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## A MASTERPIECE OF ABSTRACTION

Emerging for Sale from a Private Collection for the First Time in Over Half a Century,  
Kandinsky's Exquisite *Tensions calmées* to Star at Sotheby's this Summer

Originally Acquired by the Artist's Long-Time Supporter  
Solomon R. Guggenheim for his eponymous Museum in 1945

Exhibitions in New York, Dubai, Taipei, Hong Kong & London  
Ahead of Sotheby's Modern & Contemporary Art Evening Sale on 29 June



**LONDON, 10 MAY 2021** – No artist played a greater role in the development and emergence of abstraction than Wassily Kandinsky. *Tensions calmées*, a modern masterpiece from 1937 encapsulates the artist's extraordinary vision which continues to have a profound influence on generations of artists that have followed.

In 1964, Sotheby's held a historic auction of 50 paintings by Kandinsky from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. This major work was among those in the landmark sale and is now returning to Sotheby's for the first time in over half a century, having remained in the same family collection, unseen by the public, ever since. **The painting will star in Sotheby's livestreamed Modern & Contemporary Evening Sale in London on 29 June this summer, when it will be offered with an estimate of \$25-35 million (£18-25 million).**

*Tensions calmées* will be on view by appointment at Sotheby's York Avenue galleries until 12 May, before travelling to Dubai, Hong Kong and Taipei for public exhibitions, and going on view at Sotheby's New Bond Street from 22 – 29 June.

*"If there is one pairing which epitomises the connectedness between art and music, it is the chance encounter between Kandinsky and composer Arnold Schoenberg at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tensions calmées is infused with Kandinsky's own distinctly musical and poetic sensibilities, with rich jewel-like colours that are carefully pitched, the overall effect highly sophisticated. This great masterpiece of abstraction stands as one of the most important works by Kandinsky to come to auction in the last ten years, and is the latest in a line of Sotheby's historic offerings of the artist's work, with the top three prices for the artist having been set in these rooms over the past five years"*

**Helena Newman, Worldwide Head of Sotheby's Impressionist & Modern Art Department**

*"Sotheby's is thrilled to present this masterpiece by Kandinsky once more, over five decades after we offered it in 1964 on behalf of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. It is now coming to the market from an important American collection, where it has been lovingly cared for ever since that famous auction."*

**Simon Shaw, Sotheby's Vice Chairman, Fine Arts**

Solomon R. Guggenheim, to whom this painting once belonged, was an avid admirer of Kandinsky, acquiring his first painting by the artist in 1929, and meeting him the following year at the Dessau Bauhaus. Thereafter, in the course of a friendship that was to last a lifetime, Guggenheim acquired no fewer than 150 works by the artist, displaying them initially in the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, which he opened in New York in 1939. They went on to form the core of the collection of his eponymous museum designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, who shared Kandinsky's belief in the spiritual quality of art, and whose extraordinary creation was in part inspired by Kandinsky's works. Shining an illustrious spotlight on Kandinsky in America, while at the same time providing the funds Kandinsky needed to settle in Paris and power forward his career, Guggenheim also promoted his artist-friend with a series of exhibitions across the country, including the memorial exhibition organised after Kandinsky's death in 1944 in which *Tensions calmées* was included.

As the father of abstraction, Kandinsky started a line that would define twentieth-century art through artists such as Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian, the Abstract Expressionists Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko, and Gerhard Richter.

Painted in 1937, *Tensions calmées* illustrates an important chapter in the history of twentieth-century art and reveals Kandinsky at the height of his powers. The artist had broken new ground with a lyrical form of abstraction infused with musicality, on his discovery that colour – when disassociated from representational concerns – could become the principal subject of a painting. In 1933, Kandinsky moved to Paris and the complex abstraction compositions he painted in the city during the 1930s – *Tensions calmées* chief amongst them – are considered the culmination of his artistic ideals in which art aspires to the condition of music.

Taking his cue from musical composition, Kandinsky determined that every colour corresponded with a particular emotion or 'sound', writing in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*: 'Colour is the keyboard. The eye is the hammer. The soul is the piano, with its many strings.' The imagery of *Tensions calmées* evokes the elegant clefs, notes and bars of sheet music whilst a curved arabesque reminiscent of a violin scroll emerges in the right of the composition. Yet the musicality of the painting is borne of the artist's orchestration of the composition as a whole, rather than its individual parts, resulting in a symphonic majesty in which the many visual elements are brought together in harmony.

*"Lend your ears to music, open your eyes to painting, and... stop thinking!"*

**Wassily Kandinsky**

For the auction in 1964, the Guggenheim took great care in selecting the best examples of the artist's work from a collection that comprised multiple masterpieces from the key periods of Kandinsky's career. The sale was unique in offering most collectors their first opportunity to acquire a major painting by the artist – before this, the vast majority of his works could only be seen in museums in Russia, the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus in Munich and in the collection of the artist's widow, Nina Kandinsky.

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*\* Estimates do not include buyer's premium or overhead premium. Prices achieved include the hammer price plus buyer's premium and overhead premium and are net of any fees paid to the purchaser where the purchaser provided an irrevocable bid.*

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