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Icon of Twentieth Century Australian Art for Auction

Important Australian Art | 21 November 2017

Albert Tucker's most significant painting remaining in private ownership

An image that changed the course of Australian art

Painting formerly on long-term loan to National Gallery of Australia for almost forty years

Sale proceeds donated by the Albert and Barbara Tucker Foundation to assist socially disadvantaged Australians



ALBERT TUCKER 1914-1999, *Image of Modern Evil* 29 1946. Estimate \$800,000-1,000,000

Albert Tucker's *Image of Modern Evil 29* 1946, the most significant painting by Albert Tucker remaining in private ownership and the most important ever offered for public sale, will be auctioned on 21 November by Sotheby's Australia. Forming a cornerstone of Tucker's internationally renowned *Images of Modern Evil* series, which reflect the artist's dark vision of a society experiencing trauma, upheaval and moral decay during World War II on the Australian home-front, virtually every major painting from this series is now held in public collections. From 1979 to 2015, *Image of Modern Evil 29* was on long-term loan to the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra. Consigned by the recently established Albert and Barbara Tucker Foundation, all of the proceeds from the sale of the painting will benefit socially disadvantaged Australians.

Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Sotheby's Australia commented: 'The art produced by Albert Tucker in the 1940s forms part of the revolutionary iconography that not only changed the course of Australian art, but also profoundly influenced successive generations during the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. An image of rupture, disunity, madness, violence, vulnerability, menace, ambiguity and urgency, Albert Tucker's *Image of Modern Evil 29* represents one of the most forceful and energetic compositions created in Australian art and is the most historically significant painting by the artist remaining in private ownership. Highly personal, inventive, potent, incisive, subversive, intelligent and compelling, the series is reflective of the artist's own psychological state and his anguished responses to the effects of Australia at war abroad and at home.'

Image of Modern Evil 29 remains a cornerstone of the *Images of Modern Evil* series. Here, the single yellow globe appears to have developed wings, which provides a broader light source and clarity to the image of intertwined figures below. In the foreground, the distorted female form is recumbent, reclining on an acid-green sofa. An unashamedly lurid and confronting image of Australian women, both sexually charged and sexually explicit, *Image of Modern Evil 29* represents Tucker's primal artistic scream that visualised the perpetrators and victims of carnal lust. Tucker removed the veil of respectability and revealed the depravity and perversion that existed during Melbourne's nocturnal hours that had remained essentially unacknowledged and invisible.

The visually and emotionally confrontational aspect of Tucker's *Images of Modern Evil* series meant that, like Sidney Nolan's first Ned Kelly series created from 1946-1947, they remained essentially uncommercial and unsalable. Tucker's series remained largely intact and were exhibited to great acclaim in *Rebels and Precursors: Aspects of Painting in Melbourne 1937-1947* at both the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne and in Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney in 1962. A decade later the series was again largely reunited and shown in *Albert Tucker: Night Images (Images of Modern Evil 1943-1947)* at Sweeney Reed Galleries in Melbourne in 1972. From the late 1970s the National Gallery of Australia (then the Australian National Gallery) made a commitment to acquire the bulk of the series through purchases and augmented gifts from Albert and Barbara Tucker. This process continued for the next three decades and as a result twenty-two of the twenty-nine known works from the series reside in the National Gallery of Australia's collection, with two in the collection of Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, and one in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria.

Tucker's *Images of Modern Evil* made their international debut in 1988 when twenty-one paintings from the series (including the present work) were shown in the exhibition *Angry Penguins and Realist Painting in Melbourne in the 1940s* as part of Australia's bicentenary celebrations at the Hayward Gallery, London and Tate Gallery, Liverpool. In 2011 the most comprehensive exhibition of the

series was staged by Heide Museum of Modern Art. Curated by Kendrah Morgan, *Albert Tucker: Images of Modern Evil*, provided the first fully detailed overview of the series and was accompanied by a detailed catalogue that reaffirmed the broader social and cultural context, unique qualities and stature of this remarkable and challenging iconography.

Image of Modern Evil 29 has been consigned for sale by the Albert and Barbara Tucker Foundation. Established following the passing of Barbara Tucker in 2015, the Foundation fulfilled a dream that both she and Albert Tucker had that a charitable trust be formed to support various social, humanitarian and environmental causes. The Foundation's key aims and objectives include: the initiation and support of social change which goes towards increasing the equal treatment and social acceptance of all persons in the community; ; the relief of poverty and the suffering of children; the provision of or support for scholarships to disadvantaged children or young adults up to the age of twenty-five years (25) to enable them to pursue their education at primary, secondary or tertiary institutions; the protection of women from abuse, assisting women in these circumstances to further their education and providing support to women in these circumstances; the protection of wildlife and habitat, and to preserve natural reserves of forest, oceans and wilderness and for the rehabilitation of flora and fauna; the prevention of cruelty to animals and the promotion of animal welfare; and the support, promotion, development and advancement of public art galleries and museums.

The world auction record was established for Albert Tucker in April 2007 with *Flirtation* (1954) for \$840,000.

AT A GLANCE

ALBERT TUCKER 1914-1999

Image of Modern Evil 29 1946

oil on cotton gauze on cardboard

63.1 x 47.2 cm

Estimate \$800,000-1,000,000

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Important Australian Art

Auction in Sydney, 21 November 2017, 6.30 pm

InterContinental Sydney, 117 Macquarie Street, Sydney

Total auction estimate \$9,400,000-12,123,000 | 82 lots

Exhibition in Melbourne 8-12 November, 10 am to 5 pm, 41 Exhibition Street, Melbourne

Exhibition in Sydney 16-21 November, 10 am to 5 pm, 30 & 34 Queen Street, Woollahra

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