

## **Immediate Release**

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### **PAUL GAUGUIN'S EARLY TAHITI PAINTING *L'HOMME A LA HACHE* OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK IMPRESSIONIST AND MODERN ART SALE**

*"On the eighth of June, during the night, after a sixty-three days' voyage, sixty-three days of feverish expectancy, we perceived strange fires, moving in zigzags on the sea. From the somber sky a black cone with jagged indentions became disengaged. We turned Morea and had Tahiti before us."*

Paul Gauguin, Noa Noa

#### **Impressionist and Modern Art November 8, 2006**

**New York** – Paul Gauguin's *L'homme à la hache*, 1891 will be among the leading highlights of Christie's evening sale of Impressionist and Modern Art on November 8 in New York. One of the first paintings executed by Gauguin after the artist arrived in Tahiti in 1891, this work is among the most important and finest to have ever come to the market. *L'homme à la hache*, offered by a Lady of Title, is expected to realize in excess of \$35 million.

Paul Gauguin's majestic *L'homme à la hache*, 1891 (estimate: \$35 – 45 million), marks the artist's first arrival in Tahiti in 1891 and is one of the most important paintings of that period. In *Noa-Noa*, Gauguin's own account of his life and work in Tahiti, the artist describes the visual experience which led to the creation of this work. However, *L'homme à la hache* is a complex and multi-layered painting in which Gauguin combines direct observation, artistic freedom and symbolic meaning. Having left civilized life behind and in an attempt to free himself from values and opinions forced upon man by society, Gauguin's artistic search was mainly focused on a visual language with which he could transcend Western civilization. The relatively traditional, simple color-planes and arabesques used in *L'homme* are complemented with forms reminiscent of Greece and the Orient while the

scene is set in a Tahitian landscape. The artistic wholeness created by fusing different elements and influences reflected precisely the spiritual wholeness by which Gauguin was so inspired by and desired.

*L'homme à la hache* featured in the 1893 exhibition *Oeuvres récentes de Gauguin* organized by the famous Durand-Ruel gallery. Two years later, it was acquired directly from Gauguin by the influential and eminent Parisian art dealer Ambroise Vollard. It has resided in major private collections and was featured in prominent exhibitions including at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Art Institute in Chicago and the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

Born in Paris and educated in Orléans, Paul Gauguin embarked upon a career as a broker's assistant in 1870. It was his guardian Gustave Arosa, a major art collector, who introduced Gauguin to Camille Pissarro and soon he spent weekends and holidays painting with Cézanne and Pissarro. In 1885, after an unsuccessful attempt at a business career in Copenhagen, Gauguin decided to become a full time painter and six years later, disillusioned with the stifling approach to art in Europe, frustrated at his lack of recognition and financially destitute, he made his first trip to Tahiti. The encounter with the tropics changed his life and Gauguin remained in Tahiti and later the Marquesas Islands for most of the rest of his life. He died in 1903 and was buried on the Marquesas Islands.

**Auction:** Impressionist and Modern Art

November 8 at 6.30 PM

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

November 3 – 8

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*Images available on request*

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More information about Christie's sale of *Impressionist and Modern Art* can be found on [www.christies.com](http://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](http://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.