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PRESS RELEASE

Monumental Rare Masterwork by Clyfford Still to Star in Phillips' Evening Sale of 20th Century & Contemporary Art

Among Only 40 Works by Still to Remain in Private Hands, PH-407 to be Sold Publicly for the First Time on December 7th



Clyfford Still
PH-407, 1964
Estimate: In the Region of \$17 million

NEW YORK – 18 NOVEMBER 2020 – Phillips is pleased to announce a rare, Maryland work by Clyfford Still as a major highlight of the fall season. Known as one of the fathers of Abstract Expressionism, Still was regarded as an influencer to some of the most significant artists of the 20th century, including Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. This magnificent, large scale work was painted in 1964 after Still left the New York art scene and relocated to the Maryland countryside, specifically keeping his work out of public view. A testament to his concern for the paintings he created during this time, he left a will with strict instructions to keep them together in a Museum dedicated to his works. As a result, *PH-407* is now one of only a few dozen paintings that are estimated to remain in private hands. It is a superb example from the artist's body of work from the Maryland years of production, which are being celebrated for the first time in the current exhibition at the Clyfford Still Museum in Denver. Bearing impeccable provenance and exhibition history, this monumental masterpiece is estimated in the region of \$17 million

and will be included in Phillips' Evening Sale of 20th Century & Contemporary Art on 7 December at 7pm, marking the first time that it is being sold publicly.

Miety Heiden, Deputy Chairwoman and Head of Private Sales, said, "Clyfford Still is a titan of 20th century Abstract Expressionism, but his work seldom appears on the market. Only 30 to 40 are estimated to remain in private hands, with the vast majority held in The Clyfford Still Museum and other institutional collections around the globe. His Maryland works, such as *PH-407*, are especially rare as he only allowed one gallery show in the last two decades of his career, refusing to part with these works and only selling on the fewest of occasions. We are honored to include such a magnificent work in our December sale, especially during a larger art historical reconsideration of his mature period."

Despite his widespread influence, Still's process was particularly unique. Instead of filling canvases with expressive yet momentary gestures, as many of his peers did, the artist would gradually build up the surface of his works layer by layer, forming complex expanses of paint and emotion. While the red field that composes much of *PH-407* may appear monochromatic at first glance, upon further inspection the tonal nuances and brushstrokes begin to reveal themselves. Featuring a chromatic intensity and emotive depth characteristic of Clyfford Still's finest works, the incendiary crimson expanse and jagged black and blue shapes of *PH-407* pulsate with energy. What truly defines Still's late work, however, is the sense of simmering movement that permeates throughout. Towards the bottom of the painting, a black form evoking a flame flickers, emitting a vibrant cobalt ember and scarlet smoke. This dynamism—lent to the work not by one form but by the relationship between multiple forms—is characteristic of Still's mature canvases, which coalesce kinetic energy with a reductive approach. Continuously shifting in color and texture, *PH-407* is emblematic of Still's extraordinary approach, which forever altered the course of art history. The concept for the work was originally conceived five years earlier in 1959 in a pastel study that is now part of the Clyfford Still Museum's permanent collection. He did not return to the subject until 1964, during his famed Maryland years.

Clyfford Still refused to conform to the rules of the commercial art world and the desires of critics. And so, in 1961, he relocated from New York to an overgrown ranch in rural Maryland, a lifestyle closely resembling his childhood in Alberta, Canada. Though he had already disconnected himself from the New York art world, in order to keep developing his craft and to continue growing as an artist as he aged, Still felt he had to establish empty physical space around him to fill with his work. He converted a barn on the homestead into a studio and felt a renewed and refreshed drive to paint.

Still went on to spend the last two decades of his life in Maryland, unequivocally the most fertile period in the artist's career. Between 1961 and 1980, he executed approximately 380 paintings and 1,100 works on paper, more than he had created in the forty years prior. Most of these works remained in his collection and are now held in the Clyfford Still Museum, as he strived to keep them all. In 1969, however, he sold about 35 works on canvas, including *PH-407*, to Marlborough-Gerson Gallery—the only time his works entered the commercial art world following his disassociation from his gallerists in 1951. Several of those Marlborough works have since entered institutional collections: one has found its way back to the Clyfford Still Museum, and others are now housed by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.

In 1979, the Metropolitan Museum of Art honored Clyfford Still with the greatest highlight of his career, a monumental retrospective, for which he selected 79 paintings to include from his own collection. The Met retrospective's emphasis on Still's time in Maryland illuminated how the artist regarded his late period as the culmination of his oeuvre: almost half of the paintings exhibited were from the last two decades of his career.

PH-407 is only the third work from Still's Maryland period to ever appear at auction.

Auction: December 7, 2020

Click here for more information: <https://www.phillips.com/auctions/auction/NY010720/>

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PRESS CONTACTS:

NEW YORK – Jaime Israni, Senior Public Relations Manager jisrani@phillips.com +1 212 940 1398

PHILLIPS NEW YORK - 450 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022

PHILLIPS LONDON - 30 Berkeley Square, London, W1J 6EX

PHILLIPS HONG KONG - 14/F St. George's Building, 2 Ice House Street, Central Hong Kong

PHILLIPS GENEVA - Rue de la Confédération, 7 Geneva 1204



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