PRESS RELEASE

FRANCIS BACON PORTRAIT LEADS PHILLIPS CONTEMPORARY ART EVENING SALE IN MAY 2015

AUCTIONS TO FEATURE WORKS FROM A PRIVATE AMERICAN COLLECTION INCLUDING BRICE MARDEN AND ED RUSCHA

THE GREAT WONDERFUL: 100 YEARS OF ITALIAN ART: 13 MAY 2015, 4:30PM
CONTEMPORARY ART EVENING AUCTION: 14 MAY 2015, 7PM
CONTEMPORARY ART DAY AUCTION: 15 MAY 2015, 11AM
LINK TO ONLINE EVENING SALE CATALOGUE: http://www.phillips.com/auctions/auction/NY010315
LINK TO ONLINE DAYSALE CATALOGUE: http://www.phillips.com/auctions/auction/NY010415

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW YORK – 21 APRIL 2015 – Phillips auctions of Contemporary Art in New York in May will be led by an important large-scale portrait by Francis Bacon (1909-1992) which is expected to realise $25 million to $35 million. The evening auction of Contemporary Art on 14 May will also offer a selection of works from a Private American Collection including examples by many of the most compelling American artists of the twentieth century, including Brice Marden, Ed Ruscha, Robert Ryman, John Chamberlain and James Lee Byars. The collection is highlighted by the exceptional Elements (Hydra), 1999–2000/2001, by Brice Marden which is expected to realise $8 million to $12 million (see separate release).

The Contemporary Art Auctions and Italian Auction titled The Great Wonderful: 100 Years of Italian Art will offer over 370 lots with a combined pre-sale estimate of $132.7 million to $189.6 million (£88.9m to £127m / €122.1m to €174.4m).

Seated Woman is an early, large-scale portrait of one of the artist’s most influential muses. Muriel Belcher founded The Colony Room in Soho in 1948. The day after it opened Francis Bacon visited as a relatively poor artist who was yet to achieve great success and was immediately taken under her wing. Belcher paid him £10 a week and gave free drinks in return for his bringing friends and artists to her premises. Over the following decades, the Colony became a second home for Bacon and a legendary gathering place for other characters and artists including Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach, John Deakin and Michael Andrews. In later years, its legacy continued through a new generation of loyal frequenters including Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Sam Taylor-Wood and Tracy Emin, before it closed in 2008.

Francis Bacon’s Seated Woman is a curious, singular work for its juxtaposition of message and medium and how the two seem to be at odds, yet clearly operate powerfully together. This work presents the viewer with the artist’s glorious painterly abilities. What takes a bit more time to apprehend is the quieter, softer mood of the sitter, so clearly at odds with the robust means of her execution. This is as much a portrait of tender vulnerability; of a life lived in the glare of constant performance but which, just for a moment, takes refuge in the shadows of self.

Bacon, so clearly part of Belcher’s inner circle, has created a portrait of her that only someone as close to her as he was could create. The theatricality, the outrageous banter of the persona, is eschewed for the honesty and frailty of the person. The drama of the surface belongs to Bacon’s paint, not Belcher’s personality.

Francis Bacon
Seated Woman, 1961
Estimate $25,000,000 - 35,000,000
The exceptional painting *Elements (Hydra)*, 1999-2000/2001 by Brice Marden, estimated at $8,000,000 – 12,000,000 embodies the artist’s mastery of form, line and color. *Elements (Hydra)* is the culmination of his decades-long evolution as a pioneering artist whose influences range from the lyricism and structure of Chinese calligraphy and poetry to the undiluted and un-tempered expression of Jackson Pollock.

The sinuous whorls of red, yellow and blue course across the green-grey picture plane, framing organic forms and creating an overall impression of fluidity and natural, gestural abstraction. Marden established himself alongside the likes of Robert Ryman and Agnes Martin as one of the artists who, in the midst of Minimalism and Pop, set about proving that painting still had much to offer in the way of lyrical and emotive power. The force of color, the application and treatment of the paint and other media such as beeswax, even the construction of his pictures into multi-paneled arrangements all served Marden’s aim of harnessing the latent power of the medium. His pictures are about the plane, the rectangle, the surface, the edge and the relationship of one distinct color working alongside another.

