

CHRISTIE'S

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RELEASE

WIFREDO LAM'S BREAKTHROUGH
MASTERPIECE *LA RÉUNION*
WILL HIGHLIGHT CHRISTIE'S NEW
YORK 20TH CENTURY EVENING SALE



WIFREDO LAM (1902-1982)

La Réunion [Groupe]

Signed and dated "WiLam / 42" (lower right) and signed and dated on back (lower right) Tempera on paper mounted on canvas
70 ¾ x 47 ¾ in (180 x 120 cm)

Painted In 1942.

Estimate: \$3,000,000 - \$4,000,000

New York – On Thursday, 11 November 2021, Christie's is pleased to present *La Réunion*, 1942 by Wifredo Lamas as a highlight of the 20th Century Evening Sale in New York (estimate: \$3,000,000 – \$4,000,000). A remarkable statement of cultural hybridity and diasporic identity, *La Réunion* is among the most important artworks in Lam's oeuvre, immediately prefiguring his greatest achievement, *The Jungle* (1943). *La Réunion* will be on view at Christie's Los Angeles 20 – 23 October and at Christie's New York 30 October – 11 November ahead of the auction.

The Cuban-born Lam was the son of an Afro-Cuban mother and a Chinese father. His post-war body of work draws upon his mixed-race ancestry in a multi-faceted visual aesthetic, often incorporating African motifs alongside Western stylings. The unequivocal artistry born of this transcultural dialogue has established him among the pioneering modernists of the 20th century.

Marysol Nieves, Christie's Senior Specialist, Latin American Paintings, remarked, "*La Réunion is an exceptional example of Lam's work from the early 1940s. A decade that witnessed his full maturation as an artist. This monumental work masterfully encapsulates all that is Lam—his singular contribution to the history of modern art—the convergence of 20th century vanguard practices with New World cosmologies. By eschewing conventional notions of purity and hierarchy and embracing cultural hybridity and his diasporic roots, Lam redefined the parameters of modernism.*"

Painted in Havana in 1942, *La Réunion* was made at a pivotal moment in Lam's life and career. The artist had been in Europe since the mid-1920s developing his practice alongside some of the most renowned artists and intellectuals of the 20th century, including Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Frida Kahlo, and André Breton. At the onset of WWII, Lam returned to Cuba in 1941, and began incorporating distinctly Afro-Cuban influences together with modernist techniques seen in his work throughout previous decades. From August 1941 through January 1943, the artist executed a handful of his most significant works, including *La Réunion* and *The Jungle*, now in the permanent collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art.

La Réunion is a wonderful example of Lam's work, featuring his signature horse-headed woman, or *femme cheval*. First appearing in Lam's work in 1940, the femme cheval was initially used to illustrate the Surrealist poetry of his contemporary André Breton. Drawing from post-Cubist and Surrealist sources, including Picasso's *Minotaure* suite and Weeping Woman series of the mid- to late 1930s, the femme cheval is an amalgamation of European modernism and Afro-Cuban divinity. It simultaneously references the Surrealist penchant for subversion and hybridity with Santería practices in which devotees become transfigured into horses and mounted or possessed by *orishas*, or supernatural spirits. In *La Réunion*, the liminal condition with which the femme cheval is rendered successfully captures the equally transformative character of Lam's

work throughout 1942. Bridging European modernity with *cubanidad*, this massive composition stands among the most successful of Lam's artworks created during this all critical period, establishing conventions that would come to inform the future of his artistic production.

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