

For Immediate Release

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JOURNEY TO RUSSIA



Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovskii
A Fishing boat with a Russian merchant brig at anchor
(estimate: £800,000-1,200,000)

Important Russian Pictures and Russian Works of Art

Christie's King Street

30 November 2005

London – Christie's has gathered together an outstanding selection of magnificent Russian pictures and exceptional Russian works of art, in two dedicated sales, *Important Russian Pictures* and *Russian Works of Art* to be held on Wednesday 30 November 2005.

Leading the *Important Russian Pictures* sale is a superb painting by Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovskii (1817-1900) *A Fishing boat with a Russian merchant brig at anchor* (estimate: £800,000-1,200,000), which has never been seen at auction before. The artist was renowned in both Russia and Europe for his atmospheric seascapes which combined a delicate tonal harmony with an almost imaginary quality. The sea held a life-long fascination for Aivazovskii, and from his sketches he captured the ever-changing conditions of the water in his canvases. Here, in the white hazy early morning light, set against a rugged, mountainous backdrop, on a flat, calm sea, a fisherman, accompanied by his family, goes about his daily work, while close by is an imposing Russian merchant brig with sails drying.

One of the highlights of the sale is a group of eleven works by Maria Iakunchikova (1870-1902). Referred to by Sergei Diaghilev as the “dear poet of Russian forests”, Iakunchikova, whilst highly respected in academic circles and placed in company with the likes of Levitan and Korovin, has remained an extremely rare presence on the Russian art market. Her premature death at the age of thirty-two from tuberculosis cut short a remarkable career, the promise of which is shown in the strength of works seen here for sale at Christie’s. This will be the first time ever that a collection of her paintings have appeared at auction. Iakunchikova’s creativity and importance to Russian art lay in her ability to absorb the influences of Impressionism, Symbolism, Style Moderne and Russian folk art, employing a variety of techniques, including *pyrogravure*. Amongst the works offered is the breath-taking *View from a Window of the Old House, Vvedenskoe* (estimate: £150,000-200,000), a variant of the masterpiece currently on view at the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

After studying in Italy and Spain in 1914-15, the Italian Renaissance was to leave an indelible mark on Aleksandr Iakovlev (1887-1938) whose work was regarded as being representative of a new classicism in Russian Art. Settling in Paris in 1920, Iakovlev’s reputation as an ethnographical draughtsman was established when he became the official artist of the Citroën Central Africa Expedition, “La Croisière Noire”, in 1925, recording scenes, natives and various rituals along the journey. This is a rare oil painting from that trip, *View of Zinder, the old capital of Niger*, dated 1925, (estimate: £80,000-120,000).

A large presentation triptych icon with a Russian Imperial Family connection is one of the highlights of the *Russian Works of Art* sale. Formerly in the possession of Tsarevich Alexis, son of Tsar Nicholas II, it is engraved on the back as being a gift in 1904 from the Russian city of Uralsk. The silver gilt and enamel icon depicts St Alexis, the Metropolitan of All Russia in the central panel, flanked by the Guardian Archangel on the left and St. Seraphim of Sarov on the right (a favourite saint of the imperial family). Above the main panel is an onion-shaped top crowned by a Russian Orthodox cross, displaying Christ Pantocrator flanked by St. Aleksandra on the left, with St. Nikolai on the right. On the clasp is the coat of arms of the city of Uralsk (estimate: £220,000-280,000). This icon featured in the exhibition *Fabergé in America* at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1996.

The period following the 1917 Russian Revolution saw an outburst of creativity among Soviet artists and designers, none more so than among the innovative and bold designs that were produced by the Lomonosov porcelain factory in St Petersburg. The ceramics created during this time incorporated rousing images and slogans in support of the new regime, and were seen as an important propaganda tool by the Bolshevik government. Included in the sale are eighteen top quality avant-garde plates from The Howard Gilman Collection. A former chairman of the family paper company, Howard Gilman is well-known for building up one of the finest photographic collections which was recently

acquired by the Metropolitan Museum in New York. One of the plates is an early piece produced during the first years of Communism by Mikhail M. Adamovich which includes a portrait of Lenin and the slogan 'He Who Does Not work Does Not Eat' (estimate: £4,500-6,500) while Suprematist painter Kazimir Malevich's plate from the 1920s is purely abstract in design (estimate: £70,000-90,000).

Russian Sales at Christie's

The Russian department was established at Christie's in the late 1970s in Geneva (the last Geneva sale was held in 1994). London sales were first held in the early 1980s. More recently Christie's has held annual sales of Important Russian Pictures and Russian Works of Art and Pictures in London, and two Russian Works of Art and Paintings sales (April and October) in New York.

Christie's holds the world auction record for a Russian work of art with \$9.6 million achieved for the Fabergé Winter Egg (April 2002). Christie's also set World auction records for two single-owner sales of Fabergé: The Forbes Collection, which was sold in April 2002 for \$5.9 million, and the Kazan Collection, which realized \$4 million in April 1997. Christie's holds the world auction record for a 19th century Russian painting, for Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovskii's *St Isaac's on a frosty day* (sold in November 2004 for £1,125,250).

In 1990 Christie's was the first international auction house to facilitate a significant acquisition by The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

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Images available on request

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Notes to Editors

A selection of paintings will be on view at Christie's Paris on 5 and 7 November 2005 from 10.00am-18.00pm.

Christie's International at World Fine Art Fair, Moscow (19-26 September 2005)

The Manezh, Manezhskaya Square, Moscow

An exclusive preview exhibition of a selection of fine jewels and watches from Christie's International autumn auctions in Geneva and New York will take place at the Manezh in Moscow, as part of the World Fine Art Fair