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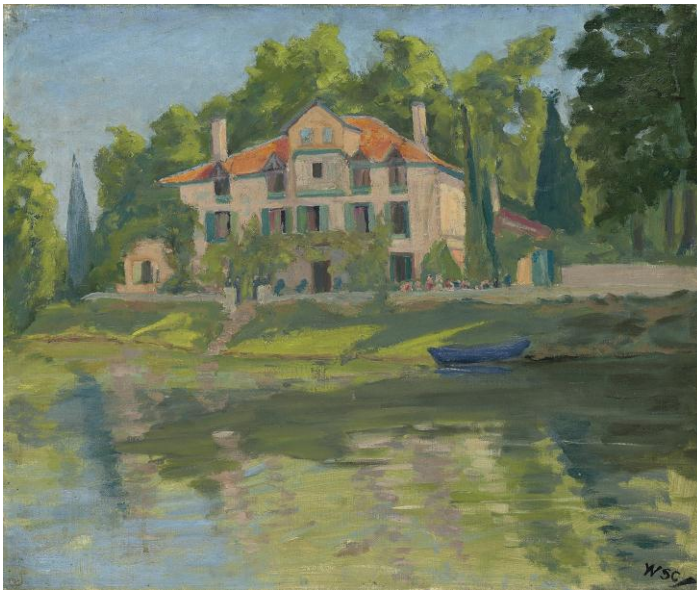
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CHRISTIE'S

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**WINSTON CHURCHILL CANVAS
PAINTED DURING A CRITICAL WINDOW IN HISTORY
TO BE OFFERED FOR THE FIRST TIME AT AUCTION
BY CHRISTIE'S IN MAY**



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London – Offered for the first time at auction, Christie's announce the sale of *Villa on the Nivelle*, 1945, by Sir Winston Churchill, O.M., R.A. (1874-1965) in London on 26 May 2011 (estimate: £200,000-300,000). Churchill executed this work during a critical window in history: between the British general election on the 5 July - resulting from the coalition government's resignation following the triumphant defeat of Nazi Germany in May 1945 - and the announcement of the result on 26 July, which heralded Labour's unexpected victory. Blissfully unaware of the pending outcome, the heroic wartime Prime Minister and his wife Clementine took a short holiday in the Basque region of France, at the Château de Bordaberry. Inspired by the beauty of his surroundings and persuaded by his companions in France, this painting marks only the second time that Churchill had picked up a paintbrush since the start of World War II. The existence of the remarkable photograph, *illustrated above*, documenting Churchill working on this canvas is extremely rare and highly evocative.

At this time, in stark contrast with the enveloping warmth and tranquility captured in this idyllic image, Japan's 59th Army - which was formed on 15 June under the Japanese 15th Area Army – was in the midst of a desperate final defence effort against potential landings of Allied forces in the San'yō region of western Honshū during 'Operation Downfall'. They were officially demobilised after Japan surrendered on 15 August, 1945.

Philip Harley Director, Head of 20th Century British & Irish Art, Christie's London: “*This important work by Sir Winston Churchill provides the global market with the extraordinary combination of a great British*

picture in excellent original condition and a highly desirable palette, by a highly sought after artist who was one of the most famous historical figures of 20th century British politics, dating to a critical window in history when the immediate political future of post-war Britain was in the balance. The existence of the photograph documenting the Prime Minister, as artist, at work on the painting is exceedingly rare. Taken through the grasses, its composition suggests that the viewer is privy to a very private moment of this great man, whose passion for painting is well recorded.” Rachel Hilderley, Christie’s International Specialist and Director, 20th Century British Art: “The market for Churchill is consistently strong and extremely international due to the enduring appeal of his style, decorative choice of subjects and his political significance. Due to the greater historical context of this very figurative work, its multifaceted appeal will undoubtedly reach beyond the broad band of existing collectors.”

Having been painted during a brief ‘pause’ in British politics, caused by the number of votes which had to be gathered from British citizens serving in the forces overseas, the eventual Labour victory was finally declared on 26 July whilst Churchill was at the Potsdam conference with Truman and Stalin. Due to the heroic status of Churchill as one of the greatest statesmen of the 20th century and Britain’s great wartime Prime Minister, this result came as a shock to the whole world.

The guests of Brigadier-General Brutinel, other members of the party alongside the Churchills at Château de Bordaberry included Mr. Bryce Nairn, British Consul in Bordeaux and his wife Margaret, who had been a professional painter before their marriage. It was Margaret who encouraged Churchill to paint again, for only the second time since the war had begun. They went on to paint together at St Jean-de-Luz, at Hendaye and on the river Nivelle where the current work was executed. Churchill’s daughter Mary Soames notes in her book, *Winston Churchill His Life as a Painter*, that her father was very focused on this painting and sat for so long that he was struck by a bout of indigestion. He did not paint imagined or composite scenes, instead always depicting real locations which resulted in very evocative works which not only captured an actual place at a specific moment, but continue to hold relevance in the present day, conjuring memories of one’s own relaxing holidays and travels, filled with the warm glowing light of summer sun.

Sir Winston Churchill started to paint at the relatively late age of 40, it was personal pastime which was to play an increasingly important role in his life; providing him with inner serenity in times of unrest and driving away periods of depression which he referred to as ‘Black Dog.’ In the celebratory January 1946 issue of Life Magazine, in which the present lot is featured, he stated that “There is no subject on which I feel more humble or yet at the same time more natural”, “it is a delightful amusement to myself.” “When I get to heaven I intend to spend a considerable portion of my first million years in painting and so get to the bottom of the subject.”

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Image available on request

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Notes to Editors

In M. Soames book *Winston Churchill His Life as a Painter*, London, 1990, Winston Churchill is recorded as painting only one picture in almost five years during the war in Europe. Following the ten day conference of Roosevelt and Churchill and their closest military and political advisers at Casablanca in Morocco in January 1943, Churchill persuaded Roosevelt to accompany him on a short visit to Marrakech where he painted *A view of Marrakech, with the tower of Katoubia mosque*. He later gave this to Roosevelt as a memento.