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Sotheby's To Auction One of the Greatest Modern Paintings Ever Offered for Sale

Suprematist Composition by Kazimir Malevich



-- Consigned by the Family of the Artist --

Executed in 1916, the Painting is Expected to Bring In Excess of \$60 Million when it is Offered at Auction on the Evening of November 3, 2008 in New York

On the evening of November 3, 2008, Sotheby's will present for sale, **Suprematist Composition** from 1916 by Kazimir Malevich, a work renowned as a premier painting from one of the most sophisticated and innovative artistic movements of the 20th century. Regarded as an icon of Russian art and a paradigmatic example of the 20th century avant-garde, the masterwork was executed in 1916, the same year that Malevich published his *Suprematist Manifesto*. The painting had been featured in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam for the past fifty years before being restituted to the artist's family. It has been included in every major exhibition of Malevich's work ever mounted –

both inside Russia and abroad, and was selected by the artist for his first ever exhibition to a Western audience in 1927. It is estimated to bring in excess of \$60 million*. It will be unveiled to the public in London, for the first time ever, beginning October 3, 2008 and will be on view through Frieze Week (see page 3).

“*Suprematist Composition* is a magnificent modern work of art of enormous art historical importance and cultural resonance,” said Emmanuel Di-Donna, Vice Chairman, Impressionist and Modern Art Worldwide and Head of Sotheby’s Evening Sales, New York. “It ranks amongst the finest paintings of the 20th Century, on a par with the best paintings of modern masters such as Picasso, Rothko, Pollock and de Kooning that have ever come up for sale either at auction or privately. Never has a work by the artist of such significance, lyricism and vibrancy appeared on the market and it is a great privilege for Sotheby’s to be offering it at auction in November.”

A brilliant constellation of geometry and color in space, *Suprematist Composition* embodies what Malevich considered to be the pinnacle of artistic expression. As he did with his other major compositions from 1915-16, the artist’s primary mode of expression here is an assembly of shapes and colors, plotted systematically on canvas. “Color and texture in painting are ends in themselves,” he wrote in his 1916 treatise. Suprematism was rooted in Malevich’s desire to move beyond traditional representation towards an art of pure color and geometric form. While this radical idea had its origins in Cubism and Futurism, Suprematism proposed something new in that it rejected a subjective basis or theme.

Jo Vickery, Senior Director and Head of Sotheby’s Russian Art Department, London, commented, “With the sale of Malevich’s 1916 *Suprematist Composition*, it feels as though history has come full circle: we have a blazing debut of early Suprematist art at the top of the international art market. It’s an historical moment of a personal dimension for the artist’s family, and for us all a chance to reconsider Malevich’s unique contribution to art history. He dreamt of creating a kind of art which would speak to all nations equally and his pioneering abstract paintings cut through old ways of defining art, as well as breaking down political and national boundaries.”

Suprematist Composition made its debut in one of the first important shows of the artist’s work at the 16th State Exhibition in Moscow in 1919-20, which established Malevich as one of the most influential artists of his era. In 1927, the Malevich accompanied this picture to exhibitions in Warsaw and Berlin, introducing Western Europe to the unprecedented aesthetic that he had devised. In June 1927, the artist was obliged to return to the Soviet Union and arranged for the paintings to be stored in Berlin, but he was prevented from leaving the Soviet Union, where he died in 1935. *Suprematist Composition* was later entrusted to the German architect Hugo Häring, who purportedly sold it to the Stedelijk Museum. It was finally returned to the artist’s heirs after a historic settlement was reached with the City of Amsterdam following a 17-year struggle.

The Heirs of Kazimir Malevich issued a statement through a spokesperson as follows: “The Malevich family is delighted that this masterpiece by our renowned ancestor is being brought to market by Sotheby’s. The sale confirms Kazimir Malevich’s place in the pantheon of 20th century masters.”

The genesis of Suprematist painting was preceded by Malevich’s experiences as a young artist of the fledgling Russian avant-garde. In 1907 he was invited to exhibit with notables such as Wassily Kandinsky and Mikhail Larionov Association of Moscow Artists. Around 1914, Malevich became a leader of the Russian Futurist movement, and began taking bolder steps with his painting. By the spring and summer of 1915, he finally discarded all reference to figuration in favor of colored, unadorned geometric shapes on a white background and painted strikingly reductive compositions. In 1915, the artist wrote a lengthy treatise about these paintings commonly known as the “Suprematist Manifesto”, which was published in Moscow in 1916.

Unlike the Soutine and Chagall, who left their native country in search of artistic inspiration in France, Malevich remained in Russia through the turbulent years following the revolution. Born in the Ukraine in 1878, he enrolled in the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in 1905 and remained in that city throughout the 1910s. His early paintings from 1910-13 were not without reference to the French avant-garde, and incorporated a variation of the Cubist aesthetic made popular by Picasso and Braque. But as his painting developed, Malevich began reinterpreting the styles of Cubism, as well as Italian Futurism, and devised an artistic philosophy that was decidedly his own. Suprematism rejected the idea of objective representation and eliminated any references to nature. The international breakthrough of Malevich’s career did not occur until the seminal 1927 exhibition, *Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung*, in which *Suprematist Composition* was featured alongside seventy other of the artist’s works.

Exhibition schedule:

Sotheby’s London: October 3-20, 2008

Sotheby’s New York: October 29-November 3, 2008

Auction

Sotheby’s New York: November 3, 2008

*Estimates do not include buyer’s premium

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