

# Sotheby's

## Impressionist & Modern Art Evening Sale

Sale L08007

### AUCTION DATE

Session 1 25 Jun 08 7:00 PM

### LOCATION

London, New Bond Street

## LOT 21



PROPERTY FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION

7,000,000—10,000,000 GBP

† □ - **GINO SEVERINI**

1883-1966

DANSEUSE

### MEASUREMENTS

#### measurements

100 by 81cm.

#### alternate measurements

39 3/8 by 31 7/8 in.

### DESCRIPTION

Painted in 1915.

signed *G. Severini* (lower right), signed *Gino Severini*, titled and inscribed 4 on the reverse

oil on canvas

### PROVENANCE

On consignment with Alfred Stieglitz, New York (sent by Severini for the 1917 exhibition)

John Quinn, New York (acquired from the above *circa* 1917)

Sale: American Art Galleries, New York, *The Renowned Collection of Modern and Ultra-Modern Art formed by the late John Quinn, 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> February 1927*, lot 259

J. B. Neumann, New York (purchased at the above sale)

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (acquired from the above in 1944)

Galerie Beyeler, Basel (acquired from the above in 1988)

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 1989

### EXHIBITED

Paris, Galerie Boutet de Monvel, *1ère exposition futuriste d'art plastique de la guerre et d'autre œuvres antérieures (Gino Severini)*, 1916, no. 14 or 15

New York, Gallery '291' of the Photo Secession (Alfred Stieglitz), *Drawings, Pastels, Watercolors and Oils of Severini*, 1917, no. 4  
 (possibly) New York, Art Center, *Memorial Exhibition of Representative Works Selected from the John Quinn Collection*, 1926, no. 44  
 Ohio, The Toledo Museum of Art, *Contemporary Movements in European Painting*, 1938, no. 98, illustrated in the catalogue  
 Seattle, Art Museum, *2500 Years of Italian Art and Civilization*, 1957, no. 225, illustrated in the catalogue  
 New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Elements of Modern Painting*, 1961-62  
 Tulsa, Oklahoma, Philbrook Art Center and travelling in the USA, *Elements of Modern Art II*, 1964-65, no. 30  
 Richmond, Virginia, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, *Masterpieces from the Collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum*, 1966-67  
 New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Acquisitions of the 1930s and 1940s*, 1968, no. 44.943, illustrated in the catalogue  
 Columbus, Ohio, The Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, *Paintings from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum*, 1968-69, illustrated in the catalogue  
 Boston, Institute of Contemporary Art & Toledo, Museum of Art, *Art and Dance*, 1982-83, no. 51  
 Venice, The Peggy Guggenheim Collection, *Gino Severini, La Danza 1909-1916*, 2001, no. 44, illustrated in colour in the catalogue

## LITERATURE AND REFERENCES

Charles Henry Caffin, 'Severini's Work seen at "291"', in *New York American*, 12th March 1917, p. 6  
*John Quinn 1870-1925. Collection of Paintings, Water Colors, Drawings & Sculpture*, New York, 1926, illustrated p. 81  
*Gino Severini* (exhibition catalogue), Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, 1967, no. 31, illustrated  
 Joshua Taylor, 'Futurism: The Avant-Garde as a Way of Life', in *Art News Annual*, XXXIV, 1968, illustrated p. 87  
 Joan M. Lukach, 'Severini's 1917 Exhibition at Stieglitz's "291"', in *Burlington Magazine*, CXIII, no. 817, London, April 1971, fig. 40, illustrated p. 202  
 Angelica Zander Rudenstine, *The Guggenheim Museum Collection, Paintings 1880-1945*, New York, 1976, vol. II, no. 231, illustrated p. 657  
 Daniela Fonti, *Gino Severini, Catalogo ragionato*, Milan, 1988, no. 248, illustrated p. 204

## CATALOGUE NOTE

A powerful, dynamic and colourful depiction of a figure in motion, *Danseuse* is a quintessential Futurist composition. Severini painted his first dancers in 1911 and continued to be preoccupied with this subject over the next five years (figs. 1 & 2). Dating from the end of his Futurist period, *Danseuse* presents a culmination of the artist's exploration of this theme, which has come to be regarded as the icon of Futurism.

Central to the Futurists' aesthetic was the idea of movement and speed, and in *Danseuse* Severini translates these notions onto canvas through the figure of the dancer, dissolving it into a vortex of linear trajectories and

brilliant colour. As the second Futurist Manifesto of 1910 proclaimed: 'Gesture, for us, will no longer be a single moment within the universal dynamism brought to a sudden stop: it will be outright dynamic sensation given permanent form. Everything is in movement, everything rushes forward, everything is in constant swift change. A figure is never stable in front of us but is incessantly appearing and disappearing. Because images persist on the retina, things in movement multiply, change form, follow one upon the other like vibrations within the space they traverse.'

