

CHRISTIE'S

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CHRISTIE'S ANNOUNCES A RARE MASTERPIECE BY CLYFFORD STILL TO HIGHLIGHT ITS EVENING SALE OF POST-WAR AND CONTEMPORARY ART



Clyfford Still, *PH-234*, oil on canvas, 1948. \$25-35million

New York – On May 10, Christie's will feature Clyfford Still's *PH-234*, 1948 (estimate: \$25-35m) among the top lots of its New York Evening Sale of Post-War & Contemporary Art.

The majority of Still's work resides in the collections of museums and institutions, including the Clyfford Still Museum in Denver, making the appearance of *PH-234* a rare opportunity to acquire an extraordinary and iconic example of Still's work at the heights of his artistic power. In its' nearly 60 years *PH-234* has only had two previous owners and was included in a major Still retrospective curated by James Demetrian at The Hirshhorn Museum in 2001, *Clyfford Still: Paintings, 1944-1960*.

Laura Paulson, Chairman, Post-War and Contemporary Art, America's, remarked: "Clyfford Still's paintings are among the most powerful and important produced in latter part of the twentieth century, and we are honored to present *PH-234* in one of the rare instances that an example of this magnitude comes onto the market from the artist. *PH-234* is a consummate masterpiece by Still, which conveys the essence of his awe-inspiring oeuvre. Demonstrating Still's distinctive style and technique, *PH-234* quickly reveals the rich and almost limitless possibilities of color, surface and space. Originally acquired in 1957 by visionary English collector, Ted Power, who was one of the first English collectors to acquire major examples of the New York School and Pop Art, *PH-234* is a commanding representation of the visceral potency of Abstract Expressionism at its zenith."

Still's reputation as one of the giants of Abstract Expressionism is built upon this mastery of the painterly process. Unique among his contemporaries, Still built up his richly textured surface by painting layer upon layer of richly pigmented oil paint carefully sculpting and applying each brush stroke. Still would often scrape away the surface only to rebuild it again, resulting in a surface both densely layered with color or often transcendent, conveying deep, mystical space. The spatial relationships created from this process and Still's vision, especially as seen in *PH-234*, result in a composition that is dynamic, almost topographical, and what ultimately defined Still's mastery of the canvas and set him apart from his colleagues such as Pollock, Newman and Rothko.

This painting was produced during the period immediately after Still's first great solo exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century Gallery in February 1946. In the introduction to the exhibition Still's then friend, Mark Rothko, related Still's new art to the epic and transcendent dimension of "Myth" and explained how Still, "working out West, and alone," had, with "unprecedented forms and completely personal methods," arrived at a completely new way of painting. The simple, seemingly organic forms of Still's painting and its bold expansive fields of space and color made, "the rest of us look academic" Jackson Pollock observed at the time.

PH-234 was shown in Still's first solo exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1951, and acquired in 1957 by E.J. "Ted" Power, one of the great collectors of international postwar art. Beginning in the mid-1950s, Power sought out the newest and most radical art he could find. He taught himself to discern what moved him and refined his eye to search for quality works by artists such as Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman. He acquired *PH-234* in January 1957 after becoming enthralled with the work of the Abstract Expressionists at the important exhibition of new American art organized by the Tate Gallery in London.

Still's work, and examples such as *PH-234*, in particular represent the pinnacle of Abstract Expressionism—a pure form of painting that relies solely on its creator to express the power and intense visceral nature of its form. His best works have an inherent power that is perhaps best summed up by Still himself, who in a rare moment of retrospection characterized the fundamental *raison d'être* of his work when he concluded, "You can turn the lights out. The paintings will carry their own fire" (C. Still, quoted in M. Auping, *Clyfford Still*, exh. cat. Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 2002, p. 303). This painting carries this fire to its very core.

Note to editors – Top three lots for Clyfford Still at auction

1. 1949-A-No. 1, oil on canvas, 1949 | Sale of Sotheby's New York: Wednesday, November 9, 2011
Estimate: \$25,000,000 - 35,000,000 | Price Realized: \$61,682,500

2. 1947-Y-No. 2, oil on canvas, 1947 | Sale of Sotheby's New York: Wednesday, November 9, 2011
Estimate: 15,000,000 - 20,000,000 | Price Realized: \$31,442,500

3. 1947-R-no. 1, oil on canvas, 1947 | Sale of Christie's New York: Wednesday, November 15, 2006
Estimate: \$5,000,000 - 7,000,000 | Price Realized \$21,296,000

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Public Exhibition:
30 April – 10 May
Monday-Saturday: 10-5pm
Sunday: 12pm-3pm

Auction:
Post-War and Contemporary Evening Sale
10 May 2016, 7pm

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 250th 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.

Christie's has a global presence with 54 offices in 32 countries and 12 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Mumbai. More recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in growth 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.

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