

CHRISTIE'S

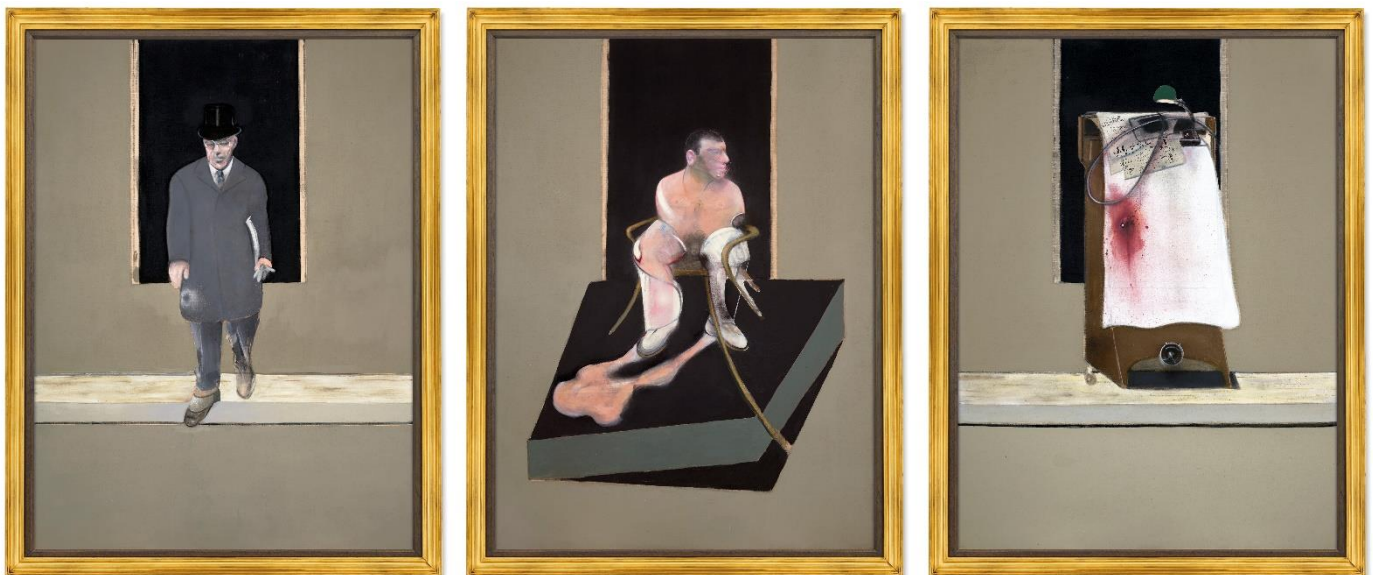
PRESS RELEASE | LONDON | 10 FEBRUARY 2022

FRANCIS BACON'S POWERFUL PAINTING *TRIPTYCH 1986-7* TO BE OFFERED AT AUCTION FOR THE FIRST TIME

1 MARCH 2022

20TH / 21ST CENTURY: LONDON EVENING SALE
20/21 SHANGHAI TO LONDON

- Francis Bacon's *Triptych 1986-7* will be a leading highlight of Christie's Shanghai to London sale series
- *Triptych 1986-7* is being offered at auction for the first time in the 20th / 21st Century: London Evening Sale on 1 March 2022
- Across three monumental canvases, Bacon's most rare and celebrated format, he entwines imagery drawn from the annals of twentieth-century history with a poignant, retrospective view of his own life and art
- The figure in the left-hand panel is based on a photograph of American President Woodrow Wilson leaving the Treaty of Versailles negotiations in 1919
- Christie's continues to establish cultural dialogues between major international art hubs, launching the key 20/21 Marquee Weeks this year with 20/21 Shanghai to London sale series
- The sale series will incorporate 20th / 21st Century: Shanghai Evening Sale, 20th / 21st Century: London Evening Sale and The Art of the Surreal Evening Sale



Francis Bacon, *Triptych 1986-7* (1986-87, estimate: £35,000,000-55,000,000)

