

# CHRISTIE'S

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## COLLECTION HENRI-GEORGES & INÈS CLOUZOT

*"In everything that is a work of art, the artist chooses elements from the real world and places them as he can to compose his own world. It is the placing of these elements and the relationships between them that define the artist's world."*

Henri-Georges Clouzot



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**Paris** - Christie's France is proud to offer the Henri-Georges & Inès Clouzot collection for auction on 1 December this year. More than fifty works, including pieces by Picasso, Dubuffet, Tàpies, Bissière, Viera da Silva, Braque, Delaunay and Laurens, together with two African sculptures make up this collection, at a reasonable estimate of between 3 and 5 million euro. In accordance with Madame Inès Clouzot's wishes, all proceeds of the sale will be donated to Secours Catholique\*.

Henri-Georges Clouzot was the director of some of French cinema's greatest masterpieces, including *Quai des Orfèvres*, *The Truth [La Vérité]*, *Les Diaboliques* and *The Wages of Fear [Le salaire de la peur]*. These films are still remembered for Suzy Delair singing her famous *tra-la-la*, Brigitte Bardot's deeply moving performance standing in tears in the dock of an impassive court, Véra Clouzot's neurotic reaction on seeing the husband she has murdered or Yves Montand at the wheel of a lorry laden with nitro-glycerine driving over the edge of a gorge.

After a first dark period, in which Henri-Georges Clouzot depicted a perverse mankind revealed in the guise of oppressive enclosed spaces dominated by shadows and low lighting, with *L'Enfer* and *La Prisonnière* the director became the emblem of a new cinematographic style that the critics then dubbed *kinetic art*. Playing with moving lights and flickering shadows, images blurred by speed or obstacles passing across the camera shot, he excelled in creating, to use his own words, scenes "*filled with pounding beats and shudders, peppered with shivers and palpitations.*"

A great art lover, Henri-Georges Clouzot was a close friend of Georges Braque, who taught him to paint, and of Pablo Picasso, with whom he made *The Mystery of Picasso [Le Mystère Picasso]*. In this documentary the film-maker had the idea of using "magic markers" drawn across the paper and of placing his camera behind the canvas to make the work appear transparently, as if by magic, without a visible hand or brush. This feature length film is a unique film record watching the entire process of making a work of art as it happens. As José-Louis Bocquet, the film-maker's godson and biographer, so neatly puts it, "*Le Mystère Picasso* is not a documentary, but the story, almost the story within a story, of the creative process. One artist seeks to penetrate the mystery of another artist." Equally passionate about the works in his collection, Clouzot managed to make them entirely separate characters in his films, as in *La Prisonnière*, in which he shows the fascination they hold over the viewer, including, amongst others, the magnificent *Femina dulce malum* by Jean Dubuffet, that we are proud to include in our sale.

Like many post-war artists, the film-maker made the Colombe d'Or, a wonderfully romantic hotel in St Paul de Vence on the Côte d'Azur, his second home. Paul Roux, the owner, offered to build him a house in the garden where he could both plan his films and mix with the many artists and intellectuals captivated by the beauty of the setting and its location. In this family owned hotel ruled by culture, the taste for works of art and literature and discussion between artists in a close community, he shared lunches and dinners with Miró, Braque, Picasso, with writers, art dealers, creative artists in all genres. Matisse – who designed and decorated the superb Chapelle du Rosaire in Vence - Chagall, Gide, Giono, Cocteau, Prévert, the French artistic élite, found their way here. Clouzot met a great many actors here, among them Romy Schneider, Serge Reggiani, Véra Clouzot – his first wife, Brigitte Bardot, Simone Signoret and Yves Montand. Like Simone Signoret and Yves Montand a few years earlier, it was at the Colombe d'Or that Henri-Georges and Inès Clouzot were married in 1963, after Véra's death in 1960. Very close by too, in

1964, André Malraux inaugurated the Maeght Foundation, a magnificent building devoted to modern and contemporary art.

Having had no children, on her husband's death Inès Clouzot was named his sole heir. A loyal supporter of Secours Catholique for many years, in 2009 she made known her intention to bequeath all her assets to the organisation founded by Monseigneur Rodhain. So the legacy given to the charity comprises this magnificent collection together with the rights to her husband's films.

The collection of Henri-Georges and Inès Clouzot reflects the choices of an art-loving couple in the period after the Second World War. The film-maker, constantly innovating in his own field, kept in close touch with the main trends driving the culture of his day. As Otto Hahn, the art critic, stressed in *L'Express* of 25 September 1967: "On the walls of his new apartment, which has a view over Paris from L'Etoile to Auteuil, are Dubuffet, Bissière, Braque and Vieira da Silva. His interest does not end there. Despite appearing to be a lone wolf [...] he has antennae everywhere. [...] He has undoubtedly learned from Picasso, that other sufferer from voracious anxiety, never to be too far from the pot in which new ideas are simmering."

A major work in the sale is *Femina dulce malum* (subtitled *Corps de dame taché de rouille et lilas* [*Woman's body spotted with rust and lilac*]) by **Jean Dubuffet** (estimate: €1,000,000-1,500,000) is from the series of *Corps de dame* [*Woman's body*]. First exhibited in January 1951 by Pierre Matisse at his New York gallery, other paintings in this very famous series are now hanging in some of the greatest international institutions: the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Fondation Beyeler in Basle. Painted in October 1950, *Femina dulce malum* is in continuity with the *Paysages Grotesques* of 1949 in which the female body represents an entirely separate landscape. Picking up the great tradition of the female nude for his own purposes, the artist here confronts it head-on, doing away with any perspective and breaking all the established aesthetic codes. Stemming from a mediaeval adage, the Latin title plays on the ambiguity of the word *malum*, which means both *evil* and *apple*. It can be equally well translated as "Woman, sweet fruit" and "Woman, sweet evil", or "sweet forbidden fruit". The form of the female body portrayed is quite clearly reminiscent of that of an apple. Dubuffet mentions this picture in a letter to Pierre Matisse of 1959, in which he recalls that Henri-Georges Clouzot owns it. Presented in the most important exhibitions devoted to Dubuffet, it was included in the Dubuffet retrospective organised by the Centre Pompidou in 2001.

