

# CHRISTIE'S

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## **CHRISTIE'S ANNOUNCES THE SALE OF NEAL CASSADY'S 1950 "JOAN ANDERSON LETTER" TO JACK KEROUAC**

**FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENT OF THE BEAT ERA AND  
PRECURSOR OF KEROUAC'S RADICAL STYLISTIC EVOLUTION**

***"It was the greatest piece of writing I ever saw..." Jack Kerouac***



CASSADY, Neal (1926-1968). Typed letter completed in autograph and with autograph additions, corrections, and deletions in pencil and pen, to JACK KEROUAC (1922-1969), Denver, 17 December 1950. 18 pages, comprising nearly 16,000 words, some pale browning and minor marginal chipping. Estimate: \$400,000-600,000

**New York**—Christie's announces the sale of Neal Cassady's 17 December 1950 "[Joan Anderson Letter](#)" (estimate: \$400,000-600,000) to Jack Kerouac as a leading lot in the 16 June 2016 [Books & Manuscripts](#) sale at Rockefeller Plaza. The work will travel on a preview tour to Seattle from 31 May to 1 June, San Francisco from 2 to 4 June, Los Angeles from 6 to 9 June, and New York from 11 to 15 June.

Thought long-lost, only resurfacing in 2012, it has permeated virtually every conversation about the Beat era since its writing. Referenced not only by Kerouac, but by Allen Ginsberg, Laurence Ferlinghetti, Herbert Hunke, and a host of their contemporaries, Cassady's fluid, incantatory, and deeply revealing prose influenced the entire generation of Beat writers and gave Kerouac the model for his own literary revolutions.

The compulsive and charismatic Neal Cassady played a powerful role in Kerouac's finding his voice as a writer. The "Joan Anderson letter" revealed Kerouac's path to an entirely new approach to writing, first attempted in *On the Road*, then developed and codified into the style he would term "spontaneous prose." Kerouac famously hails its impact in an interview with Ted Berrigan, published in the Summer 1968 issue of *The Paris Review*: "It was the greatest piece of writing I ever saw," continuing, "I got the idea for the spontaneous style of *On the Road* from seeing how good old Neal Cassady wrote his letters to me, all first person, fast, mad, confessional, completely serious, all detailed, with real names in his case, however (being letters)."

Cassady's letter had been written on a three-day Benzedrine high, Neal later confessed. It contained, by Jack's first calculation, at least 13,000 words and ran to 40 pages. (The letter is mentioned in Part Five of *On the Road*.) Compelling, unaffected and discursive, it narrated Neal's frenetic love life in 1946, particularly with Joan Anderson (whom he visited in

a hospital after a failed suicide). Neal's uninhibited, non-literary narrative pointed to the way to the free, truthful style to which Kerouac aspired.

Only a fragment has been published, apparently copied by Kerouac before giving it to Ginsberg, in 1964 by John Bryan in his *Notes from Underground* #1. It was there called "The First Third," and Bryan claimed that Cassady himself came to help print it. The title suggests that Cassady was considering it as the first portion of his ongoing autobiography. The same extract was published by City Lights in 1971 as an addendum to Cassady's book *The First Third* and later formed the basis of the 1997 film *The Last Time I Committed Suicide*, directed by Stephen T. Kay, and starring Thomas Jane and Keanu Reeves.

It is an understatement to state that Neal Cassady material is scarce at auction: it is unprecedented. No records of any sales are recorded in the online databases for any Cassady material, let alone for material of this literary consequence. The circumstances of its preservation and appearance at auction constitute a unique opportunity to acquire a foundational post-war literary manuscript that transcends its humble origins as a "letter."

## LITERARY INFLUENCE

Cassady left his mark on a generation of writers through the power of this one letter, which ironically was lost soon after its receipt by Kerouac and remained unstudied and unread in full until its rediscovery in 2012. Its impact is seen creatively throughout the pages of the major documents that rose in its wake: *On the Road* and all that followed from Kerouac's genius and Ginsberg's era-defining "Howl."

## PROVENANCE

As with many documents of the era, the "Joan Anderson" traveled a complex path through many hands, and for the majority of the last 66 years was considered lost. Kerouac immediately responded to the power of the letter he received in late 1950, and gave it to Allen Ginsberg to read and offer to publishers. Ginsberg brought the letter to his friend Gerd Stern, who was then living in Sausalito on a houseboat and working as a West Coast rep for Ace Books. It was then that the letter went missing and the story was born—perpetuated emphatically by Kerouac—that it had been lost over the side of Stern's boat.

In fact, Cassady's letter had been preserved in the files of the Golden Goose Press. Owned by R.W. "Dick" Emerson, the Golden Goose Press was known for publishing some of the finest poets of the period. Emerson placed the envelope containing the letter on his "to read" pile, where it remained untended until its discovery in 2012 by Jean Spinosa.

It may have been lost forever had not John "Jack" Spinosa, Emerson's officemate at 40 Gold Street in San Francisco, insisted on preserving the press's archives when they were forced to vacate their rental. The boxes remained with Jack Spinosa until after his death on 29 November 2011, rediscovered Jack's daughter Jean on 15 May 2012.

## TOUR DATES AND PREVIEW

Seattle | *Tuesday, May 31 to Wednesday, June 2*

San Francisco | *Thursday, June 2 to Saturday, June 4*

Los Angeles | *Monday, June 6 to Thursday, June 9*

New York | *Saturday, June 11 to Wednesday, June 15*

## BOOKS & MANUSCRIPTS | SALE DATES

[Books & Manuscripts](#)

New York | Thursday, June 16 | 10am

[Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: The Extremely Rare 1865 First Edition](#)

New York | Thursday, June 16 | 12pm

## PRESS CONTACT

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### About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction, private and digital sales in 2015 that totalled £4.8 billion / \$7.4 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. 2016 marks Christie's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers around 350 auctions 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 also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War & Contemporary, Impressionist & Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery.

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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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