Informed by his numerous journeys, Marden’s paintings are imbued with a strong sense of place following his visits to Hydra, a Greek island on the Aegean Sea, from the early 1970s.

---

Ed Ruscha’s text-based paintings have revolutionized the relationship between the visual and the semiotic. As a West Coast artist, Ruscha fully embraced the visual culture of Los Angeles and both its natural and artificial landscapes. This made him a leading figure in the early emergence of the West Coast Pop Art scene. Inspired by the text based works of fellow Pop artists Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, Ruscha pursued a lifelong artistic exploration into the formal elements of printed text and its fluid relationship to the visual image.

*Porch Crop*, 2001, the first palindrome painting created by Ruscha, is a splendid and imposing composition that fully represents the artist’s determined mastery of color and form. By culling words, images and phrases that have been imprinted in his memory and that are found in mass media (print culture, advertising billboards, etc.), his work often serves as a visual encyclopedia of American culture.

Hollywood and its visual symbols have remained at the forefront of Ruscha’s imagery. Painted in 2001, *Porch Crop* depicts a sharply defined mountain range associated with the famous Paramount Pictures logo.

As if speaking to Hollywood directly, Ruscha imposes the stenciled palindrome “Porch Crop” over the scenic view. *Porch Crop* represents Ruscha’s first use of a palindrome - a word in which the letters read identically forwards and backwards.
Mark Tansey is one of the most important representational painters of our current age whose brilliant abilities are matched by his ribald and wide-ranging intellect. Tansey's *Hedge* of 2011 is a true masterwork. While each painting by Tansey is a unique universe unto itself, all of the best works capture realistic though fantastical scenes of staggering breadth most often set in the natural world. In these dramatized landscapes, Tansey is most often illustrating highly complex art historical theories and arguments in a playful, but insightful manner. In fact, each of Tansey's paintings contains a carefully constructed ode to the history and meanings of art and the uninterrupted human impulse to make and share images.

This work typifies Tansey's most accomplished paintings. *Hedge* is realized in a single aquamarine color, constructed in a painstaking photorealistic manner that in its elegance and simplicity masks the intricate labor required for its rendering. Tansey is able to realize a fantastical mountain scape that seems to burst forth with icy resolution. But as often is the case with the artist, not all is as it seems. Cascading down the mountain is a massive avalanche that seems to tumble down from the sky, creating a violent whirlwind down the lower right quarter of the picture plane. Tansey has resolved this violence in such a way that it is hard to tell when the mass of moving snow begins and the sky ends. Tansey is well known in the most important of his paintings to play with a perverted sense of symmetry, reversing up and down.

While the central mountain remains stable in *Hedge*, each side top and bottom can be seen as the cresting peak. And yet, in what at first viewing is a landscape is also a narrative picture telling a story – in the middle left and lower right we see a series of Paragliders flying through the air. However like the landscape itself, the orientation of these figures is up for debate. Each has a parachute above and below, calling into question the orientation of gravity and their direction of flight. If the best of art tells us the stories of our age this masterwork speaks to a time without beginning or end, where all possibilities, outcomes and realities are contested and up for debate.

During the past twenty years Rudolf Stingel has tested the limits of creative medium. Focusing on technique and method, his very transformation of surfaces defines his work: integrating potential with practicality, Stingel turns the imagined into tangible reality. *Untitled* from 2012 presents a gorgeous and treasured piece of craftsmanship. The gilded surface evokes a sense of extravagant worth, working alongside the choice of medium to challenge the very notions of material and value. As the light meanders through the peaks and valleys of the inscriptions, the abundant radiance creates both a physical and spiritual moment of pure splendor.

In the early 1990’s Rudolf Stingel experimented with the craft-medium of carpets, covering floors and spaces with the intricately textured fabrics. This interest in texture was subsequently developed in his metal works. *Untitled* from 2012, comprised of galvanized copper, is a continuation of an aluminium series, displayed at a mid-career retrospective exhibition held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago and The Whitney Museum, New York in 2007. For the show Stingel transformed the conventional “white cube” presentation into a space of participation. Visitors were allowed to leave behind a permanent memento of their experience: left free to inscribe their own creations into their surroundings. The walls themselves were covered by the artist in a layer of aluminium-topped insulation material. The stimulus was created by the artist to enable participant interaction without losing the power of autonomy.
Radiant is perhaps the best word that can define the work of Dan Flavin, one of the first contemporary artists to employ the immaterial to as great an extent as the worldly. For over three decades, Flavin produced his signature work in neon, glass, and light, and, as a consequence, redefined space as we know it. His many works almost always went untitled, save for a parenthetical description of each dedicatee. In one of his earliest and purest experiments in light and wonder, Flavin produced Untitled ("monument" for V. Tatlin), 1964-65. In one of Flavin's great strokes of artistic generosity, he crafts his piece in honor of a bygone artist, and, in the process, forges a work that "monumental" only begins to describe.

