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PRESS RELEASE

Abstract Expressionist Masterpiece by Willem de Kooning to be Included in Phillips' 20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

**Offered for the First Time at Auction,
Untitled II is Estimated at \$12-18 Million**



Willem de Kooning
Untitled II, 1980
Estimate: \$12-18 million

NEW YORK – 24 APRIL 2017 – Phillips is pleased to announce that Willem de Kooning's *Untitled II* will be offered as a highlight in the Evening Sale of 20th Century & Contemporary Art on Thursday, 18 May. A magnificent tour-de force of his painterly virtuosity, *Untitled II* is one of less than ten works created in 1980, an important turning point in de Kooning's career. Estimated at \$12-18 million, this work has never been offered at auction. Since its creation nearly four decades ago, it has been exhibited twice – once at London's Royal Academy of Arts in 1981 and once at New York's Gagosian Gallery, in their de Kooning retrospective of 2007.

At 77x88 inches, *Untitled II* is an example of the largest of the three canvas sizes de Kooning used, reserved for his most ambitious projects. This painting is one of only a few paintings that he completed in 1980. The works from this period grew out of masterpieces from his highly acclaimed years of 1975-77. These bold, confident landscapes facilitated the transition from his earlier works to those created post-1981. Situated at this pivotal turning point, *Untitled II* takes a unique position within de Kooning's oeuvre. On the one hand, the heavily painterliness of the background and energetic sweeps of the brush evoke de Kooning's universally celebrated "pastoral" all-over abstractions from 1975-1977. On the other hand, the present work also exemplifies the new-found sense of luminosity and open-endedness that de Kooning would further develop in a radically new visual language in the 1980s.

With *Untitled II* one sees an artist revisiting longstanding themes and formal elements, but also making his first forays into a new, radically different, visual territory. Shifting away from the tightly organized compositions and the heavily worked, dense canvases of his earlier years, de Kooning here puts forward a fluid space in which form, line and color blend into one another, foreshadowing the infinite white backgrounds and ribbon-like brushstrokes that would become the signature of his output in the 1980s.

Untitled II is the embodiment of the de Kooning's newfound creativity after several years of episodic studio activity and marks the beginning of his celebrated final chapter. Widely celebrated upon its completion, it was notably exhibited the following year at the Royal Academy of Art's *A New Spirit in Painting* exhibition in London.

Auction: Thursday, 18 May 2017, 5pm

Auction viewing: 5-18 May | Monday to Saturday 10am-6pm, Sunday 12pm-6pm

Location: 450 Park Avenue, New York

Link to more information: <https://www.phillips.com/auctions/auction/NY010317>

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**Estimates do not include buyer's premium; prices achieved include the hammer price plus buyer's premium.*

PRESS CONTACTS:

Michael Sherman, Chief Communications Officer	msherman@phillips.com	+1 212 940 1384
Jaime Israni, <i>Public Relations Specialist</i>	jisrani@phillips.com	+1 212 940 1398

HEADQUARTERS: LONDON - 30 Berkeley Square, London W1J 6EX | **NEW YORK** - 450 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022

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