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PRESS RELEASE

Phillips Unveils ‘Titans of the 20th Century from the Collection of Marcel Brient’

Two Landmark Paintings by Gerhard Richter and Willem de Kooning to Lead the 20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Auction in London on 2 March 2023



Gerhard Richter
Mathis, 1983
Estimate: £10,000,000-15,000,000



Willem de Kooning
[no title], 1984
Estimate £7,000,000-9,000,000

LONDON – 13 FEBRUARY 2023 – Phillips is thrilled to announce two spectacular examples of late 20th century abstraction from the esteemed Collection of Marcel Brient. Coming to auction for the first time, Gerhard Richter’s *Mathis*, 1983 and Willem de Kooning’s [no title], 1984 were created within a year of each other. In their scale, ambition and bravura execution they exemplify the painterly questions posed by the artists at a specific moment in their respective careers. After being unveiled at Phillips Paris, the works will go on view at Phillips Berkeley Square from 23 February to 2 March before being offered in the 20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale on 2 March.

Renowned French collector Marcel Brient has, over the decades, built one of the most important and illuminating collections of contemporary art and design that surprises and delights in the unexpected connections that it draws between artists. De Kooning’s [no title] and Richter’s *Mathis* tell a compelling story about the history of abstraction and exemplify the working methods and approach of both artists during the pivotal years of the 1980s. It was a period of intense artistic innovation when established definitions of abstraction were being renegotiated along radically new conceptual and technical lines.

For the older de Kooning, the 1980s represented a triumphant return to painting after a period of poor health. Distilling his painterly vocabulary down to the essentials of supple line and concentrated colour, these airy, light-filled canvases bear the subtlest traces of bodies and snatches of the East Hampton landscape. Deeply meditative, the human scale of [no title] carries viewers into a sparse and sublime space, it's calm serenity and lightness of touch highly evocative of the kind of quiet contemplation with which we might look back upon a life well-lived.

The early 1980s also proved to be critical for the younger Richter and the maturation of a robust, abstract language rooted in the socio-political contexts of post-war Germany. In a significant shift, Richter moved away from the monochromatic photorealist painting that had defined his production in the 1960s, embracing improvisation, acid colour and the interplay of more complex surface textures as he began to experiment with new techniques. Richter's *Mathis* has been a centrepiece of the Collection of Marcel Brient since he acquired it over 20 years. It is the first and structurally most complex of a subset of four abstract canvases (*abstrakte bilder*) all titled after people (Mathis, Martha, Marian, Maria), highlighting the more complex dialogue that Richter developed between abstraction and modes of representation during these years.

Cheyenne Westphal, Global Chairwoman, said, "These two monumental paintings by Gerhard Richter and Willem de Kooning provoke an interesting conversation about the legacies of abstraction and the crossover from one generation to another. Richter's *Mathis* talks of extraordinary strength and power to me, whilst de Kooning's painting is delicate and very moving, the artist's last breath. Both works strike at the heart of the long legacy of abstraction to which both artists have contributed immeasurably, and of one collector's vision and commitment to 'going further' in both art and life. Marcel Brient is a visionary with an acute eye and exceptional talent for seeing the potential of an artist ahead of time and it is an honour to present these two masterpieces at auction at Phillips."

Marcel Brient, said, "I have been fortunate to live with these two masterpieces for over 20 years, and it is now time to put them back out into the world. These two works were created within a year of each other, which in their scale and ambition represent for me two specific moments in the respective artists careers. On one side, you have the bold, youthful exuberance of an artist at the beginning of his career (Gerhard Richter) and on the other, the more elegiac or quietly poetic meditation of an artist approaching the end of his life (Willem de Kooning)."

Auction: 2 March 2023 5pm GMT

Auction viewing: 23 February-2 March 2023

Location: 30 Berkeley Square, London, W1J 6EX

Click here for more information: <https://www.phillips.com/auctions/auction/UK010123>

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