

For Immediate Release

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**DIEGO RIVERA SELF-PORTRAIT HIGHLIGHTS
CHRISTIE'S LATIN AMERICAN SALE**



Diego Rivera, *Autorretrato*, 1941

New York – Christie's **Latin American Sale** in New York on May 28 and 29 will feature rare masterpieces spanning from 17th century Colonial art to Contemporary paintings. Important artists represented include Diego Rivera, Leonora Carrington, Mario Carreño, Cundo Bermúdez, Wifredo Lam, Rufino Tamayo and Matta. The two-day sale will offer 276 lots and expects to realize in excess of \$14 million.

A self-portrait by Diego Rivera will lead the sale (estimate: \$1.2-1.8 million). Sigmund Firestone, an American engineer and art collector from Rochester, New York, met Rivera and Frida Kahlo on a business trip to Mexico in 1939, and subsequently maintained a friendship and correspondence with the artists, commissioning self-portraits from each.

Rivera painted himself approximately 20 times between 1906 and 1951, the year of his last known self-portrait. In the Firestone portrait, the artist is depicted with unflinching realism and a mature self-consciousness. In the painting, Rivera holds a note, nodding to a nineteenth-century Mexican portrait tradition, which reads, *"To my dear friend / Sigmund Firestone / Diego Rivera / January 1, 1941."*

Fourteen letters exchanged between Rivera, Kahlo and Firestone are sold with the portrait. In one letter, Kahlo affectionately signed the letter with magenta-pink kisses, one for “Sigy” and one each for his daughters, Alberta and Natalie.

One of the finest examples by Leonora Carrington, *The Giantess*, also known as *The Guardian of the Egg*, painted circa 1947, is another leading work in the sale (estimate: \$800,000-1,200,000). This large scale painting was the cover of the exhibition pamphlet of Carrington’s 1948 show at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York. In this surrealist seascape, a towering Giantess allegorically commands the flora and fauna of the earth, sea and sky. *The Giantess* embodies Carrington’s fascination with mystical femininity and the enchantments of the cosmic world. Between her palms she clasps a mysterious black egg, a symbol the artist frequently includes in



Leonora Carrington, *The Giantess*, 1947

her work.

Iconic gems by two of Cuba’s most accomplished artists – Mario Carreño and Cundo Bermúdez –



Cundo Bermúdez, *Las comadres*, 1942

are important masterpieces in the sale. Mario Carreño’s *Fuego en el batey* (Fire in the farm), painted in 1943, dates to the artist’s most sought after period and is a tour de force within Carreño’s outstanding long trajectory (estimate: \$1-2 million *separate press release available*). Cundo Bermúdez’s *Las comadres*, 1942, illustrates two *comadres* sitting on a sofa; one is fanning herself while the other knits (estimate: \$400,000-600,000). *Comadre* is a term which describes a close relationship between women who are godmothers to each other’s children. In this painting, the everyday moment is transformed into a spectacle of color and form, from the ornately structured sofa to the rich tropical colors of the woman and the background.

Included in the sale are works by renowned modernists such as Joaquín Torres García, Wifredo Lam and Rufino Tamayo. Torres García’s exquisite *Composition*, 1931, was painted during an important time in his career while working in the international milieu of Paris (estimate: \$400,000-600,000). Torres-García sought to translate an order in painting symbolically structured elements to embody an ideal harmony within the universe. Wifredo Lam’s *Non-Combustible*, 1950, is one of the finest examples in the artist’s modernist vocabulary which includes anthropomorphic hybrid figures (estimate: \$350,000-450,000).

Five paintings by Rufino Tamayo are offered in the sale and span his prolific career, from the 1940s to early 1980s. Among the works of art sold to benefit the acquisitions of Latin American Art for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art are Tamayo's *Child Playing* (*Niño jugando*), executed in 1945, (estimate: \$500,000-700,000) and *Diálogo*, painted in 1971 (estimate: \$200,000-300,000). *Hombre con un farol*, reveals all the elements that had propelled Tamayo onto the international scene in the early 1940s, with the inclusion of the modernist fragmentation of form, poetic symbolism, and his inventive experimentation with color and hue (estimate: \$400,000-600,000).



Rufino Tamayo, *Child Playing*, 1945

Several works by Matta are available including *Les Separés vivants* (also known as *Funfural*) painted in 1945-46, which alludes to the atrocities of the atomic age with its menacing figures set against an orange and red geometric background (estimate: \$250,000-350,000).

The sale is strong in works by Brazilian artists and features Adriana Varejão's *Azulejaria de cozinha com peixes* (Kitchen tiles with Fish), from 1995 (estimate: \$120,000-180,000). Reflecting upon Brazil's complex colonial history, the painting is a modernist grid – now subverted through the use of the decorative tile motif. Other Brazilian artists in the sale include Lygia Pape's *Untitled (Grupo Frente)*, 1954 (estimate: \$80,000-120,000); Helio Oiticica's *Metasquema 19*, 1957-58 (estimate: \$60,000-80,000); and Emiliano di Cavalcanti's *Baianas*, 1959 (estimate: \$40,000-60,000).



Adriana Varejão, *Azulejaria de cozinha com peixes*, 1995

Masters from Oaxaca, Mexico are well represented in the sale. Francisco Toledo's *Conejo con pescado* (Rabbit with fish) recalls his Oaxacan roots and celebrates the spirituality of this indigenous world where animals represent miraculous beings (estimate: \$250,000-350,000). Sergio Hernandez's *Crucifixión*, 1991 (estimate: \$70,000-90,000) and Rodolfo Morales's *Orquesta de las tías*, 1987, (estimate: \$35,000-45,000) are other



Francisco Toledo, *Conejo con pescado*, 1987

examples in the Oaxacan tradition.

Geometric abstraction is exemplified in the auction by Argentina’s Roberto Aizenberg and Mexico’s Gunther Gerzso. Aizenberg’s *Pintura*, 1988-89, reflects his obsession with stark but magical solitary structures that hint at a psychological meaning and cultural symbolism (estimate: \$80,000-120,000). Partly influenced by the ideas of Aizenberg’s teacher Juan Batlle Planas and the work of the Surrealists but also Picasso and De Chirico, these compositions are studies in geometry and abstraction as well. Gunther Gerzso’s abstract painting *Azul-Verde-Naranja*, 1964, is a classic example from his most prolific period, and harmoniously blends blue-greens in an abstract geometric landscape (estimate: \$80,000-120,000).



Gunther Gerzso, *Azul-Verde-Naranja*, 1964

Day Sale – May 29

The Day Sale will begin with a wonderful grouping of 18 lots of Colonial art including religious art, portraits, sculpture and Casta genre. One of the earliest works in the section, painted circa 1650-1670, is *San Miguel Arcángel* by the Circle of the Master of Sopó (estimate: \$20,000-25,000). A landscape painting *Vista de Antigua con el volcán Fuego (Guatemala)*, 1795-1798, attributed to Juan de Dios Vicente de la Cerda depicts the eruption of the volcano Fuego in Antigua, Guatemala (estimate: \$30,000-40,000).



Circle of the Master of Sopó,
San Miguel Arcángel, circa 1650-70

Every major artist and movement is represented in the Day Sale, with estimates for some works of art beginning at \$3,000.

Auction: Latin American Sale

May 28 at 6:30pm and May 29 at 10:00am

Viewing: Christie’s 20 Rockefeller Plaza Galleries

May 23-28

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*Estimates do not include buyer’s premium

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