

For Immediate Release

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LATIN AMERICAN SALE AT CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK EXPECTED TO REALIZE IN EXCESS OF \$20 MILLION

First appearance at auction of Matta's 'Tige Verte (Les Possessions)'

'Recently rediscovered Alfredo Ramos Martínez painting, 'Flowers of Mexico' among the highlights

Latin American Sale May 31, 2007

New York – On May 31 and June 1, Christie's New York will organize one of the most valuable sales of Latin American art ever. With a pre-sale estimate of \$19 to nearly \$26 million, the sale presents as its cover lot a superb Matta painting dated 1943, *Tige Verte (Les Possessions)* (estimate: \$1.5 – 2 million). The maestros of Latin American art such as Tamayo, Botero, Lam, Ramos Martínez, as well as Kinetic and Op artists Jesús Rafael Soto and contemporary artists including Federico Herrero will be offered. The sale further presents a strong offering of colonial paintings, featuring a selection of works from the Collection of Judith Small Nash, and 19th century exploration and travel paintings.

Matta's superb *Tige Verte (Les Possessions)* (estimate: \$1.5 -2 million) is the highlight of the sale and the cover of the catalogue. The work possesses all the desirable qualities: it has never been offered for public auction; it comes in excellent condition and represents one of Matta's most sought-after periods of his oeuvre. *Tige Verte (Les Possessions)* belongs to a group of works Matta painted roughly between 1942 and 1944. The artist was very close to Marcel Duchamp during these years and it has been generally understood that the title of the work contains some reference to Duchamp's alter ego, *Rrose Selavy*. Moving away from landscape, the works of the early forties evince a new concept

of space whereby lines of flashing color in the darkness suggest the movement of heavenly bodies or mental activities as they traverse the nether world of our interior. Matta had always been an explorer of space – psychological, cosmological and mythological – and in his pictorial representations he drew inspiration from various sources, including his writer friends Pablo Neruda and Federico García Lorca. After a trip to Mexico in 1941, his work changed dramatically and he started using flowing paint that was allowed to drip across the canvas. This was a revolutionary technique and it influenced an entire generation of Abstract Expressionists in America. The sale includes several more works by the artist, showing a cross section of his oeuvre through different techniques, moods and styles.

A new world auction record for Alfredo Ramos Martínez at \$1.8 million was set at Christie's in November last year and the upcoming sale offers two more works by the artist, one of which is very comparable to the work sold in 2006 and is a recently rediscovered work by the artist. *Flowers of Mexico*, circa 1938 (estimate: \$600,000-800,000) is another of the large-scale easel paintings in which the artist makes use of the woman and flower aspect as a nostalgic pastoral composition. Although not a realist painter, Ramos Martínez observed nature and tried to render it as an epic version of reality. With monumental women and fantastic flowers both in color as well as size, he evokes above all a sense of boundless nature and abundance. *Flowers of Mexico* was in the collection of the late Mrs. Mildred Strong De Mott, who had befriended the artist upon his arrival as a guest at Rancho Yucca Loma in California. She commissioned a mural from him and became a patron and collector of his works. A second painting by Ramos Martínez exudes a completely different ambiance. Rather than glorifying Mexican lushness, *The Lonesome Indian*, 1933 (estimate: \$350,000-450,000) illuminates the state of loneliness and solitude in which the artist found himself after his emigration to Los Angeles. The work was acquired by Albert Bender, one of the benefactors of and donors to the San Francisco Museum of Art. Not only was Bender important in his role as patron to Ramos Martínez, the two men also maintained an active correspondence which, in absence of an official Ramos Martínez archive, provides some rare insights into the thoughts and feelings of the artist during his years of self-imposed exile.

