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POP MASTERPIECE BY ROY LICHTENSTEIN TO HIGHLIGHT CHRISTIE'S MAY POST-WAR AND CONTEMPORARY EVENING SALES IN NEW YORK



Roy Lichtenstein, *Red and White Brushstroke*, oil and magna on canvas, painted in 1965
Estimate: \$25,000,000-35,000,000

New York –Roy Lichtenstein's *Red and White Brushstrokes*, from 1965, will highlight the May 17 Post-War and Contemporary Auction in New York (estimate: \$25,000,000-35,000,000). Across this monumentally-scaled canvas, Lichtenstein took the essence of Abstract Expressionism and reframed it as Pop. With its bold representation of two brushstrokes loaded with red and white paint set against a backdrop of blue Ben-Day dots, Lichtenstein calls into question the revered status of the painterly mark. Never before offered at auction, the present work is one of only a handful of canvases from Lichtenstein's pivotal *Brushstroke* series to remain in private hands.

The distinctive subject of *Red and White Brushstrokes* puts it at the very heart of Roy Lichtenstein's legacy. Its iconic style is double edged, apparently naive but actually highly sophisticated. By taking something as fundamental as a the mark made by the stroke of a brush and rendering it in the style of a mass produced comic, Lichtenstein set out to derail over a thousand years of art history. His choice of images as well as his simplified reductive style, highlighted his objectives intentions in a way that made the paintings both accessible to the general public and irritating to traditional academic art scholars who viewed him as unsophisticated. Yet, with works such as this, Lichtenstein emerged as one of the most intelligent and innovative artists of the Pop Art movement.

Andy Massad, Deputy Chairman, Post-War and Contemporary Art, remarked: "*Red and White Brushstrokes is a Pop masterpiece, but one that effectively draws on centuries of artistic tradition. Lichtenstein was an enthusiastic student of art history, as with Warhol, distilled through the crucible of Marcel Duchamp. The Brushstroke paintings were some of the first canvases in which he delved into the art historical canon as*

source material for his work. Using Abstract Expressionism, Renaissance painting and comic books as inspiration, Lichtenstein simultaneously canonized the work of his predecessors and eviscerated the parameters surrounding fine art. With this canvas he embraced the appearance of mechanical reproduction with a palette of red, white, and blue to form brushstrokes that wave like a flag of purely American painting, commenting on, but revolutionarily apart from European tradition. This work epitomizes the artist's ability to harness so much implication into deceptively simple imagery."

The present work belongs to Lichtenstein's *Brushstrokes* series, one of the most significant bodies of work of the artist's long and prolific career. The group of 14 canvases was produced during a span of only a few months and many are now regarded as pivotal works from the Pop Art movement. Most examples now exist in major international museum collections. These include *Brushstrokes* (on long-term loan to the Moderna Museet, Stockholm), *Big Painting*, (Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf), *Little Big Painting* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York), *Yellow Brushstroke I* (Kunsthau, Zürich), and *Brushstroke with Splatter* (Art Institute of Chicago).

Lichtenstein's *Brushstroke* series is often interpreted as a sly comment on the artistic dominance of Abstract Expressionism at the time of its conception. And particularly the authoritarian gestures of artists Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline. During the movement's heyday these autographical marks were often regarded as the ultimate demonstration of the artist's prowess. With *Red and White Brushstrokes* Lichtenstein began to challenge this hegemony, and by interpreting these spontaneous marks in a commercial, mass-produced style, he questioned the authority of these purportedly inimitable gestures.

Although the *Brushstroke* paintings were informed by Abstract Expressionism, their sources are more varied. Like Lichtenstein's more familiar works, the starting point was a comic strip. One of the artist's first *Brushstroke* paintings was a direct reprisal of a panel from the comic strip "The Painting" a horror story from Charlton Comics' *Strange Suspense Stories*, no. 72 (October 1964). Here, the cartoonist indicates paint in two overlapping strokes of paint; it is from this comic strip image that Lichtenstein developed the visual vocabulary for his *Brushstroke* series and roots them in the iconography of his earlier paintings.

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Auction:

Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale
New York, 17 May 2017
7pm

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