

Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

For Immediate Release

May 25, 2012

Contact: Sara Fox

[sfox@christies.com](mailto:sfox@christies.com)

212.636.2680

## MASTERWORKS OF 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY DESIGN FEATURE AT CHRISTIE'S, JUNE 14

The Most Important Piece of Isamu Noguchi Furniture  
To Ever Appear At Auction: The Dretzin Table



New York – Christie's **Important 20<sup>th</sup> Century Decorative Art & Design** sale on June 14 in New York will be highlighted by the most important work to appear at auction by Isamu Noguchi: a unique marble table commission made for Mr. & Mrs. Dretzin (estimate: \$800,000-1,200,000). The auction will feature an encyclopedic array of the most renowned designers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with the best examples in each category, including works by Isamu Noguchi, George Nakashima, Armand Albert Rateau, Charles & Ray Eames, Charlotte Perriand, Frank Gehry, Ron Arad, Claude and François-Xavier Lalanne, among others. With more than 130 lots expected to realize in excess of \$4 million, the sale will immediately follow ***A San Francisco Iconoclast: Henry Africa's Magnificent Tiffany Collection***, comprising seven beautifully crafted leaded glass lamps valued at \$2 million; [see separate press release](#).

Leading the sale is a sublime marble table by **Isamu Noguchi** (1904-1988) commissioned for Mr. and Mrs. Samuel C. Dretzin and executed in 1948-49 (estimate: \$800,000-1,200,000). Carved from luxurious slabs of fossil marble, this work of sculptural mastery defies categorization – at once table and sculpture. The Dretzin table has remained within the family and it is the most important piece of Noguchi furniture ever to appear at auction. The table's simplicity, abstraction and timelessness speak to Noguchi's dual East-West heritage, and also embodies the artist's ideal of bringing sculpture into a more direct involvement with everyday life.

In the late 1940's the Dretzins called upon the architect Sydney Katz to design their summerhouse on a stunning five-acre woodland plot in Chappaqua, NY. While Mr. and Mrs. Dretzin maintained an active interest in the fine arts, accumulating works by among others Georgia O'Keefe and Henry Moore, it was almost certainly Mrs. Dretzin's daughter, Ginny Geiger, a furniture designer mingling with New York City's young designers, who led her parents to the modernist architect Sydney Katz. And Katz, in turn, brought them to Noguchi. For their sleek new home, which was featured in *House & Garden* in February 1950, the Dretzins commissioned the exquisite marble table from Noguchi.

At the time of the table's commission, Noguchi had firmly established himself as an artist of exceptional talent, known for his mass-produced furnishings as well as his stage sets and costume designs for Martha Graham, John Cage and others. By 1946 Noguchi had also established himself in the forefront of contemporary sculpture and was selected for inclusion in the important Museum of Modern Art exhibition, "Fourteen Americans."

For Noguchi everything was sculpture and the Dretzin table is no exception, as he consistently refused to distinguish between fine and applied art. The Dretzin table is born from artistic exploration and uses a system of inter playing parts. This latter feature with its provocative stele and rudder like ligature securing base and top, recalls traditional techniques of notching and sliding, and draws on Noguchi's fascination with the art of joinery used in traditional Japanese architecture.

The table's origins may also be traced back to 1927, when funded by a grant from the Guggenheim foundation, Noguchi went to Paris to work as a studio assistant for Constantine Brancusi, and he was deeply influenced by the sculptor's work and his reduction of form. In the heart of the Paris avant-guard, Noguchi first carved from stone and began his lifelong infatuation with the material.



An important highlight in the sale by **Charles & Ray Eames** is a unique biomorphic form plywood sculpture from a European private collection that was included in the seminal exhibition 'Design for Use' at the Museum of Modern Art in 1944 (estimate: \$400,000-600,000). Executed in 1943, the sculpture unites fine art, sculpture and industrial design. While the sculpture appears to have been constructed from a single sheet of plywood that simply was cut and molded, it was the consequence of an extensively laborious hand-crafted process. Charles (1907-1978) and Ray (1912-1988) Eames are considered amongst the most influential creative partnerships of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and this playfully serpentine sculpture, which is wholly hand-crafted, endures as the perfected synthesis of aesthetic intuition allied to experimental yet rigorous technical expertise.

Other works by **Isamu Noguchi** in the sale include a rare chess table, designed for the 1944 exhibition, 'The Imagery of Chess' (estimate: \$60,000-80,000), and a 'Radio Nurse' nurse speaker from 1937 (estimate: \$6,000-8,000). A legendary event in its day, 'The Imagery of Chess' exhibition was conceived by the New York dealer Julien Levy and artists Max Ernst and Marcel Duchamp. Lauded by many, *Newsweek* declared that with his chess table Noguchi had "created the most beautiful piece in the show."





