

CHRISTIE'S

RELEASE | NEW YORK | 20 APRIL 2023 | FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HENRI ROUSSEAU MASTERPIECE *LES FLAMANTS* WILL HIGHLIGHT 20TH CENTURY EVENING SALE



Property from the Estate of Payne Whitney Middleton
HENRI 'LE DOUANIER' ROUSSEAU (1844-1910)

Les Flamants

oil on canvas

44.7/8 x 63.1/4 in. (113.8 x 162 cm.)

Painted in 1910

\$20,000,000 – 30,000,000

NEW YORK – This May, Christie's is honored to offer *Les Flamants*, an extraordinarily rare masterpiece by Henri Rousseau in Christie's 20th Century Evening Sale during the Spring Marquee Week. Estimated at \$20,000,000 – 30,000,000, this painting is poised to reset the auction record for the artist, far exceeding the current record of \$4.4 million set three decades ago at Christie's London. *Les Flamants* comes to Christie's from the estate of Payne Whitney Middleton, having been in the family since 1949.

Max Carter, Christie's Vice Chairman, 20th and 21st Century Art, remarks, "A legend among the Parisian avant-garde, Henri Rousseau is perhaps the rarest major artist of the 19th and early 20th

centuries. Of the fewer than 240 attributed oils in the definitive catalogues by Dora Vallier and Henry Certigny, the number of privately owned paintings with provenance traced to Rousseau can be counted on two hands. Among them there is only one monumental jungle vision, *Les Flamants*, which hung for many years in Joan Whitney Payson's living room opposite Van Gogh's *Irises*. In 1954, five years after the family acquired *Les Flamants*, Rousseau's *The Dream* reportedly became the most expensive acquisition in MoMA's history. At the time, one of Rousseau's masterpieces appearing on the market was an event. Today it is once-in-a-lifetime."

Vanessa Fusco, Head of Impressionist and Modern Art and Co-Head of Christie's 20th Century Evening Sale, remarks, "Rousseau was a celebrity among the avant-garde artistic community in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century. He was championed and collected by some of the most influential modern artists, including Pablo Picasso, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, and Wassily Kandinsky, and his epitaph was written by the great poet Guillaume Apollinaire. His unique, fantastical vision has continued to inspire artists through to the current day. This May's 20th Century Evening Sale therefore represents the perfect platform in which to feature this quintessential artist's great masterpiece, in dialogue with subsequent generations of artists upon whom Rousseau had a profound influence."

Created in the final year of Rousseau's life, *Les Flamants* is a superb example of his jungle paintings, the small, highly celebrated series that cemented his artistic legacy. Among his most ambitious compositions, both in scale and subject, Rousseau's jungle landscapes were almost entirely imagined. The self-taught artist never left France, and instead drew inspiration from journals, newspapers, and botanical guidebooks, which he supplemented with visits to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, to study live animals and exotic plant life. Through this multi-layered process, Rousseau's paintings became rich assemblages, combining many different types of imagery together to create dream-like landscapes. Prior to committing himself fulltime to art, Rousseau made a living as a customs officer working at the outskirts of Paris, which led to the moniker 'Le Douanier.' Rousseau is among the most important self-taught European painters from the late 19th and early 20th Century.

PRESS IMAGE AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD [HERE](#)

Press Contact:

Jessica Stanley | jstanley@christies.com | 212 636 2680

About Christie's

- Founded in 1766, Christie's is a world-leading art and luxury business. Renowned and trusted for its expert live and online auctions, as well as its bespoke private sales, Christie's offers a full portfolio of [global services](#) to its clients, including art appraisal, art financing, international real estate and education. Christie's has a physical presence in 46 countries, throughout the Americas, Europe, Middle East, and Asia Pacific, with flagship [international sales hubs](#) in New York, London, Hong Kong, Paris and Geneva. It also is the only international auction house authorized to hold sales in mainland China (Shanghai).
- Christie's [auctions](#) span more than [80 art and luxury categories](#), at price points ranging from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's has sold 8 of the 10 most important single-owner collections in history, including the [Paul G. Allen Collection](#)—the most valuable collection ever offered at auction (November 2022). In recent years, Christie's also achieved the world record price for an artwork at auction ([Leonardo da Vinci's Salvator Mundi](#), 2017), for a 20th century artwork ([Andy Warhol's Shot Sage Blue Marilyn](#), 2022) and for a work by a living artist ([Jeff Koons' Rabbit](#), 2019). Christie's [Private Sales](#) offers a seamless service for buying and selling art, jewellery and watches outside of the auction calendar, working exclusively with Christie's specialists at a client's individual pace.
- Following the groundbreaking 2021 sale of the first digital art NFT ever offered by a global auction house ([Beeple's Everydays](#)), Christie's recently launched the first [fully on-chain auction platform](#) dedicated to exceptional NFT art. As an industry leader in digital innovation, Christie's also continues to pioneer new technologies that are redefining the business of art, including the use of hologram technology to tour life-size 3D objects around the world, and the creation of viewing and bidding experiences that integrate augmented reality, global livestreaming, buy-now channels, and hybrid sales formats.
- Christie's is dedicated to advancing [responsible culture](#) throughout its business and communities worldwide, including achieving sustainability by reducing our carbon emissions by 50% and pledging to be net zero by 2030, and actively using its platform in the art world to amplify under-represented voices and support positive change.
- Browse, bid, [discover](#), and join us for the best of art and luxury at: www.christies.com or by downloading Christie's apps.

** Please note when quoting estimates above that other fees will apply in addition to the hammer price - see Section D of the Conditions of Sale at the back of the sale catalogue.*

**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium.*

FOLLOW CHRISTIE'S ON:

