

Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

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ARTS OF AFRICA, OCEANIA AND THE AMERICAS
INCLUDING PROPERTY FROM
THE ESTATE OF ERNST BEYELER



Santa Cruz Islands Platter, Solomon Islands

Lam

Length: 24 ¾ in. (63 cm.)

Estimate: \$80,000-120,000

New York- On May 10, Christie's is pleased to present the sale of *Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas including Property from the Estate of Ernst Beyeler*. The works of art from Beyeler's collection offered in the sale includes a rare Santa Cruz Islands Platter (*pictured above*), a rare and important Lega ivory mask, and a Veracruz Smiling figure.

ERNST BEYELER

Ernst Beyeler opened his celebrated gallery at Bäumleingasse 9 in Basel in 1945. Over the next 65 years the gallery would hold over 300 major exhibitions, which were attended by collectors and museum curators from all over the globe, to whom Beyeler would sell over 16,000 works of art during his lifetime. The gallery's name quickly became synonymous with the greatest artists of the 20th century, many of whom Ernst Beyeler knew personally. Beyeler's great eye and sense for quality became legendary.

As his gallery prospered in the post-war years, Beyeler was responsible for selling great masterpieces to leading museums and, in 1970, Ernst Beyeler co-founded Art Basel. Throughout their lifetime, Ernst and his wife, Hildy, became quite avid collectors, themselves, and in 2011, Christie's London had the privilege of selling some of the couple's exquisite Post-War, Contemporary, Impressionist, and Modern works.

In 1947 Beyeler held his first exhibition, which featured Japanese woodcuts, demonstrating his early interest in non-Western art. The genesis of Beyeler's tribal art odyssey occurred in the late 1950's. He held his first exhibition of African art in 1958, during a time when 'tribal' works of art were reaching an international stage in the post-War art world. He maintained his interest in tribal art over the years as someone who clearly understood it as key to the language of Modern art. The African, Oceanic and Pre-Columbian works of art from Beyeler's collection demonstrates the continued relevance of tribal art within the contemporary art world today. Many of the sculptures offered in the sale, such as the Pre-Columbian works of art, lined Beyeler's wall since the early 1960's.



Photograph copyright Kurt Wyss

HIGHLIGHTS

AFRICAN & OCEANIC ART

Highlights of the sale include a rare Santa Cruz Islands platter, *lam*, from the Solomon Islands, (*pictured page 1*, estimate: \$80,000-100,000). This rare work of art boldly represents the fish, a revered creature in the Island's culture, with the purest of form and line. It exquisitely pre-tells the work of Constantin Brancusi's *L'Oiseau*, for example. The Beyeler platter was collected on the famous 'Korrigane' expedition in 1935.

The 19th century rare and important Lega ivory mask, *idumu*, (*pictured left*, estimate: \$30,000-50,000) from Beyeler's collection is one of only handful known of large scale, including one of the most famous examples formerly in the collection of Picasso. It is a powerful image, with squinting eyes and bearing tiny, sharp teeth created for the secret Bwami society.

A rare Bidjogo mask in the form of a highly stylized sawtooth fish demonstrates Beyeler's penchant for dramatic and inventive representations of animals (estimate: \$8,000-12,000). He had almost a 'collection within a collection' of zoomorphic forms. Aesthetically, he realized the special skill required for an artist to represent bestial forms in a sophisticated manner. The Beyeler Bidjogo mask is one of the finest examples known.

PRE-COLUMBIAN ART

The 19 Pre-Columbian works of art from Beyeler's collection are significant since many entered his private collection in the late 1950s. In 1959 Beyeler opened his gallery for an exhibition of Mesoamerican works, *Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico*, an unusual occurrence in Europe at this date. Several lots are listed in the catalogue accompanied this exhibition, including the Nayarit Couple, Protoclassic, ca. 100 B. C. – A.D. 250 (estimate: \$6,000-9,000). Ceramics such as these were placed in tombs to accompany the deceased to the afterlife. While perishable offerings of textile, wood and food have vanished, lively ceramic figures such as these remain intact.

Also highlighting the Pre-Columbian works of art in the sale is a Veracruz Smiling figure, *Remojadas*, Late Classic, ca. A.D. 550-950, which is prominent in photographs of Beyeler's office over the course of many years (*pictured right*, estimate: \$8,000-12,000). Close to half the lots belong to the Mezcala culture,



ca. 300-100 B.C., and are distinguished by the geometric and abstract treatment of the human form. The Large Mezcala Stone Figure is another important Pre-Columbian work of art from Beyeler's collection (*pictured below*, estimate: \$20,000-40,000). This pure and schematic form was influential to Modern artists, including Jacques Lipchitz, whose work Beyeler also acquired as part of the Foundation's collection, and who also had a collection of Pre-Columbian art himself. This reductionist style must have resonated with Ernst Beyeler who was an early champion of Modernism and Abstract Expressionism in painting. The Chontal Stone Mask, ca. 300-100 B.C. (estimate: \$5,000-7,000) also represents the Mezcala culture in the collection.

Auction: Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas including
Property from the Estate of Ernst Beyeler

May 10

Viewing: Christie's Rockefeller Galleries

May 4-9

About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction and private sales in 2011 that totaled £3.6 billion/\$5.7 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 450 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War and Contemporary, Impressionist and Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. Private sales totaled £502 million / \$808.6m in 2011, an increase of 44% on the previous year.

Christie's has a global presence with 53 offices in 32 countries and 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, and Hong Kong. More recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in growth markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.

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