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International Auction Houses Bring Famous Works to Moscow

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This November, the city will see a pair of highly anticipated pre-auction shows as the auction houses Christie's and MacDougall's bring works by famous artists to town for sale.

While the Russian art market is often criticized, these international firms appear to be surmising that Moscow's wealthy and powerful will be willing to spend significant sums for recognized names and classical artists, rather than contemporary art.

Christie's will be bringing a selection of mainly European art, including works by masters of the Northern Renaissance such as Lucas Cranach the Elder, Pieter Brueghel the Elder, and Jan Brueghel the Younger. The lots vary widely in time period and place of origin, and also include work by 19th-century French Realist Gustave Courbet, perhaps best known for his influence on the development of Cubism.

Christie's auction will also be bringing home some rare works of 20th-century Russian art;

the most famous of these is likely Ilya Mashkov's 1911 painting "The Swimmers," which was last exhibited in Russia in St. Petersburg in 1913. A number of other 20th-century Russians will also be included in the lots.

MacDougall's is focusing more exclusively on Russian art in their upcoming auction and will present works from big names such as Wassily Kandinsky, Nicholas Roerich, and Leon Bakst. All of these painters operated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, yet moved in widely differing circles and painted in highly differing styles. Kandinsky's clean, abstract canvases seem very much opposed to the religious symbolism of Roerich's orientalist paintings, and Bakst is best known for his association with Diaghilev and work designing theater sets, yet all will presented to the consumers together.

The Moscow branches of both Christie's and MacDougall's are relatively new: Christie's opened in 2010 while MacDougall's opened in February of this year. While art sales in Russia have declined greatly since their pre-crisis heights in 2006 and 2007, fine-art auctions have found surprising success lately, perhaps demonstrating a shift away from the gallery system as many Moscow galleries shut their doors or reoriented their activities.

Vladey, a newly formed Russian auction house, recently held their second auction earlier this month and sold about 70 percent of their lots for a gross profit of 1.3 million euros ($1.8 million), a hopeful sign for future art sales.

Catalogs and information on the auctions and pre-auction showings can be found on the websites of Christie's and MacDougall's at christies.com *and* macdougallauction.com, *respectively.*

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