SHANGHAI AND LONDON – Francis Bacon's *Triptych 1986-7* (estimate: £35,000,000-55,000,000) will be offered at auction for the first time in Christie's 20th / 21st Century: London Evening Sale, a key auction within the 20/21 Shanghai to London sale series, which will take place on 1 March 2022. An extraordinary meditation on the passage of time, and a rhapsody on

the solitude of the human condition, *Triptych 1986-7* stands among Bacon's last great paintings. Across three monumental canvases, his most rare and celebrated format, he entwines imagery drawn from the annals of twentieth-century history with a poignant, retrospective view of his own life and art. Originally unveiled in New York in 1987 at Marlborough Gallery, Christie's will exhibit the work at Rockefeller Center from 10 to 15 February 2022.

The suited figure in the left-hand panel is based on a press clipping of the US President Woodrow Wilson, stepping forward as he was leaving the Treaty of Versailles negotiations in 1919; the right-hand panel was inspired by a photograph of Leon Trotsky's study taken after his assassination in 1940. In the centre sits a figure resembling Bacon's then-partner John Edwards, his pose reminiscent of the artist's beloved George Dyer in the haunting eulogy *Triptych August 1972* (Tate, London). Widely exhibited throughout its lifetime, *Triptych 1986-7* was most recently seen in the Centre Georges Pompidou's acclaimed exhibition 'Bacon en Toutes Lettres' (2019-20).

Katharine Arnold, Head of Post-War and Contemporary Art, Christie's Europe: *"Francis Bacon is unmistakably one of the greatest painters of the 20th century. He captured everything it is to be human, unafraid to elevate rapturous love or bring to the fore the deep anguish of grief. His ability to translate the full gambit of our emotions is perfectly encapsulated in this masterpiece, Triptych 1986-7. The rare, large-scale triptych format offered Bacon the opportunity to trace his life back through the historic events of the 20th century, instilling the canvases with his lived experiences, his triumphs and his traumas. Christie's is thrilled to present the painting as a leading highlight of our London Evening Sale. Created at the same time as Lucian Freud's magnificent Girl with Closed Eyes, the two paintings will offer collectors the opportunity to acquire works that have been treasured in separate private collections. Both paintings have been widely exhibited, testament to their stature within the oeuvres of Bacon and Freud respectively. The quality and power of such masterpieces are sure to appeal to our global collector base."*

Giovanna Bertazzoni, Vice-Chairman, 20th / 21st Century Department, Christie's: *"It is an honour for Christie's to present Francis Bacon's superb Triptych 1986-7 in our innovative 'Shanghai to London' sale platform. Our international focus on masterpieces from the 20th and 21st centuries brings together stunning paintings by Franz Marc, one of the fathers of Modernism, and Picasso, whose surreal portrait, La fenêtre ouverte, represents the artist with his great muse Marie-Thérèse, while at the other end of the century we see Bacon alongside his great friend and rival Lucian Freud. Tracing the trajectory and the dynamism of more than 100 years of artistic practice, our 20th / 21st Century auctions offer our clients a uniquely cohesive platform, from London to Asia, and from Europe to the US, where the giants of art history are presented side by side."*

The year after its creation, *Triptych 1986-7* was one of 22 paintings shown at the Central House of Artists' Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow: the first exhibition by a well-known artist from the West to take place in Soviet Russia. Many viewers did not recognise the Trotsky photograph as a source, but to those who did, the painting's presence heralded a sea-change in the country's political attitudes towards art: the Iron Curtain, notably, would fall the next year. The British curator of the exhibition, James Birch, has recently documented his experience in a publication titled *Bacon in Moscow* (2022, Profile Books Ltd). Following its inclusion in major exhibitions at the Museo d'Arte Moderna, Lugano in 1993 and the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1996, the work made its American institutional debut in the Yale Center for British Art's celebrated 1999 touring retrospective. As it travelled the country from East to West to South, its nod to US history, itself rare within Bacon's oeuvre, would certainly have resonated with American audiences: Woodrow Wilson emerges from the darkness, his face pale and the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Triptych 1986-7 is one of a rare number of large-scale triptychs by Bacon to remain in private hands. Between 1962 and 1991, the artist produced just 28 such works measuring 78 by 58 inches, nearly half of which reside in museums worldwide. Recalling the grand altarpieces of Grünewald and Cimabue, the seminal *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (Tate,

London) had announced Bacon's arrival as an artist in 1944. He would go on to expand the genre to near-cinematic proportions, coming full circle with a second blood-red version of the 1944 triptych, also now held in the Tate, shortly after he created *Triptych 1986-7*. Compositionally, the closest cousin of *Triptych 1986-7* remains the 1972 'black triptych' produced in memory of Dyer, where dark canvas-like voids and haunting, liquefied shadows frame the human form. These devices would also play important roles in *Three Portraits – Posthumous Portrait of George Dyer; Self-Portrait; Portrait of Lucian Freud* (1973) and *Triptych March 1974* (Fondación Juan March, Madrid), as well as the artist's final *Triptych* of 1991 (Museum of Modern Art, New York). The depiction of Woodrow Wilson's shoes shares much in common with Bacon's *Study for a Self-Portrait – Triptych* (1985-86), while its conflation of public and private histories might be seen in relation to the landmark *Triptych* (1976).

By 1987, Bacon was basking in the extraordinary success of his 1985 Tate retrospective, whose Director Sir Alan Bowness had named him the 'greatest living painter'. Conversely, he was still haunted by Dyer's sudden death, and had spent much of the previous decade in painterly confrontation with his own mortality. Two self-portraits from that period depict Bacon with a watch. In one, its ticking hand seems to merge organically with his own face. In drawing together elements from all eras of his practice, the work sets this temporal framework in the context of a life lived in paint. Trotsky's lectern, in another reading, could just as easily be an easel; its sheet, stained with blood and lettering, might be a just-begun canvas or half-started novel. Art and life slip in and out of focus across the work's three panels, each illuminated like a beacon against the void.

PRESS CONTACTS:

London: Sara Macdonald | +44 (0)20 7752 3136 | saramacdonald@christies.com
Shanghai: Zhongwei Qin | +86 18501671367 | zqin@christies.com

About Christie's

Founded in 1766, Christie's is a world-leading art and luxury business. Renowned and trusted for its expert live and online auctions, as well as its bespoke private sales, Christie's offers a full portfolio of [global services](#) to its clients, including art appraisal, art financing, international real estate and education. Christie's has a physical presence in 46 countries, throughout the Americas, Europe, Middle East, and Asia Pacific, with flagship [international sales hubs](#) in New York, London, Hong Kong, Paris and Geneva. It also is the only international auction house authorized to hold sales in mainland China (Shanghai).

Christie's [auctions](#) span more than [80 art and luxury categories](#), at price points ranging from \$200 to over \$100 million. In recent years, Christie's has achieved the world record price for an artwork at auction (Leonardo da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi*, 2017), for a single collection sale (the Collection of Peggy and David Rockefeller, 2018), and for a work by a living artist (Jeff Koons' *Rabbit*, 2019).

Christie's [Private Sales](#) offers a seamless service for buying and selling art, jewellery and watches outside of the auction calendar, working exclusively with Christie's specialists at a client's individual pace.

Recent innovations at Christie's include the groundbreaking sale of the first NFT for a digital work of art ever offered at a major auction house (Beeple's *Everydays*, March 2021), with the unprecedented acceptance of cryptocurrency as a means of payment. As an industry leader in digital innovation, Christie's also continues to pioneer new technologies that are redefining the business of art, including the creation of viewing and bidding experiences that integrate augmented reality, global livestreaming, buy-now channels, and hybrid sales formats.

Christie's is dedicated to advancing [responsible culture](#) throughout its business and communities worldwide, including achieving sustainability through net zero carbon emissions by 2030, and actively using its platform in the art world to amplify under-represented voices and support positive change.

Browse, bid, [discover](#), and join us for the best of art and luxury at: www.christies.com or by downloading Christie's apps. The COVID-related re-opening status of our global locations is available [here](#)

###

Images available on request
FOLLOW CHRISTIE'S ON:

