

For Immediate Release

15 May 2009

Press Contact: Alexa Kindermann +44 20 7389 2289 akindermann@chrisites.com

Elena Kurbatskaya +7 495 917 0080 kurbatskaya@ima-consulting.ru

RUSSIAN ART and WORKS OF ART

London – Christie’s mid-season Russian Art sale will take place on 9 June in London and will present nearly 200 paintings and objects including works by some of Russia’s most renowned artists such as Aivazovsky, Fabergé, Shukhaev, Polenov, Vassiliev, and Pokhitonov. Following the strong results seen at the sale of Russian Art in New York in April 2009, this auction will present both new and established collectors with the opportunity to engage in a market which continues to welcome strong demand, with individual estimates ranging from £400 to £450,000.



Ukrainian Harvest by Ivan Aivazovsky (1817-1900), which is signed and dated 1857, was painted at the peak of the artist’s career (estimate: £350,000-450,000 / \$510,000-650,000), *illustrated left*. With a seemingly boundless landscape and wheat fields stretching towards the horizon, *Ukrainian Harvest* depicts Ukraine with as

much mesmerizing power as found in Aivazovsky's masterly depictions of the sea. The sky, so dominant in Aivazovsky's Ukrainian compositions, provides a sense of scale for man and nature, while the windmills occupy centre-stage in the composition and, like coastal watchtowers, stand guard over the 'bread basket' of the Russian Empire. Aivazovsky himself considered his best works as those which emphasised the light of the sun and in *Ukrainian Harvest* it is his warm, golden palette which in part gives the painting its dream-like, emotional tenor.

The sale will also offer one of Aivazovsky’s masterly maritime paintings. *The survivor* (estimate: £250,000-350,000) *illustrated left* was inspired by impressions of Aivazovsky’s transatlantic voyage undertaken in 1892. The image of man as small

and helpless before the uncontrolled power of nature is a central theme in the artist's oeuvre. The composition of *The survivor* depicts thrashing waves, perilous rocks and a stormy sky. All the forces of nature are against the only survivor of a shipwreck, who climbs the rocks, determined to overcome his misfortune. The dramatic, almost theatrical effect of this work has been achieved by using dark and intense colours and limited, concentrated light.

A Finnish village. Roofs painted in 1920 belongs to one of Vasilii Shukhaev's (1887-1973) most distinctive series of works depicting Finnish urbanisation and landscape (estimate: £300,000-500,000), *illustrated right*. In the wake of the tumult caused by revolution and civil war, in 1920 Shukhaev and his wife left Russia and settled in the small border village of Mustamyaki in rural Finland. Finland was a stepping stone to Paris, the capital of Russian *émigré* culture. The series of pictures conceived during Shukhaev's residence in Finland shows the influence of both his formal artistic training and his temporary social isolation. *A Finnish village. Roofs* is



marked by its restricted palette of browns and its angular shapes, such as the leafless trees stretching into the pale cyan-green sky, and the sharp thorny forms of the rooftops.



In September 1876 Vasilii Polenov (1844-1927) joined the army of General Cherniaev as a volunteer to assist the Serbians in their fight against oppression. His impressions of this war are reflected in *The Herzegovinian on lookout* painted in 1876 at Polenov's Paris studio at 72 rue Blanche, *illustrated left*. In January 1877 the asking price for the painting was 600 rubles; the work is now offered at Christie's in June and is estimated to fetch £70,000-90,000.

In 1893 Ivan Pokhitonov (1850-1923) moved to Belgium to be close to his beloved sister Anastasia and her family. During his stay he became acquainted with the Collon family. Auguste Collon, a Belgian engineer, had spent several years in Baku where he was



heavily involved in the development of the Russian oil industry. *Pétanque* (estimate: £25,000-35,000), *A snow-covered landscape* (estimate: £10,000-15,000) and *Vaches dans les marais* (estimate: £12,000-15,000; *illustrated*) bear dedications to members of the Collon family in whose possession these works remained until the present day.



Hailed by some as the first female Cubist artist, Maria Bronislavovna Marevna (1892-1984) studied at the Stroganov Art Academy in Moscow but left after a year to travel in Italy. In 1912 she moved to Paris to continue her studies. Here she became acquainted with Georges Braque, Marc Chagall, Henri Matisse, Fernand Léger, Amedeo Modigliani and Pablo Picasso. In *Nature morte aux Géraniums*, (estimate: £30,000-40,000) a comparatively early work dating from 1917, Marevna's bold, structured approach to composition is already evident, *illustrated left*. The influence of Mexican painter Diego Rivera, who in 1917

was at the pinnacle of his cubist period, may also be detected as the pair were romantically, if rather unhappily, involved at this time.

Birch grove on the edge of Moscow (estimate: £60,000-90,000; *illustrated right*) and *After the rain* (estimate: £40,000-60,000) belong to a series of nostalgic and emotionally-charged landscapes painted in 1993 by Oleg Vassiliev (b. 1931). The influence of the Russian school of 19th century landscape painting, exemplified by the oeuvre of Isaak Levitan and Arkhip Kuindzhi, is evident in Vassiliev's work. Scrupulously depicted with almost photographic precision, the landscapes are imbued with a subtle, yet pervasive light. Based on the spatial philosophy of his teacher Vladimir Favorsky (1886-1964), the treatment of space in Vassiliev's works is always determined by light.

RUSSIAN WORKS OF ART



The sale will also offer a selection of Russian works of art including important porcelain, silver, Fabergé objects and militaria. A small Fabergé elephant made from a single piece of nephrite and adorned with diamond-set eyes (estimate: £40,000-60,000; *illustrated below left*) belongs to the best known *objects d'art* produced by Carl Fabergé. The *objects d'art* are small scale decorative sculptures including figurines, models of flowers and animals, all carved from the native hardstones gathered in Caucasus, Siberia and the Ural Mountains.

The animals range from the exotic, including rhinoceroses and parrots, to more usual pets and household dogs. Together with monkeys, rabbits, cats and pigs, elephants were one of the most popular models and the Imperial favourites. Empress Maria Feodorovna became a devotee of the sculpted animals, owning more than one hundred Fabergé animal figures.

The Ovchinnikov album (estimate: £100,000-150,000) is a very fine work dating from 1875 and has no traces of being used by its previous owner, *illustrated right*. The Ovchinnikov firm of goldsmiths, founded in 1853 by Pavel Akimovich Ovchinnikov, was the most important in Russia, alongside Fabergé. Ovchinnikov was the first business to devote itself entirely to the manufacture of articles in Russian national style. Its *cloisonné*, *champlevé* and *plique-à-jour* enamels are outstanding and won the firm prizes in many Russian exhibitions.



www.christies.com

Exhibition: 6-8 June 2009 at Christie's, 8 King Street

Sale: 9 June at 2.00pm (GMT)