

For Immediate Release

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**EXCEEDINGLY RARE 1890s MUNCH MASTERPIECE
TO HIGHLIGHT MAY 4 EVENING SALE
AT CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK**

**NEVER BEFORE OFFERED AT AUCTION, "FERTILITY" IS ONE OF ONLY
A FEW MASTER WORKS BY MUNCH LEFT IN PRIVATE HANDS**



Edvard Munch (1863-1945)
Fertility, oil on canvas
Estimate: \$25,000,000 - 35,000,000

New York - Christie's is delighted to announce it will offer Edvard Munch's *Fertility* (estimate: \$25-35 million) - one of the most important works by the artist remaining in private hands - as the cover lot of its upcoming *Evening Sale* of Impressionist and Modern Art on May 4. Painted in the late 1890s, *Fertility* was originally purchased in 1902 by Dr. Max Linde, the German patron responsible for helping Munch establish his career in Germany. Since 1918, the large-format painting has remained in private collections in Scandinavia, with periodic loans to prestigious museum and gallery

exhibitions throughout Europe and the United States. The upcoming sale marks the first occasion that the work has ever been offered at public auction.

Conor Jordan, Head of Impressionist and Modern Art at Christie's New York, comments:

“Edvard Munch remains one of the most fascinating and influential artists of the Modern era - a pioneer of the Expressionist movement who sought to explore the deeper, universal truths of the human condition through art. We are delighted to present this exceedingly rare opportunity to acquire a true masterpiece from the most desirable period of Munch's career. Beyond this painting's pure aesthetic beauty, its rich, layered narrative, beautifully-worked surface, and remarkable state of preservation all combine to make this a highly sought-after prize for collectors, with record-breaking potential on auction night.”

At nearly 4 feet high by 4½ feet wide, *Fertility* is the one of the largest works of Munch's early career. Rendered in verdant greens with rich orange, red, and yellow accents, the painting's focal point is a lush fruit tree laden with ripe red cherries. A man and woman dressed in rustic work clothes stand facing each other on either side of the tree, creating a tableau reminiscent of Adam and Eve before the Tree of Life. Though the woman's visible pregnancy and the scene's lush greenery seem to communicate a theme of regeneration and hope, a fresh wound – as from a newly-cut bough – mars the tree trunk between the two figures and lends the scene an ominous, unsettled element.

Painted in the final years of the 1890s, *Fertility* - alternatively titled *Fruitfulness* - dates from a period of Munch's career characterized by remarkable creative output and difficult personal affairs. In 1898, he commenced a relationship with Tulla Larsen, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy wine merchant from Kristiania, as Oslo was then called. Unlike Munch, whose father was a devout military doctor, Tulla was part of the moneyed bourgeois class. Their affair was a tumultuous one, and although plans were made for the pair to wed, the relationship came to a violent end in 1902, when an argument led to a self-inflicted gun-shot wound that took off part of a finger on Munch's left hand. Scholars suggest the red-haired woman depicted in *Fertility*, and in an earlier, possibly related work *Metabolism*, is likely Tulla.

A controversial figure whose ground-breaking style was at times harshly received by critics in his native Norway, Munch is now recognized as one of the most important artists of the Modern era. Though he had not yet joined the Expressionist movement at the time he painted *Fertility*, the work represents a pivotal moment in Munch's journey toward capturing universal truths in his art. Trips to Paris in 1885 and 1889 and exposure to the innovations of post-impressionist artists like Van Gogh and Gauguin had taught him that art no longer had a role in merely imitating life. Instead, he embraced the idea of exploring pure emotion, without shrinking from the opportunity to expose a tortured soul to examination. This shift from the “impression” that had been the watchword of the

previous generation of the avant-garde to the power of “expression” for the generation of the 1890s was of momentous significance, and Munch was entirely at its forefront.

Demand amongst collectors for works from this profound stretch of Munch’s career continues to grow globally, fueled by the great scarcity of available examples. Few paintings from the 1890s-era still remain in private collections, and the works most closely related to *Fertility*, including *Metabolism* and *Eye in Eye*, are in the permanent collection of the Munch Museum in Oslo. The last significant work from the mid-1890s to come to market, the darkly seductive *Vampire*, set a new record of \$38.1 million at auction in November of 2008.

A complete e-catalogue of the Evening Sale, including this work, will be available online at <http://www.christies.com> beginning in mid-April.

Auction: *Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale*
Viewing: Christie's Rockefeller Center Galleries

Tuesday, May 4, 2010
April 30 – May 4, 2010

About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business had global auction and private sales in 2009 that totaled £2.1 billion/\$3.3 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's conducted the greatest auctions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and today remains a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 450 sales annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$80 million. Christie's has 53 offices in 32 countries and 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai and Hong Kong. More recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging and new markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai. *All auction sales figures include premium.

*Estimates do not include buyer's premium

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Images available on request

