

CHRISTIE'S

PRESS RELEASE | NEW YORK
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 25 OCTOBER 2019

FERNAND LÉGER'S *LA FEMME ET L'ENFANT*, 1921 TO HIGHLIGHT CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK EVENING SALE OF IMPRESSIONIST AND MODERN ART



New York – On November 11, Christie's Evening Sale of Impressionist and Modern Art will be highlighted by Fernand Léger's *La femme et l'enfant*, 1921 (\$8-12 million), which will mark the painting's first time at auction. *La femme et l'enfant* is a key work in the series of female figure paintings that Fernand Léger created in early 1921, a strategic campaign that culminated by the end of that year in a pair of masterworks: *Le petit déjeuner* (formerly in the collection of Burton and Emily Hall Tremain, sold at Christie's New York, November 5, 1991) and *Le grand déjeuner* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York). The paintings of one and several characters from 1921 signaled a turning point in the evolution of Léger's work in the years following the end of the First World War. The woman and child presented here, is the largest of the two paintings depicting a mother and young child and bears the designation of the artist "Définitif" on the back.

Giovanna Bertazzoni and Adrien Meyer, Co-Chairmen, Impressionist and Modern Art, remarked: "*La femme et l'enfant epitomizes our endeavors to bring top quality examples of Modernism to the market. Collectors from both the modern and contemporary fields increasingly share the same enthusiasm for the intellectual rigor of the artistic movement of the early 'teens and the 1920s, be it in exceptional oils and sculpture, or rare pieces of design. It is an extremely exciting area of collecting today, which attracts the rarified sensibilities of new and seasoned collectors alike. We are always happy to contribute to this arena and are confident that this wonderful painting will attract precisely one of these buyers.*"

By 1920, in a reaction to the trauma of the war years, a palliative conservatism had settled on the arts, le rappel à l'ordre—"the call to order." This revival of the classical, humanist values that had historically informed the Gallic tradition lent a new, retrospective demeanor to the erstwhile, stridently transgressive character of the Paris avant-

garde. A return to coherent figuration was fundamental to this endeavor. The Louvre and other museums were taking their master paintings, medieval art, and antiquities out of protective wartime storage and placing them back on view. Renewed exposure to these riches fostered in Léger a more compelling awareness of artistic tradition.

Léger maintained that conventional genre subjects, such as the mother and child, remained viable in a modernist context provided that such content was drawn from contemporary life. In this way he could utilize, transform, and revitalize virtually any pictorial convention he chose to feature, and imbue it with currency and relevance.

In the present *La femme et l'enfant*, Léger highlighted the fundamental human relationship of a woman caring for her offspring. This theme held special resonance for viewers at that time. An ovular-shaped plant in the background symbolizes reproductive fertility. The woman is attired in tricolor blue, white, and red—she is emblematic of La France. The child, especially if male, had become a key to future national prosperity. The French suffered 1.4 million military casualties during the war; at the signing of the armistice, 40 percent fewer men were available for unmarried women than before the war. The birth rate had dropped to one-third of what it was in 1870.

By 1920, however, veterans had begun to marry; women readily turned to men younger than themselves and would even cross conventional class lines. The birth rate in France soon surpassed pre-war levels. The dynamic, changing panorama of life in contemporary France, from social demographics to economic progress, indeed attested to “an epoch of contrasts,” as Léger proclaimed.

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

About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction, private and digital sales in 2018 that totalled £5.3 billion / \$7 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:

