

CHRISTIE'S

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Christie's to Offer a Masterpiece of 20th Century Sculpture

CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI'S *LA JEUNE FILLE SOPHISTIQUEE (PORTRAIT DE NANCY CUNARD)*

From The Collection of Elizabeth Stafford



Positioned to Make a World Auction Record for the Artist

On View in Hong Kong from March 31 – April 3

New York – Christie's May 15th Evening Sale of Impressionist and Modern Art will bring to the market for the first-time Constantin Brancusi's, *La jeune fille sophistiquée (Portrait de Nancy Cunard)* a unique sculpture, cast in polished bronze in Paris in 1932 (estimate upon request). *La jeune fille sophistiquée* comes from **The Collection of Elizabeth Stafford**. Mrs. Stafford and her husband Frederick Stafford acquired the work directly from Brancusi during a visit to his studio in 1955, and it has remained in their collection ever since.

An extraordinarily rare and important work, *La jeune fille sophistiquée* is the only existing bronze example of Brancusi's stylized portrait of the Anglo-American heiress and writer Nancy Cunard. The work retains the artist's original hand-carved marble base, a factor of immense significance given the importance Brancusi attached to the

interaction between materials and the interplay between his sculptural subjects and the pedestals upon which he placed them.

Conor Jordan, Deputy Chairman, Impressionist and Modern Art, New York, remarked: “A daring and exquisite work of art, the *Brancusi from The Collection of Elizabeth Stafford* represents one of the vanishingly small number of the artist’s bronzes with its original carved base not in a museum collection. Its appearance on the market will be an exciting event for the world’s foremost collectors of Modern art.”

Alex Rotter, Chairman, Post-War and Contemporary Art, New York, continued: “It is an honor to have been entrusted with *La jeune fille sophistiquée*, a tremendously formative object within Brancusi’s oeuvre and the development of modernism as we know it today. *La jeune fille sophistiquée* stands as a unique example of Brancusi’s ability to convey beauty through sheer simplicity and perfection of line. It is these characteristics that make it a masterpiece of the 20th century, which we expect to appeal just as strongly to collectors of Modernism as it will those of Contemporary art. The Staffords built their collection with passion and sophistication, taking joy in every object that they acquired. This remarkable sculpture is a testament to their taste and keen foresight.”

By the 1920s Brancusi enjoyed a near mythic status among the Parisian avant-garde. He was the author of a revolutionary visual language, who had famously arrived in Paris on foot from Romania in 1904, from “beyond the mountains and beyond the stars” as he liked to say. From his studio in Montparnasse, guided by instinct, he carved works of increasing radical simplicity, often using the ovoid form as the starting point.

In *La jeune fille sophistiquée (Portrait de Nancy Cunard)*, Brancusi’s purity of line renders the famous cool beauty of Nancy, with her striking waved hairstyle and sylph-like proportions. Cunard was a major patron of artists and writers in Paris between the wars, counting Tristan Tzara, Marcel Duchamp, Ezra Pound and James Joyce among her circle. In this context Nancy encountered Brancusi, whom she described as “a fine bearded-old-shepherd of a face and to my mind, one of the great sculptors of our time.”

Brancusi met Nancy Cunard in 1923 through the Dada poet Tristan Tzara, one of her many paramours. The profoundly iconoclastic heiress, who openly flouted sexual, racial, class, and national boundaries, struck Brancusi as the very embodiment of the liberated Twenties—a figure of and for the moment. “Everything about the way she behaved,” he recalled, “showed how truly sophisticated she was for her day.”

Cunard never posed for Brancusi and in fact was unaware until many years later that he had sculpted a figure that bore her name. However, with superbly distilled volumes, Brancusi succeeded in capturing Cunard’s elegance and stylized presentation, creating a precise, individualized characterization that simultaneously transcends the particular personality to arrive at a universal, essential form.

In 1955, at a friend’s suggestion, budding collectors, Elizabeth and Frederick Stafford visited Brancusi’s studio. Mr. Stafford, who had emigrated from Romania in the 1930’s, relished the opportunity to meet Brancusi as a fellow Romanian and learn about his work. When the couple arrived at his studio, they were astounded by the beauty of his work. Mr. Stafford returned the next day and purchased *La jeune fille sophistiquée* as a 28th birthday gift for Mrs. Stafford. This sculpture would come to define the couple’s collection. And over 62 years, the Staffords generously loaned it to prominent institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Guggenheim, Centre Georges Pompidou and New Orleans Museum of Art among others.

In addition to Modern Art, The Staffords acquired an exceptional and diverse grouping of objects that ranged from Old Master and Impressionist pictures to antiquities and 18th century French furniture.

This Fall, Christie’s will continue to celebrate the Stafford collection, selling the decorative and fine arts in a dedicated auction; Old Master and Impressionist pictures from the collection will also be offered in Fall 2018. Further details will be released at a later date.

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About Christie's

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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.

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