

Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

For Immediate Release

April 16, 2009

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**REDISCOVERED CUBAN MASTERPIECE BY MARIO CARREÑO
LEADS CHRISTIE'S LATIN AMERICAN ART SALE IN MAY**



New York – Christie's is pleased to announce a rediscovered painting by Mario Carreño, entitled *Fuego en el batey* (Fire in the farm) from 1943, will lead the Latin American Sale on May 28. Widely regarded as a lost masterpiece of Cuban modernism, the painting has been in the Collection of Milton and Nona Ward in Baldwin, New York for over half a century. Never published in color and out of public view for all those years, Mario Carreño's *Fuego en el batey* appears now along with two other unpublished and unknown works by the artist and his contemporary René Portocarrero.

Virgilio Garza, Head of Latin American Art states, "*Fuego en el Batey* by Carreño is a rare masterpiece that blends subject and form magnificently. It has achieved an iconic stature over time as a key missing link in the scholarship of one of Cuba's most accomplished artists. Its reappearance is of

invaluable importance to Cuban Art collectors and scholars and we are thrilled to present this masterpiece - a rare opportunity indeed.”

Born in the city of Havana, Mario Carreño (1913-1999) is considered a leading member of the second generation of modernist painters of Cuba. *Fuego en el batey* is one of the three masterpieces from a brief series of paintings in Duco that he painted in Cuba in 1943 (estimate: \$1-2 million). Duco is a quick drying line of lacquers made especially for the automotive industry which allows an artist to work at great speed and build successive layers of color. *Fuego en el batey* and the rest of the Duco paintings, *El corte de caña* (Cutting of the sugarcane), and *Danza Afrocubana* (African-Cuban dance), can be read as a triad, each representing an essential aspect of Cuban society – the family unit, agrarian life, and cultural heritage. Carreño elevates the everyday to a subject of universal resonance. The three works were exhibited in Carreño’s solo show at Havana’s Lyceum Gallery, which opened on November 1, 1943.

Carreño’s subject in *Fuego en el batey* reflects a commitment to a Cuban national ethos through the depiction of peasants and the countryside. The painting illustrates a panic-stricken woman handing her child to a *guajiro* (Cuban name for peasant) on a horse, while behind them *el batey* is engulfed in flames. *El batey* is an area consisting of homes and stables on a rustic farm in Cuba.

The colors throughout this composition are intense and bright yet harmoniously orchestrated; bubble gum pink with lime green, light blue with red earth, soft purple with yellow and orange. The figures maintain a fleshy sensuality that recalls Picasso’s neo-classic phase, and the colors are reminiscent of the Italian Futurists. Unlike his contemporaries René Portocarrero, Mariano Rodríguez and Cundo Bermúdez, Carreño was thoroughly trained in academic art practices, first at the San Alejandro Academy in Havana (1925-30); at the San Fernando Academy in Madrid (1932-35) and in Mexico with the Dominican painter Jaime Colson (1936).

Fuego en el batey is a large painting on wood panel in Duco and oil. Carreño had experimented with Duco as early as 1937, but it was during David Alfaro Siqueiros’ visit to Havana in 1943 that Carreño worked with the Duco medium in depth.

After Siqueiros fled Mexico in 1941 at the behest of the government for suspected involvement in Trotsky’s assassination, he traveled to Cuba in 1943. Carreño brought Siqueiros and his family to live with him and his wife at their home in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana. While there, Siqueiros painted a mural in the home’s foyer. Carreño assisted him and became re-introduced to the uses of Duco.

Other Cuban paintings from the Collection of Milton and Nona Ward include two works by Carreño, *Untitled*, painted in 1938, which portrays musicians (estimate: \$50,000-70,000) and *Untitled* (Woman with Flowers) from 1945 (estimate: \$30,000-40,000), as well as René Portocarrero's *Untitled* (Woman with Umbrella) (estimate: \$25,000-30,000). The Wards loved beautiful objects and appreciated the grace and appeal of the works of art they began to collect in the 1950s. They attended art auctions, frequented galleries, and visited museums. The Wards themselves were artists and had met as students at the renowned Julliard School in New York City; Mr. Ward trained as an opera singer while Mrs. Ward studied to be a concert violinist.

Auction: Latin American Sale

May 28-29

Viewing: Christie's 20 Rockefeller Plaza Galleries

May 23-28

About Christie's

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*Estimates do not include buyer's premium

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