

CHRISTIE'S

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ODYSSEY OF A PEOPLE

LEADING CHRISTIE'S SPRING AUCTION SEASON IN DUBAI
15-19 MARCH 2017



Dubai – An impressive 6 meter long painting by Ismail Shammout (1930-2006) recalls the history of Palestine as well as the life experiences of this important master of Arab Modern Art. *Odyssey of a People* (estimate: US\$800,000-900,000) was painted in 1980 as a result of a relentless dedicated effort of over 6 months of daily work. Driven by emotion and passion it is the most important and seminal work of the artist's career. Directly consigned from the artist's family, this work comes fresh to the art arena. This phenomenal painting was first exhibited in 1981 in Dar Al-Karama in Beirut, later travelling on loan to Damascus, Malaysia, Kuwait, the Jordan National Museum, Abu Dhabi and finally Ramallah. It was at this final location in 2002, on the day of an Israeli incursion, that the painting was quickly hidden and folded away by the director of the museum in a pillow case and was not displayed publicly since. It was not until after the artist's death in 2006 and the director's death in 2008 that the artist's wife Tamam Al Akhal was able to establish contact with the museum director's wife and reclaim the work, cherishing it carefully at the Shammout family home in Amman. Christie's hopes to shed light on the artist's remarkable skill and importance when the painting will be previewed in Dubai on 15 to 17 March and subsequently offered for sale on 18 March in the spring auction of Modern and Contemporary Art, taking place at the Jumeirah Emirates Towers Hotel.

The canvas, reading from right to left as if in the Arabic language, retraces the historical events that have unfolded within Palestinian history, from the Nakba, the subsequent wars of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s to the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization. This is juxtaposed against a sense of hope and unity under the symbol of the Palestinian flag and Kuffiyeh, all the way to a dreamlike expression of liberation and hope in peace and freedom. It was Shammout's intention to map out the odyssey of his own people and represent his dream of returning home which was never to be realised in his lifetime.

Born under the British Mandate of Palestine, Shammout and his family were amongst the 25,000 residents of Lydda who fled their homes in 1948 and were relocated to the Gaza refugee camp of Khan Younis. Shammout then later moved to neighbouring Egypt and then Rome to study art. Upon his return to Gaza three years later, he established himself as a distinguished painter and activist. After pursuing his studies further in Rome, he settled in Beirut where he joined the Palestine Liberation Organization as the Director of Arts and National Culture in 1965, while also holding the positions of Secretary General of the Union of Palestinian Artists and Secretary General of the Union of Arab Artists. Additionally, he established *Art in Palestine*, one of the first English-language publications on Palestinian art. After the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982, Shammout then relocated to Kuwait, where he was once again forced to leave in the wake of the Gulf War. He finally settled in Amman until his untimely death.

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