

SKY'S THE LIMIT FOR RICHTER'S MONUMENTAL CLOUD PAINTING

Sotheby's London Contemporary Art Sale includes works by Warhol, Basquiat, Baselitz, Fontana and Dubuffet, together with section devoted to young European artists

A STUNNINGLY beautiful and luminous painting of a clouded sky by Gerhard Richter, the German artist capable of turning an image from the ordinary to the sublime, highlights Sotheby's sale of Contemporary Art in London on the evening of Wednesday, June 23, 1999.

Cheyenne Westphal, a Director of Sotheby's Contemporary Art Department in London, said: "Wolke (Cloud), with its intense blue sky and scintillating white clouds, is a celebration of the beauty of nature. In this work, Richter creates a delicately fluctuating surface which captures light, air and space on a monumental breathtaking scale."

The painting was acquired shortly after it was painted in the mid-1970s by a private European collector from the gallery Art in Progress in Düsseldorf. Never before on the open market until now, the work is estimated at £1-1.2 million.

Richter used photographic images as a basis for his paintings and in Wolke, he turned an innocuous photograph of the sky into a powerful and compelling image which leads the viewer's eye into infinity.

In the same sale, another important photo-painting by Richter, Apfelbäume (Skizze), (Apple Trees, Sketch), further illustrates the artist's concerns with the issues of conception and perception. Estimated at £300,000-400,000, this atmospheric colour photo-painting is the third and final meditation on a small clutch of apple trees that Richter painted in 1987. It displays the artist's mastery in the manipulation of subtle tones, typical from his work from the 1980s.

A wonderful example of Alberto Burri's series of plastics on canvas, illustrates the importance of this artist. Rosso Plastica from 1961 is a monumental example of the artist's manipulation of materials, making them become both the background and the subject of the work. It is estimated at £230,000-320,000.

The American Abstract Expressionist artist Mark Rothko is represented by a sophisticated and highly contemplative work from 1969. Rendered in upbeat tones of pink and pale orange, the work presents a rare glimpse of hope and optimism, painted in the year before Rothko committed suicide. It is estimated at £250,000-350,000.

Orangenesser II (The Orange-eater) is one of a series of paintings that confirmed the importance and influence of the German artist Georg Baselitz, cementing his position as the "Godfather" of the Neo-expressionist movement from the 1980s. The painting shows one of Baselitz's typical upside down figures, truncated at the waist and holding an orange. It is estimated at £180,000-220,000.

Other highlights include a highly expressive and delicately playful work by Jean Dubuffet, Frise Moustache (Curly Moustache) from 1959, belonging to a series in which the artist explores with unusual materials such as leaves, fruit and butterfly wings which he then glued on to wood panels (estimate £150,000-200,000), and being sold by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, one of Nicholas de Staël's largest compositions from the early 1950s in which he explores the language of abstraction (estimate £175,000-225,000).

By the Italian artist Lucio Fontana is a beautiful Concetto Spaziale from 1956, a work which incorporates his concerns of space and the use of luxurious three-dimensional materials such as glass pebbles and thickly-applied paint on a pierced canvas (estimate £150,000-220,000). Two early works by Jean-Michel Basquiat are each estimated at £150,000-200,000.

An exciting group of works by younger artists, provide a great opportunity for collectors to acquire works by newly-established artists at the cutting-edge of Contemporary Art.

Elena Geuna, the European Head of Sotheby's Contemporary Art department, said: " I am very enthusiastic at the prospect of presenting such a varied sale of Contemporary Art here in London this season. A strong group of works from the 1950s through to the 1980s is being offered, alongside the work of a younger generation of European artists, and the fresh and vibrant works of contemporary African artists, the latter until now little known outside a small

select circle of collectors."

Highlighting this group are three works by Damien Hirst, an artist whose art constitutes one of the most significant and coherent bodies of work created this decade. All three works by Hirst illustrate his concerns about the validity of both medicine and art and raise the traditional art historical themes of mortality and vanitas. From 1990 is a rare and untitled work, one of only two in existence, in which Hirst attached pharmaceutical drugs on to the canvas (estimate £35,000-45,000).

An example of Hirst's celebrated series of medicine cabinets, Untitled AA from 1992, is estimated at £60,000-80,000, while 9-AAAP from 1990, the third spot painting on canvas that he ever painted, is estimated at £50,000-70,000. Hirst's spot paintings relate to the pharmaceutical industry, being abstract representations of coloured pills on the canvas.

Sarah Lucas is one of the most continuously challenging and original artists working in Britain today. In her imposing Monster Hooker from 1992, Lucas collaged newspaper images of voluptuous women alongside those of exclusively male-consumed items, playfully undermining the male industry by turning the provocative images into ones of confrontation. Monster Hooker is estimated at £12,000-18,000.

In contrast, Stephan Balkenhol's Mann mit Roter Mütze (Man with Red Hat) from 1996 is "a monument to the ordinary man", confirming this artist's maturity as a sculptor of exceptional skill and subtle wit. Showing a near-life size figure of man wearing a red hat, the sculpture humorously compares him to a garden gnome. It is estimated at £25,000-35,000.

Mona Hatoum is represented by Jardin Public from 1993, a highly-charged feminist icon created from an ordinary wrought iron garden chair with a triangle containing the artist's own pubic hair. The provocative nature of this feature, draws on the etymological source of "public" and "pubic". It is estimated at £15,000-20,000.

On offer in the Part Two sale of Contemporary Art on Thursday, June 24, is a large group of contemporary photographs by internationally recognised photographers such as Cindy Sherman, Andrés Serrano and Thomas Struth, as well as by younger artists including Sam Taylor-Wood, Henry Bond and Vanessa Beecroft.

The variety in the technique and subject matter of these works reveals the strength and breadth of contemporary photography today. The photographs by Nan Goldin together with Andrés Serrano's Morgue Series, bridge the gap between fine art and documentary. Photographs by Wolfgang Tillmann and Pierre et Gilles are also represented. Examples by all of these artists have estimates ranging from £1,500 to £10,000.

Immediately following the Part Two sale of Contemporary Art on Thursday, June 24, at 12,30pm, Sotheby's will hold the first ever sale devoted to Contemporary African Art (see separate release).