An important pair of *Long Chairs* by **George Nakashima** (1905-1990) were executed specifically for the Japanese House of Governor and Mrs. Nelson A. Rockefeller (each estimate: \$30,000-50,000). In 1972, Governor Nelson Rockefeller (1908-1979) and his wife Happy called upon the Japanese architect Junzo Yoshimura to design a house on their family's compound in Pocantico Hills, NY. A good friend of George Nakashima, Yoshimura turned to him for the furnishings. Using rare and exotic woods, Nakashima produced over 200 exquisite

pieces for the Rockefellers including a number of new designs which made up the series he called 'Greenrock' after the family's foundation. Nakashima's furnishings for the entire interior of the Rockefeller's home was, at the time, the largest private collection of his work and included the two *Long Chairs*.

A pair of rare and important reclining armchairs, made in 1902-03 by **Frank Lloyd Wright** (1867-1959) for the Francis W. Little House, Peoria, Illinois, remain in excellent original condition and are important examples of Wright's early work (each estimate: \$90,000-120,000). Other notable works of American design include a chandelier, *circa* 1910, by **Dirk Van Erp** (1860-1933) that is property from the collection of Swedenborgian Church, San Francisco, sold to support restoration of the landmark church (estimate: \$40,000-60,000), and a music stand by **Wharton Esherick** (1887-1970) made in 1962 (estimate: \$30,000-50,000).



The sale offers a strong selection of Art Deco, which is led by several important works by **Armand Albert Rateau** (1889-1938), including a pair of rare cat andirons, *circa* 1929 (estimate: \$120,000-180,000), a pair of *Palmes torchères*, *circa* 1934-1937 (estimate: \$300,000-500,000), and a set of four *Palmes* table legs, *circa* 1934-1937 (estimate: \$150,000-200,000).



Additional French Art Deco works include **René Lalique's** (1860-1945) *Ronde d'Enfants*, a *cire perdue* vase, 1930 (estimate: \$200,000-300,000), a chandelier by **Edgar Brandt** (1880-1960) and **Daum Frères** (estimate: \$15,000-20,000), and a set of 13 chairs by **Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann** (1879-1933) (estimate: \$50,000-80,000).

Among the European modern masters represented in the sale is an *Antony* bookcase by **Charlotte Perriand** (1903-1999) produced for La Cité Universitaire d'Antony in 1954-1955 (estimate: \$100,000-150,000), a *Guéridon Abre au Hibou* table, *circa* 1980, by **Diego Giacometti** (1902-1985) (estimate: \$100,000-150,000), and a **Jean Royère** (1902-1981) *Boule* sofa (estimate: \$100,000-150,000).



The sale's contemporary designs are highlighted by three epoxy stone and patinated bronze *Mouton de Pierre* by **François-Xavier Lalanne** (1927-2008) (each estimate: \$60,000-90,000), a *Narrow Papardelle* chair, designed in 1992 by **Ron Arad** (b. 1951) (estimate: \$80,000-120,000), and an early *Fish Lamp*, 1984, by **Frank Gehry** (b. 1929) from the collection of Susan Grant Lewin (estimate: \$100,000-150,000).

Gehry created his first legendary *Fish Lamp* for the exhibition, “Surface & Ornament,” organized by the Formica Corporation to promote their new product ColorCore and exhibited at Neocon, the design trade exposition at Chicago's Merchandise Mart in 1983. Under the direction of Formica Corporation's Creative Director, Susan Grant Lewin, Gehry was selected among ten innovative leading designers. One of the earliest versions, this lamp was chosen by Gehry for Susan Grant Lewin.



A selection of contemporary jewelry is featured in the sale including a *Positive/Negative* collar, circa 1948 by **Art Smith** (1917-1982) from the collection of Susan Grant Lewin (estimate: \$12,000-16,000) and a *Collier Gui Vermeil* necklace, executed in 1985 by **Claude Lalanne** (b. 1924) (estimate: \$5,000-8,000).

#### Auctions:

*Important 20<sup>th</sup> Century Decorative Art & Design*

June 14, 2012

*A San Francisco Iconoclast: Henry Africa's Magnificent Tiffany Collection*

June 14, 2012

**Viewing:** Christie's Rockefeller Galleries

June 9-13, 2012

**e-catalogue:** <http://www.christies.com/eCatalogues/index.aspx?saleid=23548>

#### About Christie's

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*\*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.*

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