

CHRISTIE'S

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Future Perfect: African Masterpieces from the Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert Collection

AUCTION: PARIS 27 JUNE 2018



Statue Mbembe, Legbo, Nigeria
Estimate on request



Fon head, the bust of the priestess,
Estimate: €500,000-800,000

Paris - Christie's will offer the African Art collection of Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert on 27 June 2018. The 105 lots offering, with a pre-sale estimate of €7,000,000-11,000,000, will unveil a private passion and excellent avant-garde taste for which Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert are publicly known and appreciated for. This collection of African Art is one of the rarest to be still in private hands, assembled over three decades.

Francois de Ricqlès, President Christie's France: *"After the recent successes for African Art, such as the Vérité collection in November 2017, and the 10 April 2018 Spring auction for African and Oceanic Art, we are very pleased to announce the sale of the Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert collection of African Art. Pioneering gallerists of contemporary art, Liliane and Michel took an innovative look at the early arts, which they collected with passion and deep appreciation for more than thirty years. The auction of this private collection will therefore be a major event for the art market and for Paris this June."*

Their African art collection was born from the same strength of passion that animated the Durant-Dessert's visionary choices for their gallery. Their unwavering intellectual curiosity and thirst for other dimensions of art have guided the couple in a natural way, from the creativity of contemporary avant-garde artists to the very roots of contemporary art: the traditional arts of Africa. Ignoring conventions, as in contemporary art, the variety of African objects and forms represented in their collection is surprisingly rich. It reveals, through these choices, the intimacy of its collectors who established a profound link with these works: *"It is certain that a collection is a portrait, and that the objects we buy are those in which we sometimes recognise ourselves, sometimes we project ourselves. One way or another, acquiring them means adopting them, in every sense of the word,"* commented Michel Durand-Dessert.

The diversity of pieces in the collection offers a wide range of masterpieces from the main artistic centre, the west coast to Congo. These works integrate the notions of the passage of time and rites.



Statue Mbembe, Legbo, Nigeria
Estimate on request

The Mbembe statues from south-eastern Nigeria are among the oldest and most spectacular preserved wooden sculptures in sub-Saharan Africa. Extremely rare, less than 20 specimens are known to exist of this group. These enigmatic works became icons of African art following their revelation in the historical exhibition "Ancêtres M'Bembé" at the Helene Kamer gallery in Paris in 1974. The exhibition presented 11 full-bodied sculptures which were dispersed internationally into private and institutional collections. In 2015 the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York assembled these 11 Mbembe sculptures for the exhibition "Warriors and Mothers: Epic Mbembe Art". The female statue of the Durand-Dessert collection had a very important place in these highly acclaimed exhibitions. This fascinating representation of the image of the woman in majesty continues to leave a profound impression on each spectator.

An icon of African art, this Fon head of a priestess has been celebrated ever since it was discovered in Abomey (the current Republic of Benin) in 1928. Famous Parisian dealer and taste-maker Charles Ratton first presented it to the world, before selling it to the much-respected collector Louis Carré. Carré then lent the head to the game-changing exhibition *African Negro Art* at the New York Museum of Art in 1935, where it was photographed by Walker Evans. Before being acquired by Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert it was kept by Buffalo's well-known Albright-Knox Art Gallery for 80 years. In 1966, it was the subject of a monograph only dedicated to this head by Christian Merlo, confirming its masterpiece status and establishing it as an icon of the art of the Fon and African art in general.



Fon head, the bust of the priestess,
Estimate : €500,000-800,000

One of the best-known and most-coveted objects in the Durand-Dessert collection is this rare Bassa figure. One-of-a-kind, this unique statue is widely considered as one of the icons of the art of Liberia's Bassa people. Mostly known for their masks, to which this statue's face strongly resembles, their art only started to appear on the market in the late 1960s. Included in an encyclopedic work on African art published by Mazenod in 1988, this object's reputation was well established not long before it would enter the Durand-Dessert collection. It was one of the stars of the exhibition of their collection "Fragments du Vivant" at La Monnaie de Paris in 2008, emblematic for their strong choices for only the best African art got to offer, often from cultures that hadn't been on the market since too long. True to the exhibition title, a fragment, this Bassa bust succeeds in conveying the talent of its creator.



Bassa Statue, Libéria
Estimate : €800,000-1,200,000



Zlan de Belewale, Dan Statue, Ivory Coast
Estimate : €600,000-800,000

While in general African art is anonymous, this masterfully sculpted female statue can be attributed to a well-known master-carver: Zlan of Belewale, the most famous Dan carver of the early 20th Century. His works are present in most major African art museums and his life has been well documented. Zlan's status as one of the most celebrated artists of the Dan was recently confirmed by the inclusion of his works in the travelling exhibition 'Les Maîtres de la sculpture de la Côte d'Ivoire' (Rietberg Museum, Zurich and Musée du quai Branly, Paris, 2015). The Musée du quai Branly holds a maternity figure very similar to the present statue. The Durand-Dessert statue sits at the apogee of Zlan's artistic production and is considered to be one of his best statues.

This exceptional figure perfectly exemplifies the classical statuary of the Fang. Conceived by a master sculptor, it is among the body of work considered the epitome of African classicism. As a guardian and protector, such a statue would sit on top of a bark box containing relics of a clan's ancestors. This statue was once owned by the famous Parisian art dealer and taste-maker Paul Guillaume (1891-1934), one of the most vocal proponents of the art of the Fang. Due to his efforts, by the First World War, Fang statuary had pride of place in the homes of sophisticated European collectors and was touted by avant-garde art critics. Ever since, Fang statuary has been much celebrated and one of the most sought-after types of African art. The Durand-Dessert statue presents a unique opportunity to acquire a well-documented example in excellent condition and with the typical smooth, oiled surface - a Fang hallmark and the result of decades of ritual libations.



Fang statue, Gabon
Estimate : €500,000-700,000

AUCTION

27 JUNE 2018 AT 3 PM

PUBLIC EXHIBITION

Days and opening hours

21-26 JUNE, 10 am-6 pm, 27 JUNE, 10-12 am

Christie's : 9 avenue Matignon – 75008 – Paris. Free entrance

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**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and are reported net of applicable fees.*

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