

For Immediate Release

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CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK SHOWCASES AMERICAN MASTERWORKS FROM THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Important American Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture May 19, 2005

New York – Christie's Spring sale of *Important American Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture* will take place on Thursday May 19 in the Galleries at Rockefeller Center. Featuring almost 220 lots, the auction features a masterful full-length portrait by Robert Henri, a lyrical 19th century seascape of Fire Island by Sanford Robinson Gifford, an important Julius LeBlanc Stewart European yachting picture and an American Cubist masterpiece by Marsden Hartley. The sale is expected to realize in excess of \$30 million.

Leading the sale is a mesmerizing full-length masterpiece by Robert Henri, *Jessica Penn in Black with White Plumes*, 1908 (estimate: \$1,000,000-1,500,000). The painting provides a new benchmark for the artist at auction, with the highest pre-sale estimate a work by Henri has ever been allocated. The picture is from The Collection of Helen and David B. Pall, which also includes *Chair Car*, the masterwork by Edward Hopper to be offered at Christie's on May 11.

Portraying a woman with carefree hair, a penetrating stare, ruffled gloves and posing in a casual stance, Henri perfectly characterizes a woman of emotional strength and beauty. The sitter was Henri's favorite model, Jesseca Penn, a Ziegfeld Follies dancer. With its absence of the usual props of an interior, this life-size portrait startles and confronts the viewer. Penn's black dress, held in her gloved hands, seems to dissolve into the background, further accentuating her already brightly illuminated and forceful face.

Depicted as a working woman with her hair loose and gloves bunched, this portrait is an example of Henri's best works and reveals a number of European influences, including the dark and light palette of Manet, the directness of Velázquez, and the animated, fleeting character of Frans Hals' portraiture. Henri's remarkable ability to unify these diverse influences with the subject matter of the New York Ash Can school sets him aside as one of the leading American portraiture painters of the early 20th century.

Sanford Robinson Gifford's *Fire Island Beach* is a fine example of his superb renderings of nineteenth century American landscape – and is one the most important Long Island pictures ever painted (estimate: \$800,000-1,200,000). Dated 1877/78, this seascape has all the hallmarks of Gifford's conception of Luminism and his preoccupation with light and atmosphere.

Demonstrating Gifford's use of one-point perspective, the seascape, with its soothing color and light evokes a harmonious balance within nature as the sea and sky appear to merge on a sandbar that fades into an expansive horizon. The striking spatial recession is emphasized by four figures across the beach as faint sails move quietly along the left stretch of the horizon.

Yachting in the Mediterranean by Julius LeBlanc Stewart offers an intimate glance into late 19th century European high society (estimate: \$1,200,000-1,800,000). Painted in 1896 in the highly finished academic style of the day, the canvas depicts the *Namouna*, one of the most distinguished pleasure yachts of the late 19th century - and the property of James Gordon Bennett, a publisher and winner of the first trans-Atlantic yacht race in 1866. A close friend of Bennett, Stewart focuses the viewer on the boat, rather than on the figures on the deck, who include actress Lilly Langtry. Seen from a dramatic vantage point, Stewart underscores the swiftness of the yacht as it cuts through the water.

Movement, Sails by Marsden Hartley is one of the earliest and most advanced Cubist paintings produced by any artist in America (estimate: \$800,000-1,200,000). Created during the summer of 1916 in Provincetown, Massachusetts, Hartley worked in a synthetic cubist style derived from his recent European explorations.

A sailboat is defined by a large, gray sail shape at the center, with the suggestion of a black mast at the top of the composition. With a restrained use of color, in contrast to his earlier vivid European works, the elements of the painting are weighted toward the center, and by presenting them against a white background he further accentuates their formal qualities. The composition veers as close to pure abstraction as any of his works and marks a turning point in his career and a move to a quieter, more lyrical and poetic aesthetic – and coupled with other abstractions of this period represent his last forays into purely abstract painting.

Auction: Important American Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture
May 19, 2005

Viewing: Christie's Rockefeller, New York
May 14 – 18

More information about Christie's sale of *Important American Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture* 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.

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