived for the Biennale in Venice in 1956 and a major retrospective of his work in Bern that would run concurrently. Giacometti decided on a series of nude women and he worked feverishly, using as a 'model' a visualization of the female form that he held in his mind's eye rather than a life sitter. He elected to show ten plasters: six in Venice and four in Bern. True to his highly self-critical attitude, Giacometti later destroyed several of the plasters shown at the exhibits while he chose some of the ones that stayed in Paris along with several of the exhibited versions to be cast in bronze. The present *Femme de Venise I* lives up to its namesake venue. The plaster cast from which this bronze was made is visible on an installation photograph taken at the 1956 Biennale.

A major surrealist work in the sale is René Magritte's *Le Banquet*, 1955-57 (estimate: \$2 – 3 million) a work he painted at the height of his popularity and which exemplifies several important themes that Magritte developed throughout his life such as the hidden and the visible, the evocation and conflation of night and day and his idea of 'elective affinities.' The use of the title *Le banquet* is as enigmatic as the image itself, as according to Magritte, titles should surprise and enchant the viewer in order to open the door to his imagination.

Both the evening as well as the day sales feature work collected by Hilde Gerst, a well-known art dealer who assembled a wide range of high quality works for her gallery located on the ground floor of the Carlyle Hotel in New York. Mrs. Gerst was born in Central Europe at the turn of the 20th century and began to travel widely after WWII, accumulating arts and antiques from her travels throughout the world. The Hilde Gerst Gallery opened in 1953 on Madison Avenue and Mrs. Gerst directed her business until she passed away at age 98 in 2006. The evening sale will offer two key works by Marc Chagall, *Cirque au cheval rouge*, 1968 (estimate: \$800,000-1,200,000) and *Les mariés au bouquet de fleurs*, 1975 (estimate: \$800,000-1,200,000). The day sales will offer works by Marc Chagall, Maurice de Vlaminck, Jean Dufy, Raoul Dufy, Moise Kisling, Marie Laurencin and others.

From a Private American Collection is a superb group of Van Gogh drawings, which reflect different phases in evolution of the artist's draftsmanship. Van Gogh left about 1100 drawings on his death and it was through drawing and sketching and discovering the mysteries of perspective, volume and line that he taught himself the difficult task of becoming an artist. In 1883, early on in his new life as an artist, Vincent wrote to his brother Theo: "Drawing is the root of everything." *The bench*, 1882 (estimate: \$800,000-1,200,000) belongs to a series of pen and pencil and ink landscapes and studies in perspective Van Gogh executed in The Hague. Around the same time he also succeeded for the first time to find townspeople who modeled for him and the pencil drawings he completed at this time were frequently executed using a broad carpenter's pencil which enabled him to alternate between broad and fine lines as in *Woman by the wash tub in the garden*, 1885 (estimate: \$900,000-1,200,000). Works that show his experiments with opaque watercolors, in preparation for his works in oil, are *Pollard willow*, 1882 (estimate: \$1.2 – 1.6 million) and *The iron mill in The Hague*, 1882 (estimate: \$650,000-850,000). The end of Van Gogh's Dutch period coincided with the real beginnings of his career as a painter as he moved to Paris and was immersed in the art world out there. *View from Vincent's window*, 1887 (estimate: \$3 – 4 million) shows the artist confidently applying his deftly descriptive line to the latest developments in progressive Parisian painting.

On May 10, Christie's will hold the *Impressionist and Modern Art Day Sale* and the *Impressionist and Modern Works on Paper* sale. Highlights include Piet Mondrian's *Red Chrysanthemum on Blue Background* (estimate: \$600,000-800,000); *Etude pour La Poesie--Décor Rockefeller* by Henri Matisse (estimate: \$400,000-600,000) and Marc Chagall's *Les skieurs au coq* (estimate: \$300,000-400,000).

Auction: Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale

May 9 at 7 p.m.

Viewing: Christie's Galleries at Rockefeller Center

May 4 – 8

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