

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Tuesday 24 May 2011

**CHRISTIE'S**

Contact: Alexandra Buxton [abuxton@christies.com](mailto:abuxton@christies.com) tel: +44 20 7389 2117  
Matthew Paton [mpaton@christies.com](mailto:mpaton@christies.com) tel: +44 20 7389 2965

**MAGNIFICENT PORTRAIT BY FRANCIS BACON DIRECTLY  
RELATED TO HIS SEMINAL SERIES OF POPES TO BE OFFERED FOR  
SALE AT CHRISTIE'S IN JUNE IN LONDON**

*“Frontal, imperious, head raised, he is among the most magisterially aloof of all  
Bacon’s ‘authority’ figures, be they popes or ‘businessmen’” says Martin  
Harrison*



Francis Bacon, *Study for a Portrait*, 1953

**London** — Christie's is pleased to announce that *Study for a Portrait*, 1953, a seminal work by Francis Bacon (1909-1992) will be a leading highlight of Christie's *Post War and Contemporary Art Evening auction* in London on 28 June 2011. An arresting and dark study in the degradation of power in Post War existentialist Europe, *Study for a Portrait* (Estimate on Request) has a rich artistic heritage, having previously been owned by two of Francis Bacon's contemporaries: Rodrigo Moynihan, a pioneer of abstract painting in the 1930's and Louis Le Brocqy, one of Ireland's most important painters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a great friend of Francis Bacon. *Study for a Portrait*, 1953, was the last painting that Francis Bacon realised in his studio at the Royal College of Art rented from Rodrigo Moynihan from 1951 to 1953, and it was there that he created some of his greatest landmark works including his definitive series of Popes and his first portrait triptych. Never sold at auction, it has been in private hands since and was acquired by the present owner in 1984.

*Study for a Portrait*, 1953 completes an outstanding and unprecedented group of iconic works from the school of London to be offered in one sale, including *Woman Smiling*, 1958-1959 by Lucian Freud, described by Robert Hughes as the turning point in the artist's career, 5 rare and early works on paper by the artist from the collection of Kay Saatchi and a portrait of Leon Kossoff, 1953 by Frank Auerbach.

**Francis Outred, European Head of Post War and Contemporary Art said:** *"1953 was one of the most important moments in Francis Bacon's career. Study for a Portrait, 1953 was painted between two of his most celebrated series that year – the major first Papal series and the landmark suite of Man in Blue paintings - and shortly after his legendary first triptych portrait, Three Studies of a Human Head. All of them were executed on the dark blue background which he pioneered in the studio that he borrowed from Rodrigo Moynihan, the first owner of Study for a Portrait and each of them cut through the veneers of civilized society to distil the raw and visceral qualities of human character. Totally fresh to the market, Study for Portrait, 1953 powerfully illustrates the degradation of power in Post War Europe and will join other major works of art from the 1940's and 1950's by Lucian Freud and Frank Auerbach in our London auctions of Post War and Contemporary Art in June."*

1953 is described by Francis Bacon expert David Sylvester as *"the last year it seems...of Bacon's first great period, initiated eight or nine years before"* and by Michael Peppiatt as an *"annus mirabilis as inventive as it was prolific"*. In *Study for a Portrait*, 1953, Bacon artfully depicts a suited man enshrouded by a sea of midnight blue, seated on a gilded armchair evocative of a Papal throne. With his disdainful gaze cast through lightly rimmed glasses, the man imports an aura of authority, isolated and enclosed within the cage of Bacon's architectural spaceframe. His atmosphere is dark, rendered through washes of blue-black oil and turpentine saturated on canvas. The twilight of the painting is broken up by striations of pale parallel lines, evocative of the folds of rich drapery depicted in the artist's studies of Velazquez's portrait of Pope Innocent X. Highlights adorn the man's armchair with flashes of gold tracing its contours like some golden throne for a ruling leader or the corporate seat of the trenchant

capitalist. As Sylvester has described, *'in these claustrophobic curtained settings, there loom up before us beings whose shadowy, ambiguous, unexpected presence takes command of any setting they survey, making real beings seem like shadows. They are as appalling as they are compelling, for these are creatures faced with their tragic destiny'*.

Measuring 198 x 137.5 cm, a work of this magnitude from this period has not come to market for several years. It is also larger than all of the artist's Pope studies.



Lucien Freud and Francis Bacon at the artist's studio at the Royal College of Art, circa 1952. The studio was lent to Francis Bacon at the behest of his close friend Rodrigo Moynihan

The early 1950s was a time of great interaction between the artist and his friends and peers Rodrigo Moynihan, Lucien Freud and David Sylvester, when all of their relationships were at their strongest. According to Martin Harrison, the author of the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of Francis Bacon, the shadows of all of these men, including the artist's caustic lover Peter Lacy can be found in the face of *Study for a Portrait*. The fleshy pink lips of his protagonist are unusual, and if they point to an individual characterization, it is possible they refer to David Sylvester. Bacon and Sylvester shared a flat in 9 Apollo Place at the end of 1953 and lived in the same house at 19 Cromwell Road at the beginning of 1954; Sylvester was also lecturing at the Royal College of Art while Bacon was painting there, and also dealing privately in Bacon's paintings during this period.

*Study for a Portrait* has been exhibited widely in the last 50 years, originally at Bacon's first museum retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London in 1955. Thereafter, prior to its spectacular reappearance in the Tate Britain centenary retrospective in 2008-2009, which later travelled to the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, it was exhibited only twice during the next thirty years, at the Fondation Maeght in 1966 and

in Japan in 1983. It was then shown at Galerie Beyeler in the Francis Bacon Retrospective in 1987 before travelling to Vienna for the Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art exhibition at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in 2003-2004. It will be on display at the Hong Kong Convention Centre from 25 – 29 May before traveling to Christie's, London in June.

Today, Francis Bacon's work is among the most popular 20th century art sold at auction. Most recently *Three Studies for Self Portrait*, 1974 realized \$25,282,500 / £15,422,325 at Christie's New York Evening sale of *Post War and Contemporary Art* on May 11, 2011 and *Untitled (Crouching Nude on Rail)*, 1952, sold for \$9,602,500 / £5,857,525. Both paintings exhibit Bacon's timeless sinuous renditions of elasticised flesh that touch on the human condition and the fleeting nature of life. In February 2007, *Study for Portrait II*, 1956 one of Francis Bacon's famous papal portraits sold at Christie's London for £14,020,000, a record price at the time for the artist at auction.

###

Visit Christie's Website at [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com)

*Images available on request*

*Complete catalogue available online at [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com) or via the Christie's iPhone app*

#### **Auction – Christie's London**

Post War and Contemporary Evening Sale

28 June 2011 at 7 p.m.

#### **Viewings**

Hong Kong Convention Centre

25-29 May 2011

*Additional exhibition dates & times will be announced in the coming weeks.*

*For further information, please contact Christie's Corporate Communications.*

#### **About Christie's**

Christie's, the world's leading art business had global auction and private sales in 2010 that totaled £3.3 billion/\$5.0 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 \$100 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.

\*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.