

# PHILLIPS

PRESS RELEASE

## Monumental Cy Twombly *Bacchus* Painting to Lead Phillips' New York Evening Sale of 20th Century & Contemporary Art

To be Offered on 15 November, Estimated at \$35-45 Million



**Cy Twombly**

*Untitled*, 2005

128 x 192 in. (325.1 x 487.7 cm)

Estimate: \$35,000,000 – 45,000,000

NEW YORK – 27 OCTOBER 2022 – On 15 November, Phillips' Evening Sale of 20th Century & Contemporary Art in New York will be led by Cy Twombly's monumental *Untitled*, 2005. With exceptional provenance and estimated at \$35-45 million, *Untitled* is a masterpiece from one of Twombly's last epic series that found its inception in his blackboards and crystallized in the three discrete suites of paintings collectively known as the *Bacchus* series. The *Bacchus* paintings began in 2003 amidst the US invasion of Iraq and culminated in 2008 when the artist donated three of the monumental works to the Tate Modern, London. The present work is the second-largest canvas from the 2005 series which were exhibited under the collective title *Bacchus Psilax Mainomenos*. Recalling the artist's earlier *Blackboard* paintings from the late 1960s with its continuous looping forms, the *Bacchus* series revisits this earlier motif with a renewed vigor and energy which manifests on the surface of *Untitled*.

**Jean-Paul Engelen, President, Americas, and Worldwide Co-Head of 20th Century & Contemporary Art,** said, “With the top ten auction prices for works by Cy Twombly having all been set in the past eight years, it’s clear that the market is stronger than ever. At sixteen feet wide, *Untitled* is among the largest of Twombly’s works to ever appear at auction, with its subject referring to the dual nature of the ancient Greek and Roman god of wine, intoxication, and debauchery. The work hails from the series that marked Twombly’s ultimate artistic expression at the summit of his career and we are proud to offer this masterpiece as the highlight of our Fall season.”

The translation of *Bacchus Psilax Mainomenos* references both the exuberance and rage that alcohol can bring, with Tate Director Nicholas Serota remarking about the paintings, “They relate obviously to the god of wine and to abandon, and luxuriance, and freedom.” The work also recalls one of the most violent and emotionally stirring moments of *Iliad*, when the Greek hero, Achilles, kills the Trojan prince, Hector, dragging his corpse in circles through the desert around the walled city of Troy—just as Twombly’s red line colors the ground of *Untitled*.

The repetition of the mythical theme in Twombly’s work, particularly the continued invocation of Bacchus across the years, finds its stylistic parallel in Twombly’s signature, circular, scrawling gesture. Two extremes rise and fall within one ancient deity, cycling, one over the other, just as Twombly’s brush turns across the surface of *Untitled*. This gesture appeared in the artist’s earlier *Blackboard* series of the 1960s, making a reprise in *Untitled*, though with a much wilder red spiral. The red line of *Untitled* is rich with emotive movement as the spiral turns and drips across the canvas, the result of Twombly likely using his whole body, swinging the brush, which he attached to a long pole, across the canvas.

**Auction:** 15 November 2022

**Auction viewing:** 5-15 November 2022

**Location:** 432 Park Avenue, New York, NY

**Click here for more information:** <https://www.phillips.com/auctions/auction/NY010722>

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

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