We will also be presenting two very important works by **Antoni Tàpies**: *Relief gris No. V* of 1956 (estimate: €400,000-600,000) and *Sans titre* [*Untitled*] of 1958 (estimate: €300,000-400,000), made during one of the Catalan artist's most intense creative periods. *Relief gris No. V* was included in Tàpies' very first exhibition in Paris, at the Stadler gallery in 1956. This pivotal date marks the artist's achievement of international recognition, aided especially by the publication that same year of the first monograph that Michel Tapié devoted to him, to whom Christie's paid tribute this winter with an exhibition in Paris. Distinctive for an unusual treatment of the subject, line and the formless, *Relief gris No. V* and *Sans titre* are characteristic of the explorations undertaken by Tàpies from the nineteen fifties and herald a work which continued for more than half a century, until the artist's recent death at the beginning of 2012.

Amongst the works by **Maria-Elena Vieira da Silva**, *Août* [*August*] (estimate: €200,000-300,000) seems to us remarkable in every respect. Painted in 1961 – the year in which the artist was awarded the Painting Prize at the São Paulo Biennale – the picture is a striking example of the unique way in which Vieira da

Silva understood perspective and depth, on the boundary between representation and abstraction. *Août* gives the viewer the vision of a landscape bathed in summer light, rendered with an astonishingly limited palette of shades of ochre, browns and beiges, punctuated here and there with incursions of bright colours. Vieira da Silva's passion for music also shows through in this brightly lit work, in which a multitude of coloured touches seem like so many scales, notes and tones giving this canvas a particularly dynamic rhythm.

Added to these major works of post-war art is the superb *Danseuse* by **Henri Laurens** (estimate: €100,000-150,000), one of his very first "paper sculptures". Made in 1915, at a time when the artist was bringing his own Cubist theories to maturity, particularly by applying geometric forms to non abstract models, especially female nudes, this collage mixing gouache, charcoal and pen on tracing paper exploits basic colour contrasts (black, beige and white) and visible construction lines reinforcing the dynamism of the geometric figures.

Another great French painter, **Pierre Soulages**, also features in the collection with his *Peinture, 9 février 1960* [Painting, 9 February 1960] (estimate: €200,000-300,000). 1960 was an important date for Soulages, not only because it was the year in which he built his studio and house in Sète, facing the sea, but it was also the year of his first major exhibition in Paris at the Galerie de France, where he selected his works himself. *Peinture, 9 février 1960* was one of those exhibited.

By **Robert Delaunay**, we present a set design for a ballet, *Football*, which in the end was never staged. This was a proposed ballet conceived between 1915 and 1917, under the aegis of Serge de Diaghilev for Les Ballets Russes, for which Léonide Massine provided the choreography, Manuel de Falla the music and Robert Delaunay the sets. The artist created several proposed sets for this choreographic work, one sheet of which is now in the Centre Georges Pompidou collection. Our watercolour with gouache highlights is particularly interesting. Entitled *Football* (estimate: €150.000-200.000), it is constructed on a gyratory movement of interlocking disks of contrasting colours. In a letter to Massine, held at the BNF [French national library], the artist says that he seeking to express in it "a wild and happy life, blemished".

Purchased by Clouzot from the very first exhibition organised by Daniel Gervis, **Louise Nevelson's** magnificent *Royal Tide II* (estimate: €80.000-120.000) is a remarkable sculpture in every way. A detail of it was reproduced on the cover of the catalogue of this exhibition. A work from the same series was purchased by the Centre Georges Pompidou, and another by the Dutch museum, Kröller-Müller. According to Daniel Gervis, this sculpture could almost be described as "baroque" in the context of Nevelson's work, in view of the number of accumulated elements and the golden colour used.

Lastly, among the works featured in *La Prisonnière*, a superb **Maternité Dogon** [Dogon Motherhood] from Mali (estimate: €30,000-50,000) stands out among the African sculptures. Covered in a magnificent slimy patina, from the many offerings and libations made to it, it has a very interesting Cubist style. Its sculptural qualities link it to the Bombou-toro style defined by Leloup and dates it to the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Bombou-toro style, which pushes human stylisation to its extreme, is characteristic of the region at the centre of the Bandiagara Escarpment.

Sale: Saturday 1 December 2012 at 4.00 pm – 9 avenue Matignon 75008 Paris

Viewing: 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29 & 30 November 2012

\* Editors' Notes:

Secours Catholique is a service of the Catholic Church and a member of the confederation *Caritas Internationalis*. The mission of Secours Catholique is spread Christian charity through tangible solidarity between all, in France and throughout the world.

In France, through **84 départemental delegations**, **4,000 local branches** (Metropolitan France and overseas territories) and a network of **61,000 volunteers** and **956 paid staff**, **1,490,000 people** have been accommodated and supported at **2,480 reception centres**.

Internationally, **365 operations** have been run in **71 countries**, in association with the *Caritas Internationalis* network; **2.3 million people** have benefited from this international aid.

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