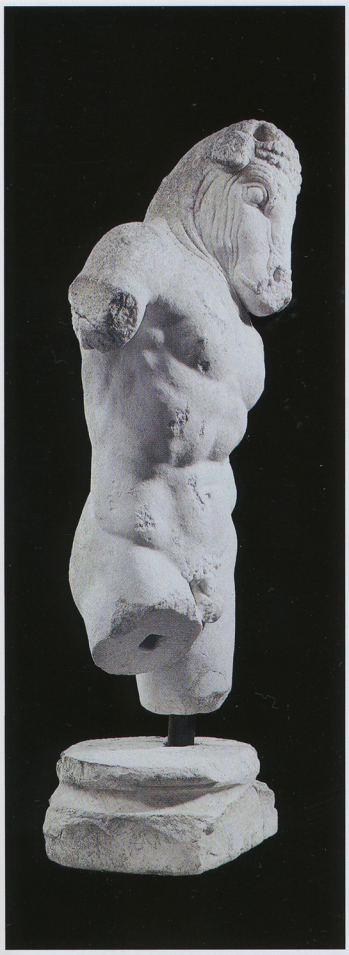
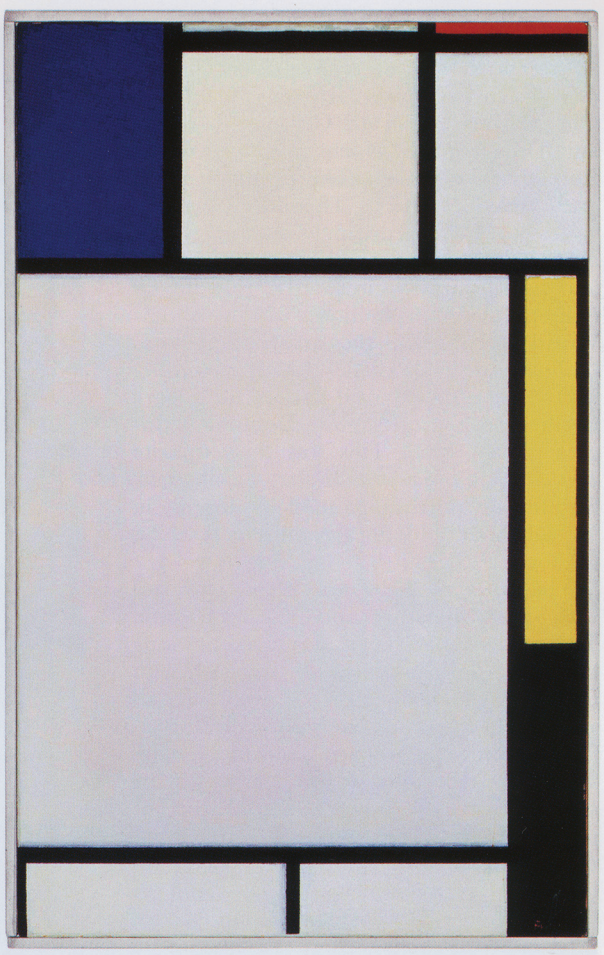


Lot 695, Minotaur, marble,
Rome, 1st–2nd century AD,
height 104.8 cm. €913,000

Lot 35, Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957),
*Madame L.R. (Portrait de Mme L.R.)*,
wooden sculpture, circa 1914–1917,
120 x 35 cm. €29,185,000



Lot 42, Piet Mondrian (1872–1944),
*Composition avec bleu, rouge, jaune et noir*,
oil on canvas, painted in 1922, signed "PM"
79.6 x 49.8 cm. €21,569,000

believe that such an extensive collection of important, and disparate, pieces could have been amassed by just two people.

At the centre of the exhibition was the impressive marble statue of a Minotaur, standing on a circular plinth within a specially constructed rotunda. This 1st–2nd century AD Roman sculpture had provided the focal point of the apsidal terrace of Yves Saint Laurent's rue de Babylone apartment. To the side of the Minotaur were fourteen display areas grouped to left and right. Some were arranged by theme, such as old master pictures, or early German silver, while other areas sought to mirror the arrangements in the Saint Laurent's home. This was done very skilfully with, for example, the impression of daylight windows being created in the *salle à manger* from the rue de Babylone. As they walked around the exhibition, the visitors could hear music by the Doors from one of Saint Laurent's favourite films playing softly in the background, and the rooms were decorated with his favourite white flowers.

When the actual sales began the scale of the operation became even more apparent. As the display of the pieces had been tasteful, elegant, and grand without being overwhelming, so too was the saleroom, with seating for 1500 people—the largest saleroom ever constructed by Christie's—and a hundred telephones to cope with the enquiries and bidding of those clients who were unable to attend the sales in person. The beginning of each session of the sale was heralded by *Casta Diva* sung by Maria Callas, who Saint Laurent greatly admired. This beautiful melody set the tone for the sale. In the front row of the saleroom sat some of Bergé and Saint Laurent's closest friends, as well as some of the latter's favourite models. Also attending each sale, as well as each of the exhibition venues, was Saint Laurent's beloved dog, Moujik.

Almost as soon as the first sale got underway it became clear that these were going to be momentous sales. The Impressionist and Modern Art sale saw seven new World Records for artists at auction, eight works of art sold for more than €5 million, and twenty-five works of art sold for more than €1 million. Perhaps appropriately, the first World Record to be broken was for the Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957) *Madame L.R. (Portrait de Mme L.R.)*, the L.R. in question being Léonie Ricou (1875–1928). According to Pierre Bergé's introduction to the Christie's catalogue, this remarkable wooden sculpture, with its echoes of Nigerian Mumuye art, was the first work of art to be acquired by Pierre Bergé and Yves Saint Laurent. On February 23rd it sold for €29.1 million (US$37.7 million). A few minutes later another piece of special significance to Yves Saint Laurent broke another World Record. This was the Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) *Composition avec bleu, rouge, jaune et noir*, from 1922. It was this painting and others with black grid and blocks of primary colours, painted by the artist around the same date, that inspired Saint Laurent's iconic "Mondrian" wool jersey dress from his 1965 autumn collection.

Only seven lots later another World Record fell, this time it was *Les coucous, tapis bleu et rose*, by Henri Matisse (1869–1954), painted in 1911, which was to become the highest selling work of art in the whole sale at €35.9 million (US$46.4 million). The majority of the buyers in the sales were anonymous, but the Centre Georges Pompidou was happy to allow it to be known that they were the purchasers of the remarkable Giorgio de Chirico painting *Il Ritornante* of 1918, which at €11 million (US$14.28 million), achieved a World Record for the artist at auction. Next day, *The Australian* carried a report confirming that the National Gallery of Australia was the purchaser of the Edgar Degas (1834–1917) *Femme a sa toilette*, which sold for €553,000 (US$707,840).