LOT 44
PROPERTY FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION
FRANZ GERTSCH
B. 1930
LUCIANO II
signed, titled and dated 1976 on the reverse
acrylic on canvas
234 by 346 cm.  92 1/8 by 136 1/4 in.

ESTIMATE £1,500,000-2,000,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 2,746,250 GBP

PROVENANCE
Galerie Veith Turske, Cologne
Turske Fine Art, Basel
Galerie Knoedler, Zurich
Acquired from the above by the present owner in 1984

EXHIBITED
Cologne, Galerie Veith Turske, Franz Gertsch, February - March 1979
Zurich, Kunsthaus Zürich; and Hannover, Sprengel Museum, Franz Gertsch, April - September 1980, p. 57, illustrated
in colour; pp. 58, 59 and 92, illustrated; and p. 2, illustrated (installation view)
Napa Valley, Hess Art Collection, Franz Gertsch: Works from the Hess Collection, 1999, pp. 24-25, illustrated in colour
Burgdorf, Museum Franz Gertsch; and Bern, Kunstmuseum Bern, Franz Gertsch: Die Retrospektive, November 2005 - June 2006, p. 125, no. 37, illustrated in colour; and p. 244, no. 39, illustrated in colour

LITERATURE
Exh. Cat., Zurich, Kunsthaus Zürich, Malerei und Fotografie im Dialog von 1840 bis heute, May - July 1977, n.p., no. 787, illustrated
Anon., Vaterland, No. 138, 17 May 1977, p. 19, illustrated
Exh. Cat., Venice, XXXVIII Venice Biennale, Dalla natura all'arte, dall'arte alla natura, 1978, p. 23, no. 33, illustrated (incorrectly titled Patti Smith I)
Dieter Ronte, Franz Gertsch, Bern 1986, p. 128, no. 12, illustrated
Dieter Ronte, Hess Collection, Stuttgart 1989, p. 64, no. 42, illustrated in colour

CATALOGUE NOTE
There are few artists who can match Franz Gertsch for sheer scarcity and artistic importance. Furthermore, even amongst his concise oeuvre, this work is of rare significance. Gertsch made only 63 major works between 1969 and 2005, such is the meticulous nature of his praxis and the grand-scale of his executive ambition. Out of these, only twenty remain in private hands, with the others held in museum collections, or retained in the collection of the artist. Luciano Castelli, the subject of the present work, was one of Gertsch’s most important sitters and his strident visage was featured in a number of paintings executed between 1972 and 1977. However, including the present work, there are only four individual portraits of him. In an appreciation of the extraordinary surface of this painting and exacting detail, we are left in awe of an artist who updated the virtuosic technical skill of the Old Masters and applied it to a bohemian contemporary context of hazy beauty and flash-bulb light effects.
Emerging in the 1970s as one of the most technically astute artists in Switzerland, Gertsch quickly became known on the international art scene after presenting his work at documenta 5 in 1972. Starting his career at the height of photorealism in America, he has often been compared to the first generation of artists who took the photographic image into the painterly realm, such as Chuck Close, Richard Estes, and Charles Bell. Indeed his signature aesthetic is based on a flash bulb light effect, which casts his subjects into sharp relief, and shows crisply delineated shadows in the background. Gertsch’s works also focussed on the Bohemian artistic and social circles that immediately surrounded him and are emboldened by the power of a subculture representing itself. Furthermore, with his painstaking method of painting that entails the use of fine brushes and tiny, contracted strokes, Gertsch adds a technical mastery to his works rarely seen in that of his contemporaries, which can be compared only to artists from the Old Master European painting tradition such as Jan van Eyck and Albrecht Dürer. Through the combination of these disparate factors, Gertsch has achieved a unique artistic vocabulary; the almost hallucinatory precision, enormous scale, and other-worldly colours of his work enter the viewer’s reality as the past restored to a parallel present.
Luciano II takes as its subject the artist’s friend, Luciano Castelli, a performer who was central to the Bohemian world of Luzern at the time of the work’s creation, and who later enjoyed his own artistic recognition as a Neo Expressionist painter in the 1980s. Gertsch met Castelli as a 19 year old in 1970 and, immediately enthralled by his androgynous appearance, began painting him, creating a series of works centred on the iconic youth that spanned the duration of the decade. While often choosing to represent Castelli amongst the circle of friends he so greatly influenced, either getting ready for a party, putting on make-up or reading magazines, in the present work, Gertsch represents his young muse alone. Luciano looks at the viewer directly from a narrow angle of intense intimacy; the image is almost uncanny in its exactitude, with the only nod to their bohemian lifestyle in the flash of lipstick across the sitter’s lips. As in all of his best works, in this painting Gertsch represents and monumentalises a quotidian moment rather than a singular climax, inviting the viewer into the day-to-day privacy normally reserved for his intimate friends and their circle. However, while offered the identifiable pictorial reality of a snapshot, the viewer is simultaneously faced with a challenge: such is the sumptuous technical execution of the work that, in terms of significance, it is propelled beyond its photographic appearance. This work is so obviously the product of a premeditated, meticulously planned, and tirelessly executed journey of creation that it demands prolonged consideration. Gertsch forces the viewer to consider the beauty of his everyday reality and the majesty of his closest friends in their quietest moments.

The precision of the artists’ photorealist technique creates a dispassionate objectivity that denies sentimental illusion and empties the image of any focus on the particular, in favour of an impeccable and harmonious surface that affords the same attention to every single detail of the composition. Using intense pigments that are often made of minerals such as lapis lazuli, azurite, and malachite over binding agents, Gertsch achieves an overall ethereal smoothness and saturation of hues: the gloss of Luciano’s hair is matched by the pointillist detail of the paisley throw, which is captured with the same intensity as the subtle folds in his striped t-shirt. The artist’s nuanced technique creates a mesmerising modern day History painting replete with the bohemian spirit of the time as well as a dedication to the monumentalising power of the painted medium. Ultimately Luciano II celebrates the enduring relevance of the ability of painting to suspend an inimitable moment throughout time.

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**Fig. 1**

Franz Gertsch, Luciano I, 1976
Artwork: © Franz Gertsch

**Fig. 2**

Franz Gertsch, Marina Schminkt Luciano, 1975
Museum Ludwig, Cologne
Image: © Rheinisches Bildarchiv
Artwork: © Franz Gertsch

**Fig. 3**

Gerhard Richter, Lesende, 1994
Image/Artwork: © Gerhard Richter, 2017
Fig. 4

Lucian Freud, Girl with Roses, 1947-48
British Council, London
Image/Artwork: © The Lucian Freud Archive / Bridgeman Images