

CHRISTIE'S

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ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONIST MASTERPIECES FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION TO HIGHLIGHT FALL POST-WAR AND CONTEMPORARY EVENING SALE AT CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK



Willem de Kooning, *Composition I*, Painted in 1955



Franz Kline, *Light Mechanic*, Painted in 1960

New York – Christie's is honored to have been entrusted with *The Defining Gesture: Modern Masters* from a Remarkable Private Collection, which will be sold in a single owner section beginning with the November Evening Sales in New York. Comprising works by many of the 20th Century's leading artists, the collection encompasses the most comprehensive representation of Abstract Expressionism to be offered at auction in half a decade. Among the highlights, are foremost examples by Franz Kline, Lee Krasner, Robert Motherwell, Arshile Gorky, Alexander Calder and Pablo Picasso among others. In total, the collection is expected to exceed \$60 million. Highlights will be on view in Hong Kong and London on September 28 and September 30 respectively.

Sara Friedlander, Head of Department, Post-War and Contemporary Art: *remarked* "We have not seen a comprehensive collection of American Abstract Expressionism come to market since 2012 and are particularly excited about a collection formed so thoughtfully with an eye toward the revolutionary spirit of art in the 20th century. The collection is led by Franz Kline's *Light Mechanic*, an unequivocal masterpiece by one of the most emblematic artists of the Abstract Expressionist Movements. Additionally, we are particularly excited to offer examples by William Baziotes, Louise Nevelson and Milton Avery, artists historically not featured in the context of the Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale."



The sale will feature works from the private collection of Heinz and Ruthe Eppler. As the couple began to purchase works of art in the 1980s, they formed a friendship with the Cleveland Museum of Art's Chief Curator of Modern Art, Edward B. Henning. The couple thoughtfully assembled the collection with Henning's wise counsel.

Henning became a trusted advisor, relating his enthusiasm or hesitation on potential acquisitions. The couple, for their part, was inquisitive and deliberate in their purchases. What motivated them was the thrill of finding works of visual and intellectual resonance. Henning offered the collectors friendship and guidance throughout the 1980s. Of Robert Motherwell's

Je t'aime No. III with Loaf of Bread – pictured left, he noted, "My feeling is that it is very

important as well as being beautiful." He lauded the collectors for having chosen a "superb" painting by William Baziotis – pictured right. Henning went to great lengths to commend the art historical significance of Abstract Expressionists. Upon hearing that the couple had purchased Kline's *Light Mechanic* – pictured page 1, right, in 1985 – a work Henning had suggested some two years earlier—the curator wrote to express his congratulations. "You now have an excellent, representative collection of American Abstract Expressionist art," he enthused, "and that is the most important art of the twentieth century and the most important of all American art."



The collectors' connection with Henning is indicative of their personal, heartfelt approach toward art — one that culminated in an inspired collection of works extending across the twentieth century.

Leading the collection is Franz Kline's *Light Mechanic*, 1960 – pictured page 1, right, a consummate canvas by the artist, whose paintings have come to be regarded as the embodiment of Abstract Expressionism. His broad sweeps of dramatic black-and-white gesture combine to produce enigmatic forms that evoke the energy and aggressive dynamism of the New York City. At nearly eight feet tall, *Light Mechanic* belongs to a group of monumental canvases that Kline painted between 1950 and the early 1960s. Deliberate imperfections, irregularities and imbalances within its composition give life to the architectural geometry of the intersecting forms. The striking beauty and intense excitement of this canvas strike a sense of awe within the viewer. In both its physical size and artistic scope *Light Mechanic* captures the masculine energy that epitomized Abstract Expressionism.

William de Kooning's *Composition I*, 1955 – pictured page 1, left, is an incredibly important transitional work for the artist. Already heralded, along with Jackson Pollock, as one of the leaders of the Abstract Expressionist movement, de Kooning did not merely re-create his successes, but continued to push himself to innovate, transform, and adapt his artistic practice throughout his lifetime. *Composition I* serves as a snapshot into the artist's constant striving for a new vision - in it de Kooning is mid-process in navigating from his bold, frenetic *Woman* paintings to a style that more closely resembles the genre of landscape. The fleshy pinks interplay with sinewy, supple blues and delicate yellows, create a dynamic painting that is at once wholly abstract and yet curiously representational. Its sublimity is echoed in the masterwork from this period, *Easter Monday*, which de Kooning began in 1955 and completed in 1956. *Easter Monday* now hangs in permanent place at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, steps away from Jackson Pollock's masterpiece *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, 1950.



Lee Krasner's *Shattered Light* from 1954 – *pictured left*, is a milestone in the development of both painting and collage. Vibrant energy pulses throughout as colorful shreds of paper and quick strokes of oil paint push and pull the composition, creating a spatial tension so skillful that it could have only come from Kasner's hand. Nature was a primary subject matter for Krasner throughout the course of her career, beginning as early as her student days, and *Shattered Light* maintains that proclivity. With this canvas, paint and collage coalesce to produce poetic naturalistic forms that recall the feeling of sweeping wind barreling through the air.

Alexander Calder's *Calderoulette*, executed 1940-1945 – *pictured right*, is a stunning example of of magical and imaginative creations that distinguished the artist's oeuvre. *Calderoulette*'s composition is formed by what appears to be an open water lily, below a floating butterfly, a small buzzing insect, and a large dragonfly. As is often the case with Calder's work, there is more to *Calderoulette* than initially meets the eye. As the name suggests, Calder's open lily flower also mimics the design of a roulette wheel. In each of the open flower petals Calder has placed a numerical digit, which invites the viewer to join Calder in playing a round of nature based roulette, guessing which petal an insect will land on first. Encompassing many of the qualities that make Calder's work so iconic and desirable, *Cadleroulette* is a delightful standing mobile that combines the magical suspension of the artist's mobiles with the stability and balance of the later stables.



Highlighting the collection's modern selection is Pablo Picasso's *Portrait de Femme Buste de femme au chapeau (Dora Maar)* Painted on 28 May 1943 – *pictured left*. With its severely simplified, jagged composition, *Portrait de Femme* is an emblematic portrait of one of the artist's most influential muses, Dora Maar. However, breaking from the wartime tension that often defines Picasso's portraits of Maar, this canvas also encompasses a measure of humor and delight in her likeness. The large and striking hat worn by the subject, is a definitive element of Picasso's portraits of Maar. She regularly sported whimsical hats, and Picasso often utilized them as a symbolic externalization of her inner moods, as well as a counterbalance to the severity with which he presented her features. This work will be included in the Impressionist and Modern Evening Sale on November 13.

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Auction:

Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale
15 November 2017

Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale
13 November 2017

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