

For Immediate Release

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MISS B'S PRIVATE COLLECTION

The private and personal collection of the late Miss Valerie Beston, loyal assistant to artists of the 'London School', to be sold at Christie's London in February 2006

**The Collection of the Late Miss Valerie Beston: Artists from the London School
Christie's King Street and Christie's South Kensington
8 and 10 February 2006**

London – Christie's is pleased to announce the sale of **The Collection of the Late Miss Valerie Beston: Artists from the London School** will take place in London on 8 and 10 February 2006. Miss Beston was known throughout the London art world as the person who loyally supported and nurtured many of the leading artists working in London during her extraordinary fifty year career. Totally discreet and loyal, she preferred to remain in the background. This highly personal collection is almost entirely comprised of works given to her by her artist friends in the 'London School' and ranges from important oil paintings and prints by artists including Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud and Frank Auerbach to photographs, prints, signed posters and other ephemera. Many bear personal dedications and words of gratitude and appreciation. The Collection lends a fascinating and personal insight into the artistic environment in London during the 50s, 60s and beyond. Six of the most important paintings will be included in Christie's *Post-War and Contemporary Art* evening sale at King Street on 8 February 2006 with the rest of the Collection being offered in a single-owner sale at South Kensington on 10 February 2006.

The Collection is led by Francis Bacon's raw and powerful *Self Portrait* of 1969 (estimate: £1,400,000-1,800,000). Here, Bacon's recognisable but seemingly beaten-up and swollen features stare directly out of the painting with an air of nonchalance that borders on disdain. Bizarre splashes, smears and rubs of purple, orange and white paint articulate a brutish and vital physicality. It is a portrait of a man aware of but ultimately indifferent to the peculiarities of his own features. This painting is one of the first of Bacon's single-head portraits, as he turned to investigate his own image, possibly reflecting a degree of introspection, and more certainly a heightened existential awareness and increased psychological intensity in his work. To Bacon, his self-portraits were essentially connected to his awareness of the passing of time and the presence of death within life including his own.

This painting was a gift from the artist to his 'dear Miss B', his friend, confidante and personal assistant, in appreciation of her friendship and loyalty. This exceptional relationship between Bacon

and Miss Beston has been well documented, and lasted for more than thirty years ending with his death in 1992. She organised his life – from paying off his Harrods account, organising his rent, and paying utility bills to arranging for pictures to be taken straight from his studio to his gallery by the Marlborough driver, “as soon as the paint was dry”. It is well-documented that Francis Bacon destroyed many of his paintings before they saw the light of day; Miss Beston saw it as part of her role to rescue what she could before that happened.

Frank Auerbach was another artist in the Marlborough Gallery stable whom Miss Beston was to nurture during her career. Included in her collection are eight powerful oils together with a number of drawings, painted over a period of over twenty years; one a gift from Auerbach to Miss Beston. Auerbach’s masterly painting style is clearly shown in *Head of Julia*, painted in 1983 (estimate: £100,000-150,000), where his desire to capture the essence and reality of his subject can be seen in the powerful surface layers of paint. *Julia asleep* (estimate: £70,000-90,000) is an earlier work of the same sitter, painted in 1978/79. Landscapes by Auerbach also feature including *Tree on Primrose Hill* (estimate: £70,000-100,000 and *Study for Primrose Hill*, executed in 1986 (estimate: £2,000-3,000).

An important work by Michael Andrews, *Study of a Head for Lights* (estimate: £40,000-60,000) is also part of Miss Beston’s Collection. Regarded as one of Britain’s leading post-war painters, Andrews had an instinct for capturing the mood of the period especially during the 1960s party scene.

Miss Beston’s Collection is rich in other important artists of the period including works by Graham Sutherland, Henry Moore, Michael Clark and Stephen Conroy together with photographs by Irving Penn and Richard Avedon among others. In addition, there are many wonderful prints and posters with personal dedications by the artist themselves, including ten examples by Frank Auerbach, seventeen by Francis Bacon together with other works by Craigie Aitchison, Victor Pasmore, Alexander Calder, Lucian Freud, Paula Rego, Joe Tilson and Henry Moore.

International Exhibition Tour:

New York	4-8 November 2005
Zurich	1-4 December 2005
New York	18-20 January 2006
Palm Beach	24-25 January 2006

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Images available on request

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Notes to Editors

Valerie Beston (1922-2005)

Born in West Bromwich, Staffordshire, Miss Beston was educated at a Belgian convent. She remained fluent in French and retained a love for France which she shared with Francis Bacon. They both shared a love of Proust and an ability to read it in the original.

She began her career at The Marlborough Gallery in 1946, where she was to remain for the next fifty years, establishing unique friendships and professional relationships with her artist clients.

Unwaveringly discreet and loyal, she preferred to remain in the background, shunning the private views for which Marlborough was famous, trusted by a generation of British artists whom the gallery helped bring to fame, including Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud and Frank Auerbach. Her attention to detail was legendary, her notes and records of museum standard. Her support was acknowledged by the artists themselves, with many of the works in this collection given directly to Miss Beston by the artists, often bearing personal dedications and words of gratitude and appreciation. This single-owner sale is a modest testament of her contribution to these artists' work, with many works never seen by the public before.

Christie's Post-War and Contemporary Art Market

Christie's leads the Post-War and Contemporary Art market sales. The February 2005 London evening sale of Post-War and Contemporary Art achieved £24,461,600 (\$45,792,115), the highest total ever realized in this category, while the June 2005 London evening sale totalled £24,459,600 (\$44,516,472). In New York, the May 2005 evening sale fetched \$133,707,200, the highest total for a sale in this category worldwide.