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Paris press release

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LE SOLEIL DE NUIT

Pre-Columbian Treasures
from an important French collection



Teotihuacan stone mask, Classique,
450-650 AP. J.-C., estimate: €125,000 – 175,000

Paris, July 2019 - Sotheby's Paris is pleased to present the auction *Le Soleil de Nuit, Trésors Précolombiens d'une Grande collection Française*, on **October 30**. The collection is from the estate of a lifelong collector whose well tuned eye assembled art of many eras and styles, from masterpieces of 17th and 18th decorative arts, natural history, to 20th design and modern art. The 75 works of Pre-Columbian fit comfortably in his domain, reflecting his passion for quality, beauty and the soulful element of fine objects.

The collection is distinguished by a group of four **Teotihuacan stone masks**, in both luminous *tecali*, (the Mexican alabaster), and dark greenstone and serpentine, each visage conveying an individual element within the corpus of these idealized faces. Two of the masks were formerly in private American collections of the 1950's and 1960's, and exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago (**estimates: €125,000 – 175,000 et €100,000 – 150,000**).





The **earliest culture of Mesoamerica** is represented with two iconic Olmec objects, a **perforator handle** of the infant were-jaguar emerging from a split ear of maize. This ceremonial tool was important for the bloodletting ceremonies that rulers performed to affirm their lineage and rulership. From the germinating seed of the maize kernel rises the supernatural half-human, half-jaguar creature. This perforator is carved in blue-green jade, the most prized of ancient materials, and echoes the birth of the corn god from the verdant growth of life-sustaining maize (**estimate: €200,000-300,000€**).

An Olmec stone maskette with the soulful face of humility and wisdom is finely incised with symbolic imagery of the Olmec deities. It was published and exhibited in 1969 at the Museum of Primitive Art, New York, in one of the important exhibitions devoted to Pre-Columbian art, *Pre-Columbian art in New York, Selections from Private Collections*.

The **Maya culture** is well represented in jade, ceramic and stone objects of refined workmanship and design. The Maya **vase of codex** of the Young Maize god as a scribe,) gracefully depicts this deity in the act of writing. The narratives of Maya mythology are also shown on polychrome cylinder vessels, lustrous blackware ceramic vessels, delicate stone pendants in apple-green jade, and the abstract 'eccentric' flints (**estimate: €100,000 – 150,000**).



The refined ceramic tradition of **ancient West Mexico** is most poetically shown in the demure seated **Chinesco female figure**, poised in tranquil meditation (**estimate: €60,000-80,000**). The ballgame was one of the most important rituals of sport and prowess played throughout the millennia in ancient Mesoamerica. The collection features a stone effigy yoke from an early French collection, carved with a serpent and images of skeletal and feline forms. Yokes were the ceremonial version of the actual leather and textile belts worn by the players. The collection also includes two ballgame hachas in human and bird form.

The breadth of the collection extends into Central American gold and jade with finely necklaces and pendants. The rich tradition of metallurgy and textile art from the Andean region are shown with a rare Chimu silver figure, exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2000, and a dazzling Wari complete textile tunic woven with bands of abstract puma-headed messenger figures.

This distinguished French collection is a feast of objects from many cultures and eras, representing the scope of ancient art and mythology from the New World. It includes objects of grandeur as well as modest beauty which convey the quality and soul of Pre-Columbian art.

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