

New York | +1 212 606 7176 | Lauren Gioia | Lauren.Gioia@Sothebys.com |
Dan Abernethy | Dan.Abernethy@Sothebys.com |

American Indian Art At Sotheby's



On 16 May 2012 Sotheby's will present the annual sale of American Indian Art in New York. The auction will be led by **An Important Nez Percé Beaded And Fringed Hide War Shirt** which once belonged to Chief Joseph – the last of the great Native American warrior chiefs who became a defiant advocate for the Nez Percé after they were defeated by the American army (est. \$400/600,000). Other highlights in the sale include masks, figurative sculpture, amulets, rattles, pipes, basketry, textiles, pottery, and more functional objects such as cradles and weaponry. The pre-sale exhibition opens on 12 May 2012.

Chief Joseph's War Shirt

Chief Joseph, In-mut-too-yah-lat-lat (Thunder travelling over the mountains) was distinguished by his eloquence and diplomacy. Even after defeat, he remained a highly regarded and respected historical figure who ranks alongside the great Native American chiefs such as Black Hawk and Sitting Bull. The defining

moment in Chief Joseph's career came in 1877 when he refused to recognize an agreement that would have restricted him and his followers to a reservation in Idaho. Realizing he could not defeat the US army Joseph planned an escape to Canada with his tribe. Despite scoring victories along the way, they were defeated after a four-day siege just 30 miles from the border. It was at this moment that he delivered the now famous line: "I will fight no more forever."

Joseph continued to lead his tribe as a tireless advocate for their cause, travelling to Washington D.C. three times and meeting two Presidents. At his funeral 'giveaway' in 1904 this exceptional and spectacular shirt was passed on to his cousin the distinguished warrior Peo-Peo-Tholekt. In 1968 Chief Joseph was honoured by a stamp bearing his image, and there are suggestions that in the portrait bearing his image Joseph is wearing the present shirt.

Other Highlights

A Rare And Important Naskapi Painted Hide Hunting Coat is one of only two left in private hands (est. \$250/350,000). Coats such as this carried symbolic significance and were thought to help the wearer when hunting Caribou. However, once they had lost their power coats were traded with Europeans as is likely the case with this piece which was discovered in a private French collection last year.



A Rare And Important Mono Lake Paiute Polychrome Basket By Carrie Bethel is one of the most beautiful baskets ever to appear at auction (est. \$300/500,000). The basket is an important symbol of Native America for tribes from across the country. However, basket weaving was elevated into an art form by a handful of exceptionally gifted weavers such as Carrie Bethel (1898-1974) whose works, including this piece, are characterized by striking and polychromatic designs.



An Important Wood And Metal Pipe Tomahawk once belonged to Chief Red Cloud, leader of the Lakota Sioux (est. \$40/60,000). Red Cloud led his tribe in successful campaigns against the US army in northeastern Wyoming and southern Montana and later steered his people to reservation life after the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868.



An Important And Rare Creek Beaded Cloth Shoulder Bag was recently discovered in the collection of a Californian family of Pottawatomie descent (est. \$70/100,000). The family's ancestry can be traced to Chief Sen noge wone (1744-1831) and given this lineage it is likely that it was bestowed as an honorary gift. Bags such as

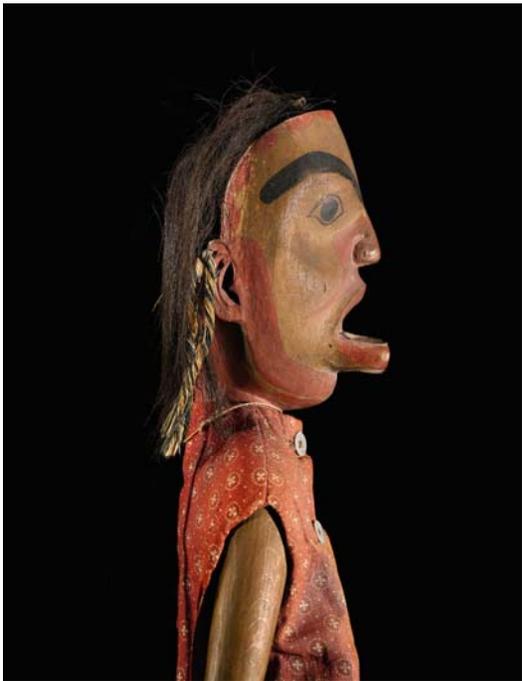
this are exceptionally rare with only two equivalent pieces having appeared at auction in the past decade.

A Superb Tlingit Polychrome Wood Headdress with a recurved beak referring to either a raven or hawk comes from the Collection of Philip and Beatrice Gersh (est. \$150/200,000). Headdresses such as this were used in ceremonies to convey power and status in the tribe and this piece is an example of the finest Northwest Coast carving traditions.



Tony Da, San Ildefonso (b. 1940) is the grandson of Maria Martinez, the legendary potter from San Ildefonso Pueblo, who introduced a new level of artistry and innovation to the family's rich pottery-making heritage. His career was recently celebrated in an exhibition and book entitled *Creative Spark: The Life and Art of Tony Da*. Two of the five lots offered in this sale were featured in the exhibition including a **Sculpture In The Form Of A bear** (est. \$10/15,000).

Further highlights of the sale include a recently discovered **Haida Polychrome Wood Doll** which adds to the known corpus of four dolls, and one mask, by the "Jenna Cass" carver, one of the great Haida artists of the early 19th century (est. \$50/70,000, below left) and a **Sioux Painted Pictorial Buffalo Hide** (est. \$90/120,000, below right).



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