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PRESS RELEASE

PHILLIPS TO OFFER IMPORTANT WORK FROM COLLABORATION OF ROBERTO MENGHI AND LUCIO FONTANA

AUCTION: 24 SEPTEMBER 2014, 2PM

VIEWING: 17-24 SEPTEMBER 2014

AUCTION LOCATION: Howick Place, London, SW1P 1BB

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LONDON - 11 September 2014 - Phillips is proud to announce a highlight from the forthcoming September Design Auction, a remarkable table and result of a collaboration between **Lucio Fontana** and **Roberto Menghi**; two of Italy's most prominent postwar creatives. The work will be offered within the Design Auction taking place in London on 24 September containing over 180 lots with a pre-sale estimate of £2,324,000 / \$3,863,900 / €2,944,600 to £3,272,500 / \$5,438,700 / €4,146,300.

"This work is the fruit of a marriage between two great creative minds, uniquely demonstrating how a work of art can be integrated into a utilitarian object. We are very excited to be able to offer this incredible work, one of only four known to exist, to the Design Market in our auction on 24 September." **Ben Williams**, Head of Design Sale, Phillips.



LUCIO FONTANA AND ROBERTO MENGHI
Unique centre table, model no. 1295 A, 1952
Estimate £140,000 - 180,000

This table was made during the most fertile period of the **Fontana / Menghi** collaboration in the early 1950s. It combines the imaginative force and material density of **Fontana's** ceramic artistry and **Menghi's** sense of grace and proportion. In its ability to fuse disparate frames of reference drawn from the contemporary worlds of art, design and architecture and the meticulous formal articulation of the various parts, this table stands out as an epic example of the Italian postwar "synthesis of the arts".

Menghi's approach took its cue from the postwar Rationalist aesthetic, at the same time it carved out a niche for itself within the dynamic world of Italian design in its willingness to experiment with new materials at a variety of different scales. The Rationalist reduction to essentials and taste for transparency is manifest in the glass top through which the brass circle becomes visible from different angles. As for **Fontana**, his ceramic production stands out within the fields of the 20th century design, both for the force of its lyricism and the sheer energy of its material expression, which hovers at the boundaries between form and formless, figuration and abstraction, and, for that matter, between art and utility.

The apparent paradox resulting from the nesting of art in design is the effect of multiple features that become evident when one studies the sculptural table more closely. Within **Fontana's** oeuvre, there are many parallels but no real precedents for the swirling energy, poly chromatic richness, and organic dynamism manifest in the sculpted base. This sculptural base of the table presents significant formal and stylistic affinities with such autonomous sculptural works from the late '40s as the "Via Crucis" of 1947 by **Fontana**, which discloses a radical exploration of new dimensions of ceramic and a preference of swirling, organic and polychrome elements.

The **Menghi/Fontana** table is also characterized by a unique language that counterbalances the competing impulses of painting, sculpture, and design alongside subtle architectonic references. The base, shaft and capital of a Doric column, though this particular analogy could only come about due to the framing effect of **Menghi's** contribution, such as the brass and glass elements. The ceramic shaft was signed prominently by Fontana at the base, near the point of juncture with the brass plate, demonstrating that in every sense he considered the contribution to be a work of art in its own right.

One can say that the table's uniqueness as an experimental piece situated between sculpture and design derives in large part from the tension between the dynamic forces unleashed by the ceramic base and the calm, almost restraining quality of the tempered glass top and circular brass rings. These provide structural and spatial mediation between floor and base and base and table top, framing the sculptural portion. Taken together, these highly crafted glass and metal elements allow the eye some respite from the swirling journey it must follow in order to fully appreciate the curvilinear motion and chromatic richness of **Fontana's** base.

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