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PRESS RELEASE

Phillips to Offer Jean Dubuffet's *Barbe des rites* in May Evening Sale of 20th Century & Contemporary Art

Rare and Exceptional Painting from the Artist's Seminal *Beard* Series to go on
Public View for the First Time in Half a Century



Jean Dubuffet, *Barbe des rites*, 1959
Estimate: \$1,500,000-2,500,000

NEW YORK - 21 APRIL 2016 – Jean Dubuffet's *Barbe des rites* will be offered by Phillips on 8 May as a highlight of the 20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale. Offered at auction for the first time, and the first significant oil painting from the artist's famed 'Beard series' to appear at auction in almost 20 years, this important work has remained in the same private collection since 1973 and has not been seen by the public since 1960, the year after its creation. It is expected to realize \$1,500,000-2,500,000.

Hugues Joffre, Phillips' Worldwide Head of 20th Century Art said, "We are pleased to have the opportunity to feature such an exciting painting by Jean Dubuffet in our May sale. Celebrated for his fearless sense of invention, Dubuffet challenged long-held aesthetic ideals, transforming seemingly mundane imagery into ever-captivating works of art. *Barbe des rites* was painted in 1959, a watershed moment in the artist's celebrated career, just as he was gaining the widespread appeal he maintains today. It is incredibly rare to offer a 'Beard painting', many of which are now in major museum collections including the National Gallery of Art, MoMA, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, the Hamburger Kunsthalle, the Stedelijk van Abbemuseum and the Abbaye de Beaulieu, and it is serendipitous to show this painting at

the same time as the wonderful exhibition of Dubuffet's early works at Acquavella Galleries in New York."

"Phillips continues to find success in the recent expansion of our evening sales into the category of 20th century art, reinforcing collectors' deep and varied tastes." noted **Jean-Paul Engelen, Phillips' Worldwide Head of Contemporary Art**. "Today's market is more knowledgeable than ever and bidders are often choosing to cultivate a collection that captures the breadth of their personal preferences, rather than one that is defined by a single art historical period."

Painted in July 1959, *Barbe des rites* dates from early in Dubuffet's exploration of the theme of the beard, and crucially is one of the first oil paintings from the famed series. Blurring the line between landscape and portraiture, the present work recalls Dubuffet's *Texturologies*, the series of abstract landscape-style paintings with which the artist had previously been engaged. Indeed, he himself considered the *Barbes* to be *Texturologies* hanging from a chin. Dubuffet's groundbreaking fusion of landscape and portraiture made a huge impact, with its post-war grit and charm appealing to a generation of critics and collectors. The present work encapsulates this potent mixture, with the frenetic foliage-like thatch of the beard itself juxtaposed with the stony backdrop and monolithic neck and face.

In *Barbe des rites*, the backdrop and barely delineated face, with its two tiny peering eyes, are filled with scraped patterns, marks, and stains that give a sense of a thinned texture. Meanwhile, the beard at the center of the canvas is a riot of movement, dominated by a field of effervescent brushstrokes and given all the more verve by the various incision marks and drips of paint across the surface. With its figurative content and sheer sense of glee, *Barbe des rites* clearly revives Dubuffet's fascination with the figurative, with characters such as those featured in his earlier *Portraits*, while also paving the way for his seminal *Paris Circus* series two years later.

The majority of this celebrated series (eighteen paintings, including *Barbe des rites*) were exhibited in the gallery of Daniel Cordier in 1960. Entitled *Jean Dubuffet: As-tu cueilli la Fleur de Barbe*, the show dated from an important period in his relationship with the dealer. At this time, Dubuffet was moving away from the New York-based dealer Pierre Matisse and gave Cordier increasing access to his works. Cordier would even open a gallery in New York and help to promote Dubuffet internationally at a time that his reputation was truly in the ascendant. It was at the end of the same year as the *Barbes* exhibition that Dubuffet was granted a retrospective at the *Musée des arts décoratifs*, Paris, solidifying his reputation as one of the most important artists of his time.

Auction: Sunday, 8 May 2016, 7pm

Auction viewing: 30 April-8 May | Monday to Saturday 10am-6pm, Sunday 12pm-6pm

Location: 450 Park Avenue, New York

Link to more information: <https://www.phillips.com/auctions/auction/NY010316>

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**Estimates do not include buyer's premium; prices achieved include the hammer price plus buyer's premium.*

PRESS CONTACTS:

NEW YORK - Michael Sherman, *Chief Communications Officer*

msherman@phillips.com

+1 212 940 1384

LONDON - Matthew Paton, *Consultant*

matthew@patonarts.com

+44 (0)7711 112425

HEADQUARTERS: LONDON - 30 Berkeley Square, London W1J 6EX | NEW YORK - 450 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022

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