

For Immediate Release

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CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK TO OFFER KIRCHNER PAINTING IN IMPRESSIONIST AND MODERN ART EVENING SALE OF FALL 2006

Impressionist and Modern Art
November 8, 2006



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Strassenszene, Berlin*
oil on canvas, painted in 1913
47.5/8 x 37.3/8 in. (121 x 95 cm).

New York – Christie's New York is honored to announce the sale of *Strassenszene, Berlin*, (Street Scene, Berlin) of 1913, by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner during the *Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale* on November 8. The painting was restituted by the Brücke-Museum in Berlin to the heirs of Alfred and Thekla Hess this past July. The work is expected to realize in excess of \$18 – 25 million (£10 – 14 million / €14 – €20 million).

“We are thrilled to offer this outstanding work by Kirchner in our evening sale this November,” says Guy Bennett, Senior Vice President and Head of Christie's Impressionist and Modern Art

department in New York. “It is one of the 20th Century’s first and finest expressions of metropolitan life. The painting is both an icon of Expressionism and of this troubled generation’s ambiguous relationship with modernity.”

“*Strassenszene, Berlin* from 1913 is a *tour de force* that captures the theme of the human being in a large metropolis on the edge of profound change,” adds Andreas Rumbler, Head of Christie’s Germany. “It is the most significant German Expressionist picture ever to come to auction and we are pleased to continue Christie’s tradition of offering milestones of German art at our upcoming sale. We have enjoyed particular success in offering works by 20th century German artists from Georg Grosz to Ernst Ludwig Kirchner to Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and Emil Nolde to Oskar Schlemmer at record prices.”

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880 – 1938) was the leading member of *Die Brücke* or The Bridge, a group of young, impassioned German artists who sought to reinvigorate art and life with “all revolutionary and surging elements.” Inspired by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche from whose notion of man as ‘bridge’ to a higher realm of being they took their name, the *Brücke* artists built their art from such diverse sources as Vincent Van Gogh, Edvard Munch, Henri Matisse and the primitive arts of Africa and the Pacific Islands. Kirchner’s own artistic development began with woodcuts and came to include architectural drawing before he mastered painting and sculpture. In Munich in 1903 he began to incorporate into his painting style the use of bold colors, reminiscent of Gauguin, and wild brushstrokes like those of Van Gogh. After serving briefly as a soldier in World War I, Kirchner suffered a nervous breakdown in 1915 from which he never really recovered and after which he spent several years in convalescence continually fighting depression.

The works for which Kirchner is most noted are those that predate his war service and culminate in the series of paintings of the erotic street life of Berlin to which *Strassenszene, Berlin* belongs. Popularly known at the time as *Die Hure Babylon*, (The Whore of Babylon), Berlin – then the fastest growing city in the world – was also a hive of prostitution, being the only city in Europe where prostitutes legally solicited on the street. Kirchner’s celebrated portraits of the bustling erotic street life of the metropolis mix eroticism, anxiety and the fast pace of city life into one of the first and most intoxicating expressions of the nature of modern urban existence in the whole of 20th Century art. Using dramatic angular brushstrokes, flat areas of vibrant color and an almost gothic sense of style, Kirchner depicted the metropolitan dance of men and women courting in the urban jungle in a way that is infused with erotic tension and strained emotional impact. *Strassenszene, Berlin* is one of the finest of this exceptional series of 11 pictures of Berlin life that Kirchner painted in this unique period in the years immediately before the First World War.

Kirchner's inclusion in the 1937 Nazi exhibition of so-called "degenerate art" combined with the destruction of nearly 600 of his works, further exacerbated his fragile mental state and in 1938 he committed suicide. This painting is undoubtedly one of his finest works to survive him.

"We are of course delighted to offer the picture on behalf of the heirs of Alfred and Thekla Hess," says Monica Dugot, Senior Vice President and Christie's Director of Restitution. "We at Christie's take the question of works of art looted during the Nazi-era very seriously and are committed to working with clients, museums, dealers and the claimant community in finding clarity on such issues and in helping to find solutions when these arise. We have been privileged to offer a number of restituted works in the last few months including Egon Schiele's *Herbstsonne* restituted to the heirs of Austrian collector Karl Grünwald and also Francesco Guardi's *The Grand Canal, Venice, with the Palazzo Bembo*, restituted by the Louvre last year to the heirs of John and Anna Jaffé."

Viewing and auction dates are as follows:

Auction: Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale

November 8 at 7 p.m.

Viewing: Christie's Galleries at Rockefeller Center

November 3 – 7

About Christie's

Christie's is the world's leading auction house, a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service, and international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's conducted the greatest auctions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and today remains a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers nearly 1,000 sales annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewelry, photographs, collectibles, wine, cars and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$20 million. Christie's has 90 offices in 30 countries and 16 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv and Hong Kong. Most recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai. In 2005 Christie's annual global sales increased 38% to \$3.2 billion, the highest total in company history and propelling the auction house into global market leadership.

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Images available on request

Visit Christie's Web site at www.christies.com

More information about Christie's sale of *Impressionist and Modern Art* can be found on www.christies.com. All lots from the sale can be viewed online along with full catalogue descriptions on Lotfinder®, which also allows clients to leave absentee bids. www.christies.com provides information on more than 80 sale categories, buying and selling at auction, complete auction results, and Christie's international auction calendar.

Notes to Editors

In 1993, Christie's was the first auction house to hold a theme sale dedicated to German and Austrian Art. Since then, Christie's has established many of the current auction record prices for the leading German and Austrian artists including, George Grosz, Heinrich Campendonk, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Emil Nolde, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and Oskar Schlemmer among others. In February 2006, the German and Austrian Art portion of the London Evening Sale realized £24.5 million and established new auction records for: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's double-sided canvas *Frauenbildnis in weissem Kleid*, 1908, which sold for £4.9 million, and Heinrich Campendonk's *Kuh Mit Kalb*, 1914, which realized £1.68 million, as well as a setting a new auction record for a drawing by Egon Schiele, *Kniender weiblicher Halbnackte* (*Kneeling female half-nude*), 1917, which sold for £4.15 million. The German and Austrian Art section of the June 2006 Evening sale totaled £24.3 million bringing sales in this category to £48.8 million in London this year.