

CHRISTIE'S

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CHRISTIE'S TO PRESENT AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT CANVASES BY FERNAND LÉGER EVER OFFERED AT AUCTION

CONTRASTE DE FORMES, 1913



PROPERTY FROM THE ANNA-MARIA AND STEPHEN KELLEN FOUNDATION
Fernand Léger, *Contraste de formes*, oil on burlap, Painted in 1913

Tour Dates:

Christie's Paris – 18 October

Christie's Hong Kong – 24-26 October

Christie's New York – 3-13 November

New York – On November 13, 2017, Christie's will present Fernand Léger's *Contraste de formes*, 1913, the most important canvas by the artist offered at auction in several decades (estimate on request). This exquisite picture comes from Property from the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation, and proceeds from the sale of this work will go towards the foundation's philanthropic mission. Originally acquired from Léger at the end of 1913 by his dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *Contraste de formes* was bought in 1956 from Galerie Rosengart in Lucerne by Ludmilla and Hans Arnhold, an international banker and art collector. Mr. Arnhold later bequeathed the painting to their daughter and son-in law, Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen. Mr. Kellen was the esteemed and longtime CEO of the highly respected investment banking firm, Arnhold and S. Bleichroeder, Inc. (now First Eagle Holdings, Inc.), and with his wife were both passionate collectors and distinguished philanthropists. The Kellens were deeply captivated by Léger and his work, often visiting the Musée National Fernand-Léger in Biot, France, with their children and eventually their grandchildren. *Contraste de formes* was a cherished highlight of the Kellens' collection and it enriched their New York home for over 40 years. November 13 will mark the painting's first time at auction.

Conor Jordan, Deputy Chairman, Impressionist and Modern Art, remarked: “This is pure painting seen in its most exciting form, bursting with visual and intellectual ideas. The Kellen Foundation’s *Contraste de formes*, among the greatest Léger’s still in private hands, has a startling intensity. Executed just months before the First World War, *Contraste de formes* with its groundbreaking abstract conception and its thrillingly preserved physical state, is without question a major work of Modern Art. Standing at the threshold of 20th century art, this picture marks a departure from the purely figurative, leading the way for abstract art.”

Painted in 1913, *Contraste de formes* belongs to a series of paintings that changed forever the way we look at art. Across the course of just a few months, in a sequence of some fourteen canvases, Léger advanced beyond Cubism into a visual language that abandoned the representational concerns of his contemporaries, Picasso and Braque. Instead Léger made abstract shapes and colors, hinged on a network of forceful lines his only subject. The work of Léger during 1912-1914 is the story of the push towards pure or non-representational painting in France and the subsequent return to the subject in the months preceding the mobilization for war. The *Contrastes de formes* have long been considered cornerstones of important collections of modern art and thus nearly all examples from the series are today housed in major institutions.

In his *Contrastes de formes* series, Léger utilized simple geometric volumes composed of cylinders and planar elements which he rendered into multiple elements by means of line and color. He fabricated a tumbling surface in which shapes simultaneously appear to project out of the picture plane or recede into it suggesting volume. All the component lines, forms and colors are actively engaged as they play off each other to create a jolting, rhythmic composition. At first glance these surfaces display a helter-skelter appearance; however, there is a visual logic based on the simple aspect of his chosen component forms. In the second Académie Wassilief lecture, prepared as Léger was bringing this series of paintings to a close, he wrote, “Composition takes precedence over all else; to obtain their maximum expressiveness lines, forms, and colors must be employed with the utmost logic. It is the logical spirit that will achieve the greatest result.”

Marina Kellen French, daughter of Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen and a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, vividly remembered *The New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith’s review of the 2014 Met exhibition “Reimagining Modernism: 1900-1950.” “Just beyond the Picasso head in the “Avant-Garde” section hangs a fabulous early Léger...” wrote Roberta Smith, “filled with curving planes of red and blue girded by black lines and patches of rough white. A truly fabulous picture.”

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Public Exhibition:

Christie’s Paris – 18 October

Christie’s Hong Kong – 24-26 October

Christie’s New York – 3-13 November

Auction:

Impressionist and Modern Art

13 November 2017

6:30pm

About Christie’s

Christie’s, the world’s leading art business, had global auction, private and digital sales in first half of 2017 that totalled £2.35 billion / \$3 billion. Christie’s is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. 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.

Alongside regular sales online, Christie’s has a global presence in 46 countries, with 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, and Shanghai.

**Estimates do not include buyer’s premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer’s premium and are reported net of applicable fees.*

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