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October 10, 2005

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MATTA, BOTERO AND RIVERA TO LEAD LATIN AMERICAN ART AT CHRISTIE'S

Latin American Art
November 15 & 16



Matta, *Watchman, What of the Night?*, 1961, oil on canvas, estimate: \$500,000-700,000

New York – Christie's sale of *Latin American Art* this season will have its evening performance on November 15, offering several seminal works by major Latin American artists. On November 16, the day sale will present a wide array of paintings, drawings and sculpture, ranging from more work by key artists to contemporary creations, attractive for new and established collectors alike. Both sales are rich in private and museum property, including property from the Metropolitan Museum, New York, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Detroit Institute of Arts.

One of the main eye-catchers of the sale, both in size and reputation, is Matta's formidable *Watchman, What of the Night?*, 1961 (estimate: \$500,000-700,000). Throughout a career that spanned more than 7 decades, Matta employed painting as a means to express the mind's inner universe. His intellectual sharpness and fierce imagination were crucial to the generation of New York's Abstract

Expressionists emerging in the 1940's. It is during that decade that Matta embarks upon large scale paintings. Painted in 1961, the present work exemplifies the continuation of his working with grand surfaces. *Watchman, What of the Night?* is an epic mural that marries Matta's vocabulary of abstract forms and fluid shapes in explosive yellows, greens and reds. Once in the collection of the famous Athenian art dealer Alexander Iolas in whose bedroom the work proudly hung, the painting is being offered for sale by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

For Fernando Botero - recently in the news with the unveiling of his Abu Ghraib series – the theme of military regimes and their use of power has made appearances in his work during his entire career. Less overt in its expression of unrest but reflecting a clear interest in the military as a subject-matter is *Junta Militar* (estimate: \$750,000-950,000), a painting Botero executed in 1973 and the cover lot of the sale. At first glance the work is a signature Botero - full figures in bright, flat colors – but a second reading evokes the kernel of his developing fascination with the military and on a more emotional level, issues such as loss, sadness and nostalgia. *Junta Militar* exudes a slightly unsettling atmosphere and in its mild, almost deceiving way, it is a milestone on the artist's road to uncovering the many layers of society's dehumanization which often occurs at the hands of politicians and generals.

Extremely unusual and reflective of a very imaginative and wistful collecting approach, a second Botero lot in the sale will offer two paintings by the artist, at the explicit request of the collectors, Mr. and Mrs. Mackenzie Gordon. Art history itself provides the reason for this unique gesture: one painting is Botero's portrait of the illustrious Arnolfini couple, after Jan van Eyck; the second one is a painting of a French poodle. Since the original van Eyck painting represents the Arnolfinis with their dog and the Botero variation omits the dog, *French Poodle* is offered with *Los Arnolfini* to reflect the van Eyck scene in the most faithful of ways. The two paintings are estimated to reach between \$550,000 and \$650,000. Botero's *La Poupée*, a brown patinated bronze from 1977, will also be offered (estimate: \$450,000-550,000).

An absolutely splendid portrait by Diego Rivera, depicting *José Antonio del Pozo* (estimate: \$700,000-900,000), shows Rivera at the height of his powers. The work belongs to the series of commissioned portraits Rivera did of the youngest members of Mexico's intellectual and business elite. The 1955 portrait features the twelve-year old son of the General Secretary of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and the work is inscribed elaborately by Rivera, a practice reminiscent of Renaissance portraits. The artistic as well as allegorical power of the painting is stunning – symbols of childhood and maturity, death and life blend in this fabulous *retrato*. The work is part of the National Heritage of Mexico and will have to remain in the country.

A superb reflection of Rufino Tamayo's exquisite treatment of the child in his paintings is *Girl with Yellow Flowers*, 1946 (estimate: \$600,000-800,000), from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The present painting opened a new chapter in Tamayo's dealing with the subject, as he abandoned traces of shyness and opened up his work to vibrate with vitality and joy. *Girl with Yellow Flowers* evokes an exterior impressionist scene, bathed in sunlight and displaying a lighthearted play of lights and shadows. Also by Tamayo are *Dos Personajes en un interior*, 1970 (estimate: \$300,000-400,000), depicting a mysterious realm of warm and luminous color; and *Imagen en el Espejo*, 1961 (estimate: \$250,000-350,000).

Wifredo Lam is represented by three works from the late thirties/early forties, a highly sought-after period in his career. *Habana*, 1944 (estimate: \$250,000-350,000) reflects the large impact his returning to Cuba in 1941 had on his art. Lam felt a "great stimulation of my imagination" and his subsequent works integrated Cuba's flora, its extraordinary light and African myths. *Habana* belongs to this group of vigorously colorful paintings, exploring Cuba's sunlight using techniques of impressionism and pointillism. The sale also features *Untitled*, circa 1945 (estimate: \$400,000-500,000) and an exquisite work on paper, *Figure*, drawn in 1938 (estimate: \$150,000-200,000).

From an Important Brazilian Collection is Emiliano di Cavalcanti's *Cena de Bahia*, 1957 (estimate: \$400,000-500,000), a lyrically painted impression of the streets of Salvador de Bahia, where the mulatas with their voluptuous bodies, wearing richly patterned dresses, express Brazil's exuberance and mixed cultures.

The evening sale further features Candido Portinari's *Tocador de trombeta*, 1958 (estimate: \$300,000-400,000), a splendid painting offered by the Detroit Museum of Arts which now makes its first appearance on the market; several works by the mid 20th century artists whose work is much en vogue right now such as Jesus Rafael Soto, Antonio Bandeira, Mira Schendel and Alfredo Volpe; and a group of works by the up and coming artists including Beatriz Milhazes and Carlos Amorales.

On November 16, the sale opens up to a wider collecting audience, offering works by established as well as contemporary artists at a slightly more modest price level. Following the very successful day sale last May, this auction will again offer the opportunity to select from a wide range of artists from all Latin American countries as well as all time periods as colonial, modern and contemporary works of art are included. Among the many noteworthy lots is a group of sculpture by Zuñega; paintings by Angel Zarraga; a Portinari study for Morro, a painting currently belonging to MoMA; and a host of contemporary and avant-garde artists including Julio Galan, Roberto Juarez, Alfredo Jaar, Guillermo Kuitca, Jose Bedia and Los Carpinteros, an artist's alliance created in 1991.

Auction: Latin American Art

November 15 at 7 p.m. and November 16 at 10 a.m.

Viewing: Christie's Galleries at Rockefeller Center November 11 - 15

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Images available on request

Visit Christie's Web site at www.christies.com

More information about Christie's sale of *Latin American Art* can be found on www.christies.com. All lots from the sale can be viewed online along with full catalogue descriptions on Lotfinder®, which also allows clients to leave absentee bids. www.christies.com provides information on more than 80 sale categories, buying and selling at auction, complete auction results, and Christie's international auction calendar.