Flavin absorbed the Abstract Expressionist boom of the 1950s, consolidating his ideas for a new type of intense sculpture. Finally, in 1963, he unveiled to the world Diagonal of Personal Ecstasy (the Diagonal of May 25, 1963). The piece was remarkable not only for its revolutionary use of neon light and its resultant lack of boundaries, but also for Flavin's dedication, which took sculptor Constantin Brâncuși as its subject.

A year later, while Flavin's sculpture was gaining a wider audience, Flavin himself was still immersed in art history as a diligent student. In particular, he forged a spiritual kinship with Vladimir Tatlin, an avant-garde Russian sculptor who passed away ten years earlier. Yet Tatlin's work was indispensable to Flavin, especially in regard to the work in which he was presently engaged: Tatlin had sought to dismantle the concept of the frame, finding it an impediment to the structural and formative process of sculpting.

Flavin would begin a long affair with the memory of Tatlin, dedicating many of his works to the sculptor over the next twenty years.

From his meldings of furniture to his whimsical sculptures, Urs Fischer has set the status quo for the uncategorizable artist. Untitled (Candle) represents one of Fischer's most unabashedly terrifying works, yet it is molded in man's own image—a tribute to the duality that all of his work seems to feature.

Despite Fischer's excellence in the various physical forms, his only formal training is in photography. This lack of institutionalization encourages total freedom of expression in Fischer's work: a great deal hints at Dada while other pieces are entirely dependent upon their relation to the space in which they are exhibited. Simply put, Fischer's anti-formulaic process has precipitated a new era of sculpting, where a lack of conformity lends each piece a life removed from all others.

In Untitled (Candle), 2001, Fischer bequeaths us with a work both grotesque and breath-taking. Standing five feet, seven inches. Fischer seeks to give his sculpture a form as true-to-life as possible. The wide hips, long dark hair, and youthful breasts of his figure hint at a woman in the prime of her life. Yet the color scheme foils any inclination of attraction for the viewer, her pale skin betraying bits of its original color. With gashes strewn across her upper body, it's difficult to surmise whether these are the result of an athletically-sculpting Fischer or the intentional marks of a cadaver. We cannot help but feel as though the figure has been dead for some time, the petrifying aspects of rigor mortis contorting the blood in her veins and her theoretical muscle tissue. And, when comparing her former life to her present state, one cannot rule out the horror of foul play.
Jean-Michel Basquiat
*Krong Thip (Torso)*, 1983
Estimate $4,000,000 - 6,000,000

*Krong Thip (Torso)* executed in 1983 shows Jean-Michel Basquiat during the second creative phase of his eminent career, having recently graduated from subways to white cube spaces and assuming his position as a prodigy on the international art scene. Known for his powerful compositions which ignore academic rules and compositional hierarchies, Basquiat drew inspiration from everyday life and mixed media. Famously sampling elements from a wide range of source material such as symbol books, comic books quotations, music, African American culture, art history and anatomy and re-mixing them on canvas. Perhaps best known for his derivative street style, *Krong Thip (Torso)*, 1983 is a rare example of Basquiat subscribing to traditional modes of rendering human anatomy. This lot depicts a human muscle study of the back and upper limb that is rich with reference to the proportional figure studies drawn by old masters, yet painted in the archetypal Basquiat process. This unusual subject matter aligns itself with the recurring motif of anatomical components within Basquiat’s oeuvre, inclusively tied to an enigmatic combination of words and symbols that collectively characterize his unique visual aesthetic.