The sale offers a solid Cuban art selection, led by Wifredo Lam's *Femme Cheval*, 1948 (estimate: \$600,000-800,000). The femme-cheval is a subject that Lam often uses and it alludes to the figure of a horse-headed woman known from *santería* rites in which a *devotée* is 'ridden' by the spirit, much in the same way one would ride a horse. In the present painting, the femme-cheval bears a long, resplendent tail topped by two mango-like breasts and a thick mane. Mariano Rodríguez is another Cuban artist whose focus was clearly the female figure. *Mujer con jarra*, 1943 (estimate: \$200,000-300,000) is one of the paintings that reflects the tradition of 19th century portraiture. The work was first shown at Cuba's Museo Nacional in 1964 and has since extensively been featured in exhibitions, making it one of the artist's most popular and well-known images. Another striking scene is

Antonio Gattorno's *Waiting for the coffee* (estimate: \$100,000-150,000), a fragment of a mural done for the Bacardi rum company. Gattorno's interest in Cuban peasant culture and the countryside was used to its full advantage in the monumental mural the artist executed for the headquarters of the Bacardi Company at the Empire State Building in 1938. This fragment – showing a *mestiza* woman and child walking up a country road with sugar cane present in different locations – is a life-affirming celebration of Cuba's vegetation, climate and peasantry. One of Cuba's most fêted painters, Tomás Sánchez, is represented with *Meditador en la laguna*, 1995 (estimate: \$180,000-220,000).

Further featured in the modern part of the sale are Joaquín Torres García's gripping *Homo Sapiens*, 1945 (estimate: \$250,000-350,000) in which the artist reveals his horror at the nuclear attack on Hiroshima and the denigration of civilization this entails. A group of works by Fernando Botero is led by his 2002 sculpture *Woman on a horse* (estimate: \$600,000-800,000), while *The Frog* by Rufino Tamayo, 1946 (estimate: \$350,000-450,000); *Tres figuras* by Armando Reveron (estimate: \$200,000-250,000) and David Alfaro Siqueiros's *Autorretrato*, 1968 (estimate: \$200,000-300,000) are also included.

Christie's New York has been building a tradition of offering colonial and 19th century paintings in the *Latin American Sale* and this auction is no exception. A group of pictures from the Collection of Judith Small Nash is highlighting this section. Mrs. Small Nash has been a dealer and connoisseur in the field of Pre-Columbian art and Native American art and became a devotee of Latin American art ever since she bought her first painting thirty years ago. From her collection, the sale offers a select ensemble of 17th and 18th century works, all religious in nature. Colonial works are rare on the market, often because of national patrimony issues and this offering reflects a very fine overview of the art created during colonial times.

The interest in 19th century travel and exploration paintings has been increasing steadily and true masterpieces of the genre will be presented in the sale. A superb highlight is Daniel Thomas Egerton's *The ravine of the desert (The Valley of Mexico)* (estimate: \$250,000-350,000), which will be offered alongside Conrad Wise Chapman's *Valle de Mexico*, 1884 (estimate: \$180,000-220,000); August Löhr's *Valley of Mexico*, 1898 (estimate: \$60,000-80,000) and Edouard Pingret's *Acueducto de Chapultepec*, 1842 (estimate: \$150,000-200,000).

Moving on in time, several works of the Kinetic and Op art movement will represent the creative outpour of the 1960s and 1970s. The movement was particularly strong in Argentina and the sale offers works by Antonio Asis (*Untitled*, oil on wood, \$25,000-35,000); Rogelio Polesello (*Untitled*, acrylic, \$30,000-40,000); Luis Tomasello (*Atmosphere Chromoplastique*, wooden cubes, \$15,000-20,000) and three works by Jesús Rafael Soto (including *Armonia a la derecha*, \$70,000-90,000). The

Contemporary art stream contains artists such as Federico Herrero (*Untitled*, oil and acrylic, \$25,000-30,000) and Fernanda Brunet (*Slurrsh*, acrylic \$8,000-12,000) and the recently deceased Julio Galán (*Te mentí (Sofía)*, oil on canvas, \$30,000-40,000 and *Low-fat cherries*, oil and collage, \$20,000-25,000);.

The sale will continue on June 1 with a morning session offering works by colonial artists as well as drawings by Botero, several small scale works by Tamayo, an impressive selection of works from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s of the Mexican School, Cuban masters and contemporary art.

Please note that this evening sale will start at 6.30 p.m.

Auction: Latin American Sale

May 31 at 6.30 p.m. and June 1 at 10 a.m.

Viewing: Christie's Galleries

May 26 – 31

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