

CHRISTIE'S

PRESS RELEASE | NEW YORK
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 11 JUNE 2020

CHRISTIE'S TO OFFER WAYNE THIEBAUD'S *FOUR PINBALL MACHINES, 1962*

THE MOST IMPORTANT WORK
BY THE ARTIST IN PRIVATE HANDS



NEW YORK – On the precipice of the artist's 100th birthday, Christie's is honored to offer Wayne Thiebaud's tour-de-force, *Four Pinball Machines*, 1962 as a central highlight of **ONE: a Global Sale of the 20th Century on July 10**. With an estimate of \$18-25 million, the present painting is expected to more than double the artist's world auction record currently held by *Encased Cakes*, 2011, which sold for \$8.5 million in November 2019. This will mark the first time in almost 40 years that *Four Pinball Machines* will be exhibited.

Wayne Thiebaud commented: *"I am interested in painting things that have been overlooked; people, places and things that reflect intimate feelings of pleasure and joy. I enjoy seeing people smile when looking at the work."*

Alex Rotter, Chairman of Post-War and Contemporary Art, Christie's, remarked: *"It is always a privilege to have the opportunity to present a painting that is categorically recognized as one of the best*

works that an artist has ever created, but in this case it is particularly exciting given its prominence within the canon of Pop art. This is precisely the case with Thiebaud's *Four Pinball Machines*, 1962. In his centennial year, Thiebaud is among the most loved and revered artists of the 20th century, both for his extraordinary artistic talent and vision, but also for the delight that his paintings instill into anyone who stands before them. *Four Pinball Machines* is a painting that combines all of the qualities that people treasure about Thiebaud's work: an iconic subject imbued with American nostalgia, the joyful palette and the masterly quality of the expressionistic brushstrokes. This work is the most important example by the artist in private hands, and we are honored to be able to offer it in **ONE: a Global Sale of the 20th Century.**"

One of the largest canvases painted during Thiebaud's pivotal early 1960s period, *Four Pinball Machines* is a striking monument to the artist's desire to paint what he described as objects "...which I believe have been overlooked". In the present work, a row of five magnificent arcade games stand in splendid isolation, as Thiebaud's unique method of figurative painting captures these objects with an air of nostalgia. Luxuriously rich brushstrokes of electric color portray these machines in complex detail, Thiebaud's brush rendering every nuance of these complex and colorful machines. Alongside Andy Warhol's Coca-Cola bottles, and Roy Lichtenstein's comics, Thiebaud's paintings of pinball machines, lollipop trees, cakes, and diner counters have become icons of the Pop age, but far from merely celebrating the consumerism of the American postwar economic boom, it is with paintings such as this that Thiebaud asks fundamentally more important questions, and addresses significant aesthetic and philosophical concerns.

At the time that *Four Pinball Machines* was executed, the seemingly innocuous pinball game was still steeped in controversy, having been banned in many cities throughout the US. By taking these game consoles on as his subject, Thiebaud constructs his "storyline" as a veritable commentary and homage to the contrarian objectives of Post-War American Art. *Four Pinball Machines* simultaneously references the genres of Abstract Expressionism, Conceptual Art, Pop Art and Minimalism, paying homage to both his predecessors and to his contemporaries, and in doing so, positions himself as a leader among them.

Four Pinball Machines's combination of straight lines, vibrant palette, and delight in order and simplicity are hallmarks of Thiebaud's painterly process, and his enjoyment in the meticulousness of his work. His immaculate attention to detail reinforces the intensity of the composition and, combined with the heavy shadows and empty background, highlights the intensity of the abstract nature of this particular image. Through both his inventive use of color and his ingenious handling of paint, this particular work rivals some of the best of abstract art. He had in fact spent time with some of the leaders of abstraction when he frequented the Cedar Bar in New York in the mid-1950s.

Alongside his cakes, ties, and gumball machines, pinball machines became a central part of Thiebaud's early body of work. He first started depicting the arcade games in 1956, with *Pinball Machine*, a highly abstracted mixed media painting that depicts a single machine alongside a gumball dispenser and a stool with a Coca-Cola bottle. *Penny Machines* followed in 1961, along with *Star Pinball*, from 1962, and *Twin Jackpots*, also from 1962. Of all his arcade game paintings, *Four Pinball Machines* is by far the largest and most aesthetically and conceptually complex.

1962 was a pivotal year for the Thiebaud. In April, he opened his first New York solo show at the Allan Stone Gallery and later the same year he was honored with a solo museum exhibition, *An Exhibition of Paintings by Wayne Thiebaud*, at the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco. Following the critical success of his New York exhibition, later in the year he was invited to take part in a group show—*New Realists*—at the Sidney Janis Gallery in Manhattan. His unique paintings garnered the interest of critics and the artist began to receive favorable reviews in a number of influential publications including the *New York Times*, *Artforum*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *ARTnews*. Many of the other major paintings that Thiebaud completed during this important year are now in major museum collections including *Delicatessen Counter* (Menil Collection, Houston); *Candy Counter* (Anderson Collection at Stanford

University); *Jackpot Machine* (Smithsonian American Art Museum); and *Around the Cake* (Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas).

The present painting remains the most important work by the artist in private hands.

ONE: A Global Sale of the 20th Century: This July, Christie's will launch a revolutionary relay-style auction concept. Entitled **ONE: A Global Sale of the 20th Century**, this sale will present masterpiece-level works of 20th Century Art together in a curated live-online hybrid sale, blurring category boundaries and bringing clients together in an unprecedented way.

Launching in Hong Kong, the sale will then transition to auctioneers in Paris and London, concluding in New York. Each city will host a pre-sale public exhibition staged in line with the appropriate regional health advice at the time, complemented by a ground-breaking virtual exhibition and digital marketing campaign to connect with global audiences and support the auction event. Bidders will be able to participate both online, via Christie's LIVE online bidding channel, and where regional, government advice allows, clients and phone bidders will be welcomed in each saleroom location.

Public viewing: All ONE sale highlights will be available for online viewing from anywhere in the world. For New York sale highlights, Christie's expects to begin welcoming clients into its Rockefeller Center galleries by request and on an appointment-only basis in the weeks ahead, subject to all local public health guidelines and with all necessary measures to protect our visitors and our staff in place. Clients may request an appointment for viewing by contacting OneNY@christies.com; all members of the media should reach to Christie's press contacts below.

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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.

**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.*

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