Unlike many Basquiat compositions which depict figures engaged in actions or which exude overt political or social associations, the labels “TORSO” and “LEFT HAND” alongside the figure are clear references to anatomical drawings and figure studies from the renaissance in which specific body parts were illustrated in isolation in order to enhance the artist’s understanding of anatomical precincts and contribute to the creation of more dynamic compositions. Set against the dominant red background, the vibrancy of the yellow torso isolates itself from the rest of the composition as the focal point. The sculptural rendering of the torso derives from Basquiat’s fascination with Leonardo Da Vinci’s notebooks, which provided a great source of inspiration throughout his career. The protruding shoulder blades and chiseled core indicate an idealized physique rendered in the classical style, while the cyan and black brushstrokes upon the torso depict a muscular form reminiscent of the deep shadowing and highlights employed by Da Vinci in his topographic notebook studies of human musculature.

Frank Stella remains one of the most influential American artists of the post-war period. His work helped shape and define movements such as Minimalism, Color Field painting and Post-Painterly Abstraction. Heralded as a crucial innovator of Modernism, he is credited with both achieving the so-called last advancements in modernist painting and re-defining what the limits of modernist painting could be. The exuberant and methodical *Double Scramble* from the 1970s is an eloquent exemplar of his practice.

Frank Stella
*Double Scramble*, 1978
Estimate $2,000,000 - 2,500,000

Moving to New York in 1958, Stella was heavily influenced by the Abstract Expressionist movement prevalent at the time. Rejecting the expressive individuality of artists like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, he was drawn to the group of Abstract Expressionists who favored expansive fields of solid color over gestural brushstrokes. Artists such as Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, through their use of flat color, paved the way for a new kind of abstraction to be explored. Later works by Color Field painters such as Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland would bring this abstraction to new frontiers with an increased sense of clarity, symmetry and simplicity. Stella took this initiative even further, completely stripping his paintings of all psychological meaning and subjectivity and reducing the canvas to an orderly language of color based on repetition and form.
Looking objectively at the conventions of painting, wrestling with its traditions and questioning its foundations from within, is a seemingly volatile stance for any artist. Herein lays the mastery of Christopher Wool’s work: his unrelenting pursuit of his chosen medium of painting can be, at times, unforgiving. Every approach he adopts is carefully balanced. Wool’s renegade use of technique is weighted with a sense of admiration for the painterly tradition. For the artist, the physical act of painting and its resulting spontaneity have carefully mapped lines; he creates rules and boundaries within his method and process. Amidst the seeming chaos of the tempestuous and hazy strokes, Wool carefully structures his approach to medium and subject. The resulting work is visually arresting, almost alarming, retaining a delicate and intricate quality.

Decisive and yet undefined, coherent and yet frantic, Christopher Wool’s Untitled, 2005, confronts us, unabashedly, in the artist’s signature style. Swathes of untamed grey and navy enamel course throughout the canvas, obscuring what might perhaps be a more representational composition underneath. Perhaps initially, we are struck with how Wool has visualized a sort of destruction—the marks seem to reflect the moment in which the artist is tearing something up, washing it over, and starting again. Questions loom. What are we witnessing? We know this isn’t an artistic tantrum; each layer of paint is definitive—purposeful in its interaction with its surroundings. Logic has been applied; there is structure. This is Wool’s way of painting from within.

In the instance of Untitled, 2005, Wool expands the limits of painting through a nuanced and subtle appropriation of the graffiti he absorbed on the streets of 1970s New York. The artist subsequently took photos of the street art that intrigued him, contributing to the genesis for works like the present lot, Untitled, 2005.

PHILLIPS:
As the only international auction house to concentrate exclusively on contemporary culture, Phillips has established a commanding position in the sale of Contemporary Art, Design, Photographs, Editions and Jewelry. Through the passionate dedication of its team of global specialists, the company has garnered an unparalleled wealth of knowledge of emerging market trends. Founded in London in 1796, Phillips conducts auctions in New York and London and has representative offices throughout Europe and in the United States. For more information, please visit: phillips.com.

– END–

Contacts:
LONDON
Alex Godwin-Brown
Head of Press and Events, Europe
agodwin-brown@phillips.com
+ 44 20 7318 4036

NEW YORK
Trish Walsh
Marketing and Communication Manager, New York
twalsh@phillips.com
+ 1 212 940 1224

HEADQUARTERS
30 Berkeley Square
London W1 6EX
+44 20 7318 4010

450 Park Avenue
New York NY 10022
+1 212 940 1200