

## **For Immediate Release**

October 18, 2004

Contact: Bendetta Roux      212.636.2680      [broux@christies.com](mailto:broux@christies.com)

### **THE NATHAN L. HALPERN COLLECTION OF IMPRESSIONIST AND MODERN ART**

*“The horrible tragedy that we are experiencing might produce a few isolated geniuses and give them an increased vigor ... There is no longer an ivory tower.*

*Retreat and isolation are no longer permissible.”*

*Joan Miró, Cahiers d'Art, 1939*

#### **Impressionist and Modern Art**

**November 3 & 4, 2004**

**New York** – As part of the sales of *Impressionist and Modern Art* on November 3 & 4, Christie's New York will be offering Property from the Collection of Nathan L. Halpern, a New York collector with a remarkable zest for life and collecting. The Halpern collection not only includes works by the most renowned modern masters but often shows them at crucial stages in their careers when they were breaking molds and re-routing art history. Miró's *La caresse des étoiles* is the highlight of the collection and as Mr. Halpern preferred not to exhibit this work, it is a new discovery to the market.

Mr. Halpern's collecting of European art began during World War II, while he was based in London and Paris as a naval officer, assisting in the planning of D-Day. After the war, he returned to the States and embarked upon a career at CBS television, becoming the assistant to William S. Paley, President of CBS and a renowned art collector. The exposure that he received here to the relatively new medium of television sparked his creative and analytical mind, and he soon was credited with the development of the first closed-circuit-television project. He started his own company, Theatre Network Television, becoming a pioneer in such major television advancements as telecast presentation of events and interactive video conferencing. Mr. Halpern frequented a circle of individuals who were nourishing and enriching to his collecting life such as the Hollywood producer

and art collector Joseph H. Hazen and Alfred Barr, the first Director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The centerpiece of the collection is Joan Miró's *La Caresse des étoiles* (estimate: \$6,000,000-8,000,000), a 1938 painting closely related to *The Reaper (Catalan peasant in revolt)* (now lost), which Miró created for the Spanish section of the 'Exposition Internationale' in Paris where it was exhibited as the counterpoint to Picasso's *Guernica*. Although the two artists' temperament and style differed, both were appalled by the atrocities and the violence that kept their country hostage and expressed their passionate feelings in paintings that were bold and undeniable artistic statements, attacking the state of affairs in their homeland. Miró had been dealing with violent and pessimistic themes as far back as 1934, many months before the eruption of civil strife in Spain. With the euphoria of the 1920s dead and gone, Miró started depicting terrorism and human tragedy in its harshest forms. *La Caresse des étoiles* is filled with abstract symbols, with a revolutionary star hovering about the peasant's head while another star is caressing his child's hair. By contrast with the mood of Picasso's work of the period, these elements offer a sense of hope and optimism. Mr. Halpern acquired this masterwork while based in Paris following the liberation of the city in 1944. With funds in short supply, Halpern overruled comfort for passion, by exchanging his overcoat and other sundries to acquire the painting from Miró's dealer in Paris, Pierre Loeb. When the War ended, he returned to New York in a military air carrier with *La Caresse des étoiles* wrapped in a blanket on his lap.

While many artists preferred the relative calm of the south of France during World War II, Pablo Picasso remained in Paris and continued working with the same intensity as before. During the German occupation, he devoted himself to three great series encompassing three of the principal and traditional genres of European painting: the still-life, portraiture and the nude. Although hugely important to Picasso, of the three themes, the nudes from this period are the least well-known. *Nu couché* (estimate: \$400,000-600,000), is the very first of this group and probably the first painting Picasso executed after the Occupation. This study in grisaille tonalities bears references to artists Picasso admired such as Goya, Matisse and Gauguin and it also reflects many of the basic ingredients of the reclining nude in *Nu couché*, the large oil painting, sold by Christie's in 1997 as part of the Ganz collection. Having befriended Picasso whilst staying in Paris, Mr. Halpern received this painting as a gift directly from the artist.

A ravishing, early landscape by Paul Cézanne, *Vue d'Auvers-sur-Oise – La Barrière* (estimate: \$1,500,000-2,500,000), executed circa 1873 is another highlight of the Halpern collection. Having spent several months with Pissarro and Guillaumin in Pontoise, Cézanne accepted the invitation of Dr. Gachet to come and live with him and his family in Auvers-sur-Oise. The bucolic nature of his new environment was a great stimulus to Cézanne's stylistic breakthrough and he worked with zest, taking full advantage of the technical advice he had obtained earlier on from Pissarro and enjoying the freedom to paint

undisturbed by curious spectators. However, he did not escape the attention of one onlooker, the Barbizon painter Charles Daubigny, who commented: “I’ve just seen on the bank of the Oise an extraordinary piece of work. It is by a young and unknown man, a certain Cézanne.”

*Nu dans l’Atelier*, a seminal drawing by Matisse executed in Nice in 1935 (estimate: \$800,000-1,200,000), was acquired following the advice of Alfred Barr who wrote: “Rarely if ever before had Matisse drawn, and composed as he drew, with such elaborate virtuosity” thereby referring to the drawings of that year. Although initially much more in favor of charcoal, Matisse undertook a sequence of eight pen and ink drawings on white paper in the final weeks of 1935, exploring once again one of his favorite themes: the reclining nude. The drawings were fully-formed and self-contained works of art, a perfectly realized synthesis of subject and mastery of means. Apparently fully satisfied with the experiment, Matisse declared in 1939: “My line drawing is the purest and most direct translation of my emotion.” The present drawing stands out for its complex manipulation of space and is fascinating for the coolly teasing manner in which Matisse completes the illusion of a drawing within a drawing, one reality folding into another, to come to one conclusion: in the end, all is artifice.

Other works from the collection to be included in the evening sale are a dramatic view of the Normandy coast by Claude Monet (estimate: \$1,500,000-2,000,000); a rare colored monotype by Edgar Degas *Le Coucher* (estimate: \$1,200,000-1,600,000); a 1920 oil by Matisse entitled *Femme au Fauteuil Rouge, Kimono, Nice* (estimate: \$1,800,000-2,500,000) and four drawings by Picasso including *Arlequin* (estimate: \$600,000-800,000).

A group of works from The Nathan L. Halpern Collection will be also offered during the sale of Impressionist and Modern Works on Paper and the Impressionist and Modern Art Day sale on November 4 and includes works by Pierre Bonnard, Edgar Degas, Paul Cézanne and Camille Pissarro, Auguste Rodin, Edouard Vuillard and others.

**Auction:** Impressionist and Modern Art

November 3 at 7 p.m.

November 4 at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

**Viewing:** Christie’s Galleries at Rockefeller Center

October 29 – November 2

###

*Images available on request*

*Visit Christie’s Web site at [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com)*