LOT 40
PROPERTY OF PATRICIA PHELPS DE CISNEROS, WITH 100% OF THE GROSS PROCEEDS TO BENEFIT THE PATRICIA PHELPS DE CISNEROS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ART FROM LATIN AMERICA AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK
MIRA SCHENDEL
(1919-1988)
UNTITLED, FROM THE SERIES DROGUINHAS (LITTLE NOTHINGS)
rice paper
26 1/4 by 10 1/4 by 6 3/16 in. 66.7 by 26 by 15.7 cm.
Executed in 1966.

ESTIMATE 1,200,000-1,800,000 USD
Lot Sold: 1,512,500 USD

PROVENANCE
EXHIBITED
Lima, Museo de Arte de Lima; Santiago de Chile, Museo de Bellas Artes de Santiago de Chile; and Bogotá, Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, Diálogos: Arte Latinoamericano desde la Collección Cