

Sotheby's Important Prints & Multiples Auction to Feature Property from the Collection of Catherine Woodard and Nelson Blitz, Jr.

FEATURING:

Four Iconic Jasper Johns **Flags**,
Including Three Unique Impressions

Estimate \$1.8/2.4 Million

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A Unique Example of Johns's **Ale Cans**
Recognized for Its Pioneering Role in the Birth of Pop Art

Estimate \$1.5/2 Million

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Rare & Early Woodcuts by Edvard Munch

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Master Prints by Emil Nolde and Chuck Close

Auction in New York 24 October

PUBLIC EXHIBITION OPENS 16 OCTOBER

NEW YORK, 15 October 2019 – Sotheby's is pleased to announce that our October auction of Prints & Multiples in New York will feature important works from the Collection of Catherine Woodard and Nelson Blitz Jr. Following our auction of works from the Blitz Collection in 2017, this season's selection features 11 superlative works by master printmakers including Jasper Johns, Edvard Munch, Emil Nolde and Chuck Close.

The full Prints & Multiples auction will open for public view in Sotheby's New York galleries beginning 16 October, works from the Blitz Collection on offer in the Evening Sale on 24 October.

Mary Bartow, Head of Sotheby's Prints & Multiples Department in New York, commented: "Following our successful auction of works from the Blitz Collection in October 2017, we are delighted to once again offer prints by Jasper Johns, Edvard Munch and more on behalf of enthusiastic and generous collectors Catherine Woodard and Nelson Blitz Jr. It is a privilege to share another exceptional selection of rare, important works this season."

Passionate about the arts from a young age, Nelson Blitz began collecting prints in the early 1960s. Originally in pursuit of prints by French artists such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Odilon Redon, Mr. Blitz's collection changed course when he happened upon a work by Edvard Munch at a Sotheby's print auction in 1972. Drawn in by an image of an embracing couple facing a forest, as well as Munch's quintessential themes of morality, loneliness and anxiety, Mr. Blitz began studying the work of German Expressionists, going as far as to obtain a master's degree at Columbia University, where he met his wife Catherine Woodard in an art history course. Since that meeting in 1982, Catherine Woodard and Nelson Blitz have built together one of the greatest collections of prints in private hands.

JASPER JOHNS

Following a studio visit as members of the Museum of Modern Art's prints acquisition committee, Ms. Woodward and Mr. Blitz began acquiring the works of American master Jasper Johns. The upcoming offering features four of his **Flags** – including unique examples of *Flag I*, *Flag II* and *Flag III* (together estimated at \$1.8/2.4 million). The universally-recognized emblem of the American flag was the ideal subject for Johns to study as a novice printmaker working with



renowned publisher ULAE. New to lithography in 1960, the artist created three variations of the flag that year, each printed from one stone. Relying solely on lithographic tusche to render his first iteration (*Flag I*), this early adaptation of the subject very much resembles a drawing completed the year prior. The present example of *Flag I* is a unique work, utilizing the same stone but varying the ink color and paper type. With *Flag II* and *Flag III*, Johns

appears to have gained confidence and ventured to explore lithography more daringly, employing wash, crayon and a sharp tooling instrument. These unique impressions demonstrate how Johns pushed the boundaries of lithography to explore how subtle changes can have different visual effects.



Recognized for its pioneering role in the advent of Pop Art, Johns's **Ale Cans** best demonstrate the artist's evolutionary and rigorous approach to printmaking (estimate \$1.5/2 million). Dismissing the new wave of young talent who art dealer Leo Castelli promoted in the late 1950s, fellow Abstract Expressionist Willem de Kooning teased: "You could give that son of a bitch two beer cans and he could sell them." In response, Jasper Johns cast two cans of Ballantine Ale in bronze for Castelli Gallery. Initially perceived as a witty retort to de Kooning's prideful remarks, the work inspired discourse about consumerism: just two years later, Andy Warhol would unveil his first *Soup Cans*. Johns subsequently transferred his *Ale Cans* from three dimensions to two, re-inventing them on lithographic stones and

aluminum plates. Agonizing over how to best reinterpret his sculpture on a flat surface, he experimented with numerous proofs before completing the edition of 31. Extensively hand colored in ink and crayon with collage, the present unique work was initially annotated as a working proof for the edition. However, Johns erased that notation in the 1980s, deciding that the work had not been conceived in the development of the edition but as a distinct, individual project.

EDVARD MUNCH

Woodcuts by painter-printmaker Edvard Munch are also a centerpiece of the Blitz Collection, led by a handcolored example of his 1896 **Moonlight I (SCH. 81; W. 90)** (estimate \$700,000/1 million). In a letter to Munch dated 1899, the artist's fiancée Tulla Larsen describes one of his prints as "the woman by the window" – likely referring to the present work. Little did she know that the female subject would come to be widely recognized as Emily "Millie" Thaulow, the artist's first great love. Munch met Thaulow, the wife of a distant cousin, in 1885. Their dramatic affair was short-lived, yet haunted the artist for life,



leaving him with a fear of intimacy. His resulting commitment issues may have contributed to the dissolution of his tumultuous relationship with Larsen – which ended with a gunshot wound to Munch’s left hand.

A rare and early proof before the block was divided, the present work is among the most complex and inventive modern woodcuts – even more impressive for the fact that it is believed to be Munch’s second-ever attempt at the medium. Employing what became known as his “jigsaw” technique, the artist sawed oak woodblocks into pieces and worked them individually before reassembling his desired image.



Another Munch woodcut, **Two Human Beings. The Lonely Ones (W. 157)** highlights the selection (estimate \$700/900,000). This early, clear impression is a rare example of one of Munch’s most celebrated printed subjects. Featuring two figures standing on the Åsgårdstrand shore, looking very much together yet simultaneously alone in their emotional void, Munch created this mysterious scenario by dividing his woodblock into thirds. Treating each piece individually, the ocean and the woman were

worked separately, while the man is joined to the shore. Physically anchored to the foreground, he will never be able to reach his partner; materially and symbolically, she is isolated from the other components of the composition, lost in her own world. This preliminary impression best conveys the painter-printmaker’s original intent, and enhances our understanding of his ever-evolving printmaking process.

About Sotheby’s

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