

CHRISTIE'S

PRESS RELEASE | NEW YORK
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 9 APRIL 2018

MONUMENTAL SCULPTURE BY JEFF KOONS TO HEADLINE CHRISTIE'S EVENING SALE OF POST-WAR AND CONTEMPORARY ART

PLAY-DOH



FIRST TIME AT AUCTION

New York – On May 17th, Jeff Koons's monumental sculpture, *Play-Doh*, will highlight Christie's Evening Sale of Post-War and Contemporary Art (estimate in the region of \$20 million). *Play-Doh* was introduced to the public at the Jeff Koons retrospective put on by the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2014. Conceived in 1994 and finalized twenty-years later, *Play-Doh* quickly became regarded as one of the most integral works from the artist's *Celebration* series. The unique sculpture will be installed in Christie's Rockefeller Plaza galleries for an extended view beginning April 13th.

Ana-Maria Celis, Head of Evening Sale, Post-War and Contemporary Art, New York, remarked: "It is an honor to be presenting this extraordinary sculpture by Jeff Koons for the first time at auction. *Play-Doh* is a definitive work for the artist, which was meticulously executed over the course of 20-years. This heroic sculpture stands as a definitive example of the artist's relentless commitment to perfection, in his pursuit to inspire and challenge his viewers. Standing before *Play-Doh*, it is difficult to comprehend the staggering complexity behind fashioning

aluminum into such a convincing model of soft clay. In fact, all one can think of when initially viewing this work is the feeling of joy – on a monumental scale.”

In 2014, Jeff Koons was given a retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. This groundbreaking show marked a new beginning for Koons: the debut of *Play-Doh*, a sculpture that had already become legendary in the two decades of its creation. This monumental sculpture is one of the largest and most complex works in Koons’s *Celebration* series, a group of works that commenced in the mid-1990s, and includes contemporary icons such as *Balloon Dog*, *Hanging Heart*, and *Tulips*. The *Celebration* series has become increasingly ambitious in its evolution, with Koons pushing fabrication techniques to new levels of precision, meeting his own desire for a meticulous finish.

The result of this single-minded dedication is clear in *Play-Doh*, which was painstakingly created over two decades. Looking at the crevices, curves and bubbles of its surface, as well as the matte colors with their faint sheen, the viewer could easily believe that this really was an enormous mass of Play-Doh. Yet this sculpture has been assembled using more than two dozen interlocking sections of painted aluminum. Gravity alone fastens them together, the weight of each part pressing down on the next. Koons’s exactitude runs to intriguing extremes: each of these pieces is painted in its entirety, not just the facet visible when *Play-Doh* is fully assembled. Even the palette was the result of unwavering dedication, as the Play-Doh colors of 1994 were skillfully recreated. This sculpture is almost architectural in its scope and intricacy, its surface belying the complexity behind the decades of its creation. And in each of the five versions of *Play-Doh*, the color configuration is unique.

The Play-Doh has been recreated in such a way that it appears to show the traces of the human touch in its assemblage—albeit blown out of proportion in its new gargantuan scale. In this way, Koons has managed to create a paradox: the surface resembles the Abstract Expressionist paintings of Willem de Kooning, yet this work is the result of two decades of research and perfection, of fabricators and scientists, metallurgists and modellers, rather than the swirling gestures of either a child with his Play-Doh or de Kooning with his paints.

It is a mark of the importance that *Play-Doh* has achieved within Koons’s oeuvre that it has been published and exhibited extensively since it was first unveiled four years ago. Reviewing its debut at the Whitney show in *Frieze*, Chris Wiley would refer to it as, “one of his most important works to date,” while Roberta Smith described it in the *New York Times* as “a new, almost certain masterpiece whose sculptural enlargement of a rainbow pile of radiant chunks captures exactly the matte textures of the real thing.”

Play-Doh was inspired by Koons’s son Ludwig, who proudly presented his father with a similar colorful mound in Rome when he was a toddler. Koons was struck by the complete faith that his son had in his creation. The experience pushed Koons to tap into his own memories and his own creative beginnings. “When I was about four and a half, five years old, I would go after school to this little building, like a little shelter,” he has recalled. “In the afternoons we’d make things out of Popsicle sticks. We’d work with Play-Doh. And this experience gave me my foundation. That’s what I hold on to in the world. And whatever I made at that time I know is equivalent to what I’m doing now. And that was, for me, really, art.”

PRESS CONTACT: Rebecca Riegelhaupt | 212 636 2680 | RRiegelhaupt@christies.com

Public Exhibition:
13-19 April, New York
28 April – 17 May, New York

Auction:
Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale
17 May 2018

About Christie’s

Christie’s, the world’s leading art business, had global auction, private and digital sales in 2017 that totalled £5.1 billion / \$6.6 billion. Christie’s is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and international expertise. 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.

**Please note when quoting estimates above that other fees will apply in addition to the hammer price - see Section D of the Conditions of Sale at the back of the sale catalogue.*

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

###

Images available on request

FOLLOW CHRISTIE'S ON:

