LOT 148
KEES VAN DONGEN
1877 - 1968
AU BOIS DE BOULOGNE
Signed van Dongen. (lower right); titled, numbered No. 4 and dated 1906 (on the reverse)
Oil on canvas
36 1/8 by 23 1/2 in.
91.7 by 59.7 cm
Painted in 1906.

ESTIMATE 800,000-1,200,000 USD

This work will be included in the forthcoming catalogue raisonné being prepared by Jacques Chalom des Cordes under the sponsorship of the Wildenstein Institute.

PROVENANCE
Armand Drouant, Paris
Sale: Sotheby's, London, December 1, 1987, lot 29
Dr. Anton C. R. Dreesmann, Amsterdam (acquired at the above sale and sold: Christie's, London, April 9, 2002, lot 109)
Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

EXHIBITED
Paris, Salon d'automne, 1909
Paris, Galerie Charpentier, Chevaux et cavaliers, 1948
Paris, Galerie Drouant
Nice, Galerie des Ponchettes, Van Dongen, 1959, no. 22
Tokyo, Les Fauves, 1965, no. 78
Paris, Musée national d'art moderne & Munich, Haus der Kunst, Le Fauvisme français et les début de l'Expressionisme allemand, 1966, no. 114
Hamburg, Kunstverein, Matisse und seine Freunde, 1966, no. 94
Paris, Musée national d'art moderne & Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Van Dongen, 1967, no. 69
Lausanne, Galerie Paul Vallotton, Hommage à van Dongen, 1971, no. 8
Geneva, Musée de l'Athénée, Van Dongen 1877-1968, 1976, no. 19
Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Kees van Dongen, 1989-90, no. 10, illustrated in color in the catalogue
Monaco, Nouveau musée national de Monaco; Montreal, The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts & Museu Picasso de Barcelona, Van Dongen, 2008-09, no. 128, illustrated in color in the catalogue

LITERATURE
Jean Melas Kyriazi, Van Dongen et le Fauvisme, Lausanne, 1971, no. 40, illustrated in color p. 98 & on the back cover

CATALOGUE NOTE
Au Bois de Boulogne was painted at an important time in van Dongen's career. He had just exhibited at the Salon d'Automne the previous year, showing his work with the now infamous Fauve canvases of Henri Matisse, André Derain and Albert Marquet. It was in 1906 that he also took a studio at the Bateau-Lavoir, alongside Pablo Picasso, thereby fully immersing himself in the creative maelstrom that was Paris at this time. He met with Max Jacob and other key figures in the art market, thus enabling him to navigate the commercial aspects of the profession more easily. Van Dongen readily adopted a Fauve palette during this period, having previously explored the possibilities of Pointillism. The present work demonstrates this shift with its strong, differentiated fields of color, reminiscent of Gauguin rather than Signac. These bold areas of pure pigment thrust the horse and the female figure into the foreground, an effect heightened by the dark background. There is an ardent intensity in the horse's color underlined by the contrast with the simplified, almost monochrome woman—essentially a strip of ultramarine. Paul Gsell observes “It might be in his analysis of the impressions of light that van Dongen excels. He has his own shades. His range of colors is different from his fellow artists... He has reintroduced the care for color in the modern vision of luxury. He is as gifted as Delacroix” (Paul Gsell, quoted in Kees van Dongen (exhibition catalogue), Monaco, Salle d'expositions du quai Antoine 1er, 2008, p. 264).

The subject of this work is formally elegant and seemingly innocent but is in fact most likely the negotiation between a prostitute and her customer in the Bois de Boulogne, at the time a well-known salacious haunt on the edges of Paris. Van Dongen painted several canvases on this subject, a natural extension of his interest in sharply observed street life in the “hustle-bustle” seaport area of Rotterdam where he was a student in the 1890s. His dedication to recording
the multiple facets of Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century is discussed by Gaston Diehl: “From Van Dongen’s beginnings, by the side of streetwalkers, midinettes, ballerinas, and circus people, there are bonnes bourgeoises, artists of renown, important personages mixed up with the mob of the streets, with the dandies, the streetwalkers, the playboys, etc. Still more, after the first war, the most celebrated personalities, the most elegant of the dernier cri, the millionaires of the Old World or of the New are side by side... All of humanity is there, fixed, catalogued, registered” (Gaston Diehl, Van Dongen, New York, 1969, p. 90). Eschewing the landscape subject matter of his fellow Fauve painters, he preferred to paint at the circus, in cabarets and music halls. The resulting vignettes of life in Paris, of which the present canvas is one, clearly reflect van Dongen’s artistic heritage, as a compatriot of Rembrandt van Rijn and heir to the Dutch genre painting tradition.

The subject of the park continued to preoccupy the artist and he went so far as to move to the Villa Saïd in the Bois de Boulogne between 1915 and 1921, a period during which his reputation began to transition from avant-gardiste to society darling.

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Fig. 1

The artist in his Paris studio, circa 1950-52
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