

For Immediate Release

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LEADING COLLECTION OF MODERN BRITISH ART ASSEMBLED BY PETER NAHUM TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S

The Poetry of Crisis: The Peter Nahum Collection of British Surrealist and Avant-Garde Art

Public exhibition: 11 to 14 November 2006, Christie's South Kensington

Auction: 15 November 2006, Christie's South Kensington



London – Christie's announce that they will offer for sale *The Poetry of Crisis; The Peter Nahum Collection of British Surrealist and Avant-Garde Art*, one of the most important single-owner collections of modern British art in private hands. Comprising approximately 300 paintings, watercolours and drawings by a range of renowned artists including John Armstrong, Robert Colquhoun, Jacob Epstein, Henry Moore, Paul Nash, William Scott and Graham Sutherland, this private collection has been assembled over a period of twenty years and represents the collecting passion and discerning eye of Peter Nahum, a leading expert on 19th and 20th century British art and regular contributor to the BBC's *The Antiques Roadshow*.

The pictures, all of which are dated between 1933 and 1951, offer a unique narrative of British Art during the crisis years preceding, during and immediately after the 2nd World War, and offer a fascinating insight into how the influences of those troubled times affected British artists. The Collection has never before been publicly exhibited in its entirety and is expected to realise in excess of £3 million, with individual estimates ranging from £1,000 to £100,000.

Rachel Hilderley, Director and Head of the 20th Century British Art, and William Porter, Associate Director, comment: *"The Poetry of Crisis collection assembled by Peter Nahum is unique and decisive in presenting a narrative of British art from 1933 to 1951, some of the most testing and influential years of the 20th century. It ranks among the most important private collections of modern British art and has frequently been drawn upon by museums from around the world for both academic research as well as art exhibitions. The current strength of the market for 20th century British art has seen Christie's achieve a number of record breaking sales totals over the past decade and the fast-growing international interest for this category makes the occasion of this collection being offered on the market a truly exciting prospect."*

The periods surrounding the 2nd World War were times of unsurpassed emotional and intellectual resonance, as artists and writers were subjected to previously unimaginable circumstances and explored new languages with which to express themselves. New technology led to visual influences that had never been seen before, as illustrated with the extraordinary library photograph of German searchlights at night taken in 1943 *illustrated right*. The sheer energy of the period is illustrated by the simultaneous strength and growth of two major international artistic movements during the 1930s: Surrealism and Abstract Modernism. Representing the Abstract Modernist movement in the sale are a number of works by artists





including William Staite Murray (1881-1962), and Alistair Morton (1910-1963), whose *Abstract* from 1940 is expected to realise £18,000-25,000 *illustrated left*. Morton, who became the artistic director for Edinburgh Weavers, was arguably the most influential British textile designer of the 20th century and was a close friend of both Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth.

The British Surrealist Group was founded in 1936 and in the same year the *First International Surrealist Exhibition* was held in London and opened by Salvador Dali, who dressed for the occasion in a deep-sea diver's suit. The Surrealists were a radical group of left-wing artists who regularly clashed with the Abstract Modernists during the 1930s. Leading the surrealist works is *Into the Deep* by John Armstrong, A.R.A. (1893 - 1973), which was included at the *Unit One Exhibition* staged by Herbert Read in 1934 (estimate: £30,000-40,000) *illustrated page 1*. John Banting (1902-72), who trained with Jean Arp and became the leading British surrealist, was profoundly effected by the advent of the Spanish Civil War, which saw a much loved nation tear itself apart. Banting's 115cm-high drawing *The Abandonment of Madame Triple Nipples* (estimate: £4,000-6,000) from 1937 illustrates the angst that absorbed the art world, fusing together various artistic languages *illustrated right*.



During the latter stages of the 1930s, Graham Sutherland was working with a new artistic language which was based on twisted natural forms, combining the influences of both abstract and surrealist art. Sutherland became an official war artist during the 2nd World War and was selected to record the devastation of the London Blitz. Under strict instruction not to portray human figures, Sutherland's depictions of bomb sights during the Blitz developed in such a way that buildings evolved to represent the organic form. Among the 10 examples of the artist's work to be offered in November is *The Dying Swan* (estimate: £10,000-15,000) which was acquired from the artist by Sir Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin Books *illustrated left*.

