

For Immediate Release
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THE ITALIAN SALE
20th Century Italian Art at Christie's London this October

The Italian Sale
Christie's London
24 October 2005

London – Christie's is pleased to announce its fifth sale of 20th Century Italian Art, which will take place on Monday 24 October 2005. Interest in Italian art has never been stronger, as growing numbers of private collectors and institutions from around the world discover the diversity and vitality of 20th century Italian art. This sale will include major paintings and sculptures from Italy's leading modern and contemporary artists while at the same time presenting a comprehensive overview of important Italian art through modern, post-war and contemporary eras.

“As in previous years, an outstanding array of prestigious Italian works of art has been gathered, in what promises to be a thrilling sale. The most exciting work offered is Pino Pascali's 1965 make-believe gun Bella Ciao which is the most important of his ‘weapons’ series. Other highlights include a number of museum-quality works by Futurist artists Carlo Carra and Giacomo Balla, by Arte Povera artists Jannis Kounellis, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Luciano Fabro and Alighiero Boetti together with an anonymous and hitherto unseen collection of works by Alberto Burri,” says Olivier Camu, the specialist in charge of the sale.

*The modern section includes two large 1914 drawings by the Futurist artist Giacomo Balla including *Velocità astratta* and *Linea & velocità* (estimate: £100,000–150,000 each) as well as a large rediscovered painting of 1906–1911 by Carlo Carra *Lo scaricatore di porto* (*The Docker*) (estimate: £300,000–400,000) which has a fascinating history, and a 1930s painting by Giorgio de Chirico titled *Ettore* (estimate: £230,000–280,000). Finally there are four works by Giorgio Morandi, of which the transcendental still life of 1941 *Natura morta* (estimate: £700,000–800,000) is the earliest and most important.*

The undeniable star lot of the Post War part of the sale is Cannone Bella Ciao (estimate: £1,500,000–2,000,000), a wonderfully playful yet shocking make-believe and life-size artillery gun created by Pino Pascali in 1965, at the height of the Vietnam War. Bella Ciao is the best known of Pascali's 'weapons' and has been exhibited in all the major Arte Povera or Italian Art international exhibitions in the world. The only other gun made by Pascali was sold by Christie's in its 2003 Italian Sale for £1,573,250, a record for any classic Post War Italian art.

One of the other exciting highlights is a hitherto unknown collection of works by Alberto Burri (1915–1995), an artist whose work is much in demand. Burri was a strong influence on many Post War Italian artists as well as on the American artist Robert Rauschenberg who visited him in Italy in 1953, before returning to the US to work on his famous 'combine' works. The sale includes a 1951 oil Bianco nero (estimate: £80,000–120,000), Plastica, a 'plastic combustion' of 1962 (estimate: £250,000–300,000), one of his fascinating and very large black 'Cretto' series title Cretto nero of 1973 (estimate: £350,000–450,000) among others.

The sale also features great examples of works by other Informel movement artists such as Piero Manzoni (1933–1963) and Lucio Fontana (1899–1968). Manzoni's Achromes are well represented by two highly simple and elegant examples, one with pleats and one with squares, both dated 1958–59 (estimate: £250,000–350,000 each). The Fontana section boasts no less than eleven works by the artist. These span his career, from an early painted sculpture of 1931 Tavoleta graffita (estimate: £30,000–40,000), a beautiful early large plain canvas Concetto spaziale of 1954 with rows of holes and blue glass pebbles (estimate: £450,000–550,000), together with one of the first Concetti spaziali with tears and cuts from 1958 (estimate: £170,000–200,000), and a group of colourful Tagli (cuts) works of which the most important is a large flamboyant red one of 1965 (estimate: £500,000–600,000).

Aside from Fontana's, Italian sculpture is well represented including a 1957 bronze cardinal Cardinale Seduto by Giacomo Manzù (1908–1991) (estimate: £150,000–200,000), a 1944 Cavaliere by Marino Marini (1901–1980) (estimate: £250,000–300,000) and a large 1969 bronze disc by Arnaldo Pomodoro (b. 1926) Disco (estimate: £80,000–120,000).

Two museum-quality sculptures by Arte Povera artists feature in the sale. The first is Luciano Fabro's (b.1936) striking Cosa Nostra, a glass and metal sculpture of Italy turned on its side, (estimate: £100,000–150,000). Conceived in 1968 and executed in 1971, Cosa Nostra is an attempt to encourage the viewer to move beyond a sense of the map's iconography, provoking a more profound and fundamental understanding of Italy. The second is the star piece by Alighiero Boetti (1940–1994), a Cubo of 1968, a cube of plexiglass filled in an orderly manner with mixed building material elements (estimate: £140,000–180,000). This is the first appearance at auction of a 'Cubo' by the artist. The sale also features two of his famous and colourful embroideries, a map of the world of 1983, A Kabul Afghanistan (estimate: £140,000–180,000), and a Tutto of 1988 (estimate: £140,000–180,000).

Among the celebrated artists included is an important work by Italian painter and printmaker Emilio Vedova (b.1919) entitled Scontro di situazioni '59-1, (estimate: £250,000-350,000). This work was painted in 1959, the year before he was awarded the Grand Prize for Painting at the 1960 Venice Biennale. Essentially a self-taught artist, Vedova is best known for his expressionist abstract paintings whose surfaces are covered in energetic, sweeping strokes of paint. Scontro di situazioni was selected to represent Vedova's work at the London Royal Academy 1989 exhibition 'Italian Art in the 20th Century' as well as for the New York Guggenheim 1994 exhibition 'The Italian Metamorphosis 1943-1968'.

An artist whose work was reflective of the 1960's 'Pop' era is Domenico Gnoli (1933-1970). His painting Shoulder, 1969 (estimate: £200,000-300,000) is painted with acrylic and sand on canvas. After moving to New York, his paintings from the 1960s onwards concentrated on everyday objects and details of ordinary items of clothing. The sale will also show the first and most important section within the Italian sale format devoted to Jannis Kounellis (b. 1936). Leading the group is Untitled, a large and poetic 1960 painting stencilled with his trademark black signs (estimate: £350,000-450,000). It is this painting that achieved the world record price for the artist at auction when it sold in 1999. The group also reveals the artist later on in his career with his 1971 Bachfuge (estimate: £250,000-350,000) a large canvas with fragments of music scores by Bach appearing amidst a sea of green pigment.

In addition to the above, The Italian Sale will feature an array of works from the leading Italian artists of the 'Transavanguardia' movement namely, Sandro Chia, Mimmo Paladino and Enzo Cucchi. And last but not least, the sale closes with two works by the Italian contemporary master of wit, Maurizio Cattelan.

International Exhibition Tour:

Turin:

7 October from 11.00-7.00pm at Unicredit PB, Via XX Settembre, 31

Milan:

11 October from 11.00am-7.00pm at The Westin Palace, Piazza della Repubblica, 20

Rome:

13-14 October; 13 October 4.00pm-8.00pm; 14 October 10.00am-2.00pm at Palazzo Massimo Lancellotti, Piazza Navona, 114

Bologna:

16 October by appointment only at Fondazione del Monte, Via delle Donzelle, 2.

The sale will open for viewing at Christie's King Street from 20-24 October.

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Images available on request

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