The treatment of the dancer in the present work is a fascinating example of Severini's exploration of the divisions of colour and form. Here, the artist captured the movements of the dancer through prismatic forms, animating Cubist faceting with the use of a brilliant palette and a dynamic contrast between soft, curved lines and sharp, angular shapes. The undulating lines of the woman's skirt and the gradation of bright colours create a pulsating rhythm that renders the sensation of sound and movement on a two-dimensional medium. The dancer appears to radiate with a centrifugal force that spreads across the canvas and into the viewer's own space. As Ester Coen observed: 'The Futurists declared that the traditional conception of space had been surpassed, that modern sensibility had made the faculty of perception more acute and that colours had to 'shout' their iridescence and splendour in a luminous vision. Bodies were to be dematerialized in space, and matter liberated from the confines of form. The Futurists also affirmed their desire to paint the figure along with its surrounding atmosphere, to catapult the viewer into the centre of the painting' (E. Coen, 'The Violent Urge Towards Modernity: Futurism and the International Avant-garde', in *Italian Art of the 20th Century* (exhibition catalogue), Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1989, p. 49).

Futurist painting burst into the consciousness of the international art world with the opening of the exhibition *Les Peintres futuristes italiens* at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in Paris in February 1912, and the following month with a group exhibition at Herwarth Walden's Galerie der Sturm in Berlin. 'At the first Futurist exhibition in February 1912, Gino Severini stood out from the other members of the group because of the way he celebrated modern life. His paintings rejoiced in the gay spectacle of Parisian life and were subtly permeated with that sense of the poetic quality of things which is hidden in the memory of feeling of those who live their youth with abandon and optimism' (Piero Pacini, *Futurismo e Futurismi* (exhibition catalogue), Palazzo Grassi, Venice, 1986, p. 572). Indeed, in his paintings of dancers Severini managed to harness the rigid geometric rhythms explored by Balla and other Futurist artists in fluid rhythms, rendering the spectacle of modernism through the seduction of Parisian nightlife in a highly original and personal style. Influenced by the atmosphere of Paris, Severini combined a new approach to colour with the geometric rhythms of Futurism to convey the pulsating sensations of the city. The woman depicted is probably one of the dancers from the *café concerts*, watched in admiration by the man in the lower right.

In November 1906 Severini moved to Paris, inspired by Giacomo Balla's discussion of the latest experiments in French avant-garde art. Before his move, he had discussed colour theory and practice with his fellow student Boccioni (fig. 6), and their Roman teacher, Balla. Italian Divisionism, celebrated in the Manifesto of Futurist Painters which Severini would sign in

1910, sprang from the same late nineteenth-century research into optics and physics of light that was to inform the Neo-Impressionism of Seurat (fig. 3). Whilst well versed in the techniques of Italian Divisionism, Severini had little immediate knowledge of French Neo-Impressionism, and upon his arrival in Paris, he was immediately captivated by Signac's and Seurat's concern with the representation of light.

Severini, however, was not merely concerned with the division of colour. In his paintings, he sought to achieve the division of form, the breaking up of volumes that allowed him to incorporate motion into the depiction of objects and figures. Severini admired the Cubist artists for their radical aesthetic and their decisive break with the traditional modes of representation and accepted artistic canons. While borrowing from the Cubists the technique of breaking up forms, Severini's work differs from them in two elemental aspects: his concern with movement, in sharp contrast with the Cubists' static approach, and the central role of colour. Another important influence was the work of Robert Delaunay, who also distanced himself from the representational mode of painting, in favour of form that was derived purely of pictorial elements. It was Delaunay's concept of 'simultaneity' and his prismatic forms (fig. 4) that greatly appealed to Severini.

*Danseuse* has an extraordinary history. In 1917, Severini himself sent this work, alongside several others, to Alfred Stieglitz in New York, for the one-man show at Stieglitz's renowned avant-garde gallery '291', named after its location at 291 Fifth Avenue in New York. Number 4 inscribed on the reverse of the canvas refers to the handwritten list of works that Severini sent to Stieglitz in October 1916, in preparation of the exhibition. In his review of the exhibition, Charles Henry Caffin wrote about the present work: 'the composition is constructed in color. The rose and yellow of the costume is prolonged into the surrounding space. The latter is felt as part of the movement of the figure. It is as if one saw the volumes of form, into which the total volume of lighted air had been carved by the sinuous direction of the moving arms and legs' (C. H. Caffin, *op. cit.*, p. 6). The exhibition also included the closely related *Danseuse=Hélice=Mer* (fig. 5), now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

At the time of the 1917 exhibition, *Danseuse* was purchased by the celebrated New York collector John Quinn (1870-1924), alongside several other Severini oils, pastels and one drawing. After Quinn's death, his vast and impressive collection, that included masterpieces by Van Gogh, Cézanne, Seurat, Matisse, Picasso, Brancusi, Duchamp and many others, was sold at a four-day auction held at the American Art Galleries in New York. In 1944 *Danseuse* was acquired by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, in whose collection it remained for over forty years.

Fig. 1, Gino Severini, *Danseuse bleue*, 1912, oil on canvas, Mattioli Collection, Milan

Fig. 2, Gino Severini, *Geroglifico dinamico del Bal Tabarin*, 1912, oil on canvas, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 3, Georges Seurat, *Chahut*, 1889-90, oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo

Fig. 4, Robert Delaunay, *Les Fenêtres simultanées*, 1912, oil on canvas,

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Fig. 5, Gino Severini, *Danseuse=Hélice=Mer*, 1915, oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Fig. 6, Umberto Boccioni, *Elasticità*, 1912, oil on canvas, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan