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PRESS RELEASE

Burri Masterwork to be Sold in Phillips' Evening Sale of 20th Century & Contemporary Art

Auction to be Held in New York on 15 November 2018



Alberto Burri

Grande Legno e Rosso, Executed in 1957-1959
(150 x 250 cm.)

Estimate: \$10-15 million

NEW YORK – 26 SEPTEMBER 2018 – Phillips is pleased to announce that Alberto Burri’s monumental *Grande legno e rosso* will be offered as a highlight in the Evening Sale of 20th Century & Contemporary Art in New York on 15 November. Executed in 1957-1959, the work has remained in the same private family collection for over fifty years since its acquisition from the renowned Galleria La Tartaruga in Rome, shortly after it was first exhibited there in 1957. With an estimate of \$10-15 million, it is poised to break Burri’s auction record during its first-ever public sale.

“*Grande legno e rosso* is a prime example from one of Burri’s most celebrated periods,” said **Hugues Joffre, Phillips’ Senior Advisor to the CEO**. “A picture of exceptional quality, the sale of *Grande legno e rosso* presents an exciting opportunity for collectors of Italian post-war art to acquire a true masterwork from Burri’s body of work.”

Monumental and absorbing in scale, Alberto Burri’s *Grande legno e rosso* stretches over eight feet in width, featuring the combination of wood and fire that Burri had only recently introduced into his work, thus placing it at the vanguard of his oeuvre. The work demonstrates why Burri’s artistic output chimed so well with the atmosphere of post-war Europe. The continent had been ravaged by the Second World War with old hierarchies having been toppled. This was the age of Existentialism and Abstract Expressionism and, having established his career in Rome and New York in the early 1950s, Burri’s works appeared to challenge both. His incorporation of “poor” materials such as sackcloth and wood revealed an

artist appearing to elevate the humblest of elements into the realm of the artistic, placing them on a previously unthinkable pedestal. Likewise, the techniques that Burri employed, indicated an artist who was finding new ways of making a mark on the canvas. By scorching wood and incorporating it within the confines of a picture surface, Burri was pushing the boundaries of art to new extremes.

Grande legno e rosso marks one of the first instances where Burri used the most uncontrollable element of fire in his work, taking place a few years before Yves Klein began his famous series of fire paintings. Material is very important when considering Burri's work, but rather than focusing on the materials directly, he has used them as a vessel to generate an emotive response within the viewer, much as the artists of the Arte Povera movement would later do. Burri's methods can be seen as paving the way for artists who would follow him, creating an extraordinary influence on the international scene.

By the time that *Grande legno e rosso* was created, Burri had already become an internationally-recognized artist, having gained increasing exposure and acclaim at the beginning of the 1950s. By 1957, Burri was participating in shows throughout Italy, Europe and the States. This rise to fame was all the more impressive as it was only during his imprisonment in World War II that he had turned to painting as a vocation, abandoning medicine, his former calling. While serving as a prisoner of war in Hereford, Texas, Burri became increasingly focused upon art; although he would later destroy many of the works from this period, he made a point of saving his early landscape, *Texas*. This work, filled with scorched red and orange and with a high horizon, can be seen as a forebear for the composition of *Grande legno e rosso*.

The importance of *Grande legno e rosso* is further indicated by its inclusion in the critically-acclaimed 2015 retrospective of Burri's work held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. After that exhibition, the presentation of this picture at auction marks only the second occasion it has been shown publically since 1960, shortly after it was completed.

Auction: Thursday, 15 November

Location: 450 Park Avenue, New York

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Phillips is a leading global platform for buying and selling 20th and 21st century art and design. With dedicated expertise in the areas of 20th Century and Contemporary Art, Design, Photographs, Editions, Watches, and Jewelry, Phillips offers professional services and advice on all aspects of collecting. Auctions and exhibitions are held at salerooms in New York, London, Geneva, and Hong Kong, while clients are further served through representative offices based throughout Europe, the United States and Asia. Phillips also offers an online auction platform accessible anywhere in the world. In addition to providing selling and buying opportunities through auction, Phillips brokers private sales and offers assistance with appraisals, valuations, and other financial services.

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