The Second World War saw death and destruction on a massive scale for the second time in just 25 years. John Spencer Churchill (1909-92), a nephew of the British Prime Minister, was serving at Dunkirk on 30 May 1940. Having been instructed to go to London to report the worsening situation to his Uncle, he drew a portrayal of the scene (estimate: £4,000-6,000) *illustrated right*. As a result of this drawing, delivered in person by his nephew, Winston Churchill ordered a retreat from Dunkirk preventing more unnecessary deaths. As John Churchill went on to recall, 'For some odd reason, my arrival at the Admiralty that morning has always stuck in my uncle's mind. When exactly ten years later I had finished my painting of the Dunkirk beaches he insisted on having it in his house, where he studied it for long periods at a time I am told.'



While artists within the military were witnessing the fight first-hand, a number of leading British artists were confined to London, many of them employed to record the destruction of the capital during the war. Carel Weight, C.H., R.A. (1908-97) illustrates this frustrating confinement with *Hammersmith Nights*, painted *circa* 1942, which portrays a naked and vulnerable figure in a dark London street, superimposed by dream-like circus figures (estimate: £6,000-8,000) *illustrated left*.

The end of the Second World War offered hope for the future, as well as the opportunity for artists to travel freely across Europe. Artists began to revisit elements of space and colour, a number of them spending much time traveling and freeing themselves from the shackles of confined existence. By 1949, Patrick Heron, CBE (1920-99) had traveled to the South of France where he painted *Cap d'Antibes* (estimate: £70,000-100,000) *illustrated right*.



The last examples from the Peter Nahum Collection date from 1951, the year of The Festival of Britain which was staged to demonstrate Britain's contribution to civilization through the arts, science and technology. Hoping to infuse the nation with an enthusiasm for a new and optimistic future, the Festival was launched with the opening of London's newly-developed South Bank. *The Shell X100 By Plane* was painted in this year by Rowland Emmett (1906-1990) *illustrated left*, whose fantastical designs took a lighthearted approach at the world's increasing dependence on technology, and were also used in the film *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. The Times Literary Supplement wrote at the time that Emmett's work 'may not appeal to tall elderly men with prominent noses, long moustaches, bald heads and very thin legs, but nearly everybody else will enjoy it'. This example is expected to realise £5,000-7,000.



Peter Nahum joined Sotheby's in 1966 and became Head of the British Painting Department. In 1984 he opened *The Leicester Galleries* in St James's, London, specialising in paintings, drawings and sculptures of the highest quality from the 19th and 20th centuries. He is currently advisor to major private collections and museums throughout the world, signatory on authentication certificates for Victorian paintings sold to Japan and official valuer for the Department of Arts, Heritage and Environment of the Government of Australia. He also acts as a celebrity auctioneer for many charities. He is a member of the B.A.D.A. (The British Antique Dealers' Association), of S.L.A.D. (The Society of London Art Dealers), television personality, academic, lecturer, author, frame designer and regular lender of paintings to international exhibitions. Peter Nahum was elected a Fellow of The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (FRSA) in 2005.

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Notes to editors:

- *The Poetry of Crisis: The Peter Nahum Collection of 20th century British Surrealist and Avant-Garde Art* will be on public view at Christie's, South Kensington, between 11 and 14 November 2006

- Christie's have held market share in the category of 20th Century British Art for over 10 years. This market dominance has been further strengthened by the last five auctions, which have been the most successful sales of 20th century British Art ever held and have realised a collective total of £39,061,472.

- The sale of *20th Century British Art* on 9 June 2006 realised a total of £12,379,200, the highest ever total for a sale of 20th Century British Art anywhere.

- Christie's stage two sales of 20th Century British Art a year at the King Street headquarters, and hold artist records for a number of renowned figures including David Bomberg, Patrick Caulfield, Sir Winston Churchill, Ben Nicholson, Ceri Richards, William Scott and Graham Sutherland.