

CHRISTIE'S

MEDIA ALERT - PARIS - 12 JULY 2019 - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE MASTERPIECE OF NICOLAS DE STAËL
PARC DES PRINCES
OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S IN PARIS DURING
FIAC WEEK
17 October 2019 at 7 pm



Paris – Christie's France is delighted to offer *Parc des Princes* by Nicolas de Staël on 17 October during the week of FIAC (International Contemporary Art Fair) with an estimate of €18,000,000-25,000,000. The monumental painting has remained in the family of Nicolas de Staël since his passing in 1955, and constitutes a key element in the history of post-war art.

Completed in the spring of 1952, this large-scale painting (200x350cm) marks the zenith of the series of soccer players, which Nicolas de Staël painted after attending the France-Sweden match with his wife, on the evening of 26 March 1952, in the renowned Parisian stadium. In the spotlight, the beauty of the interaction between the players proved a striking scene for the artist, who immediately began working on figurative compositions executed with his palette knife.

Pierre Martin-Vivier, 20th Century International Director: "It is such a joy to present this historical and monumental painting in Paris during FIAC. *Parc des Princes* is a masterpiece by de Staël, a work that challenged the pictorial idiom of the post-war period. We believe that the art market will respond with the same enthusiasm which drives us. Coming directly from the family of the artist, it is estimated at 18-25 million euros, and could set a new world auction record".

First exhibited at the Salon of May 1952, this painting was immediately critically acclaimed. The response would continue throughout the most important exhibitions organised around his work: his first solo-exhibition at the Knoedler Gallery in March 1953, the several retrospectives organised at the Palais de Tokyo in 1956, at the Bern's Kunsthalle in 1957, but also at the London Tate Modern in 1981, the Reina Sofia Arts Museum of Madrid in 1991 and more recently at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 2003.

It is more the forms and colors of the soccer players' movements rather than the physical performance which interested De Staël, a rising figure in abstraction at the time. The detachment with which he viewed his models led him to a deliberate schematisation of the subject. This brief but nonetheless intense period of creation marked a turning point with the artist using a more colourful chromatic palette whilst moving away from the impasto that had characterised his work thus far. De Staël was at the peak of his career and the resulting works were a stunning synthesis between abstraction and figuration. In this way, he brought an innovative and original response to the 20th century's pictorial and esthetical issues.

"What the Soccer Player series brought to Nicolas de Staël's work, and which will now remain, is his very personal way of dividing his canvas into a field of intense color broken by formal accidents which compose visual metaphors evocative of reality. Staël fills our eyes, as well as his own, with a personal vision, perceiving the sea in red, as he explained to Jacques Dubourg and employing the act of vision to determine the clear belief in its equivalence.", writes Germain Viatte in the catalogue's retrospective held at the Pierre Gianadda Foundation in 1995. Nicolas de Staël himself wrote that: *"I do not set abstract painting as an opposition to figuration. A painting should be both abstract and figurative: abstract to the extent that it is a flat surface, figurative to the extent that it is a representation of space"* (quoted in *Nicolas de Staël in America* (exhibition catalogue), *The Phillips Collection, Washington D.C.*, 1990, p. 22).

« His whole studio was cluttered with sketches of all sizes, inspired by this spectacle, here the French team's leader, there the players' parade on the grass, there the extraordinary scissor kick of a player who is about to fall. As if they were burnt, in blue and red sky-tones, some men fiercely articulated, the segmented and general movement, greens, yellows, a sort of *conquest of the air* »: Pierre Lecuire writes in his *Staël's Years Diary*.

Two weeks after attending the game, Nicolas de Staël wrote to the poet René Char: *"My dear René, Thank you for your note, you are an angel, just like the boys who play in the Parc des Princes each evening... I think of you often. When you come back we will go and watch some games together. They are marvellous. No one there is playing to win, except in rare moments of nervousness which cut you to the quick.*

On the red or blue field, between earth and sky, a ton of muscle flies in abandon, forgetting themselves entirely in the paradoxical concentration that this requires. What joy René, what joy! Anyway I've put the whole French and Swedish teams to work, and a bit of progress begins to be made. If I were to find a space as big as the Rue Gauget, I would set off on two hundred small canvases so that their colour could blare like the posters on the motorway out of Paris... Yours, Nicolas » (Nicolas de Staël, 'Letter to René Char, 10 April 1952', cited in: Françoise de Staël, Ed., *Nicolas de Staël: Catalogue Raisonné de l'Oeuvre Peint*, Neuchâtel 1997, p. 975).

Preview: From Friday 11 to Thursday 17 October 2019
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