

Lot 22



Auction Modern, Post War & Contemporary, Evening Sale

Date 27.11.2024, ca. 18:16

Preview 22.11.2024 - 10:00:00 bis
25.11.2024 - 18:00:00

COPLEY, WILLIAM NELSON
1919 New York - 1996 Key West

Title: Les Etats Unis du Monde.

Date: 1962.

Technique: Oil on canvas.

Measurement: 115 x 145cm.

Notation: Signed and dated lower right: CPLY 62.

Frame/Pedestal: Framed.

We are grateful to Mr Anthony Atlas, William N. Copley Estate, New York, for his kind, scientific support.

Provenance:

- Estate of Max Ernst (1962 directly from the artist)
- Dorothea Tanning Collection (since 1976 through inheritance)
- In family ownership since then

Exhibitions:

- Galerie Iris Clert, Paris 1962
- Hanover Gallery, London 1963
- Kunsthalle Bern, 1980
- Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris 1980/81 (label)
- Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven 1981
- Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe 1981

Literature:

- Exhib. cat. W. N. Copley Paintings, Hanover Gallery, London 1963, cat. no. 3, ill. (titled differently here)
- Exhib. cat. William N. Copley, Kunsthalle Bern/Centre Georges Pompidou/Van Abbemuseum, Berne 1980, ill.

- From the estate of his artist friend Max Ernst
- Characteristic of Copley's provocative and ironic approach to nationalist ideas
- Offered on the international auction market for the first time

- Significant image that caricatures the "Star Spangled Banner" with its stripes

"My Mother Land Can Fuck Your Father Land"

William Copley had had difficulties with nationalistic ideas since his experiences as an escort for the US Army during the Italian campaign towards the end of the Second World War – after all, exaggerated ideas of national greatness had been the reason for war and widespread suffering. Copley's contempt for such attitudes was encapsulated in the aphorism 'My Mother Land Can Fuck Your Father Land', which he illustrated in 1957 with a small-format painting showing a couple wrapped in national flags, embracing intimately. In 1961-62, he designed a whole series of ironic flags (of the USA, France, Germany, Spain, Greece, Brazil and 'CPLYLands'), which he exhibited from 21 March to 21 April 1962 at the Iris Clert Gallery in Paris under the title 'Flags (United States of the World) (Les Etats-Unis du Monde)'. His artist friend Max Ernst attended the opening, and the painting that gave the show its title entered his collection. With this important painting, Copley encapsulated his ironic, erotically tinged humanism with a lascivious female figure, whose background with its strong-coloured stripes caricatures the 'Star Spangled Banner', while the open-hearted lady celebrates the freedom of a painting rooted in the French tradition of the 19th century. Copley's lady is an amalgam of the unclothed lady from Manet's 'Dejeuner sur l'herbe' and his 'Olympia', two of the most controversial paintings in 1860s Paris, which a good 100 years later had become an integral part of French cultural folklore. The dove of peace in the upper left corner of Copley's painting can be seen as a warning against the Cold War, which entered a new phase that year, culminating in the October 1962 Bay of Pigs crisis in Cuba.

"Les Etats-Unis du Monde"

Copley's painting 'Les Etats-Unis du Monde' occupies a prominent position in his oeuvre. His distinctive, seemingly naive formal language, combined with knowing sophistication in terms of both artistry and content, secure him his unmistakable niche in art history. 'No other pictures are as free, natural and humorous as Bill Copley's, and everything in them is so phenomenally strange,' wrote the painter Georg Baselitz in an appreciation (Baselitz, Georg: Bill Copley, in: Copley, Stiftung Frieder Burda und Adriani, Götz (eds.), Baden-Baden 2012, p. 236).

The painting was reproduced in the catalogue of the 1980 retrospective that Johannes Gachnang had organised for the Kunsthalle Bern and that was taken over by Pontus Hultén for the Centre Pompidou in Paris and by Rudi Fuchs for the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (Gachnang, Johannes (ed.): William N. Copley, Kunsthalle Bern 1980, p. 44, ill.). It was exhibited in Paris with the kind permission of Dorothea Tanning, the widow of Max Ernst, who died in 1976. Kay Heymer

Estimate: 80.000 € - 120.000 €; Hammer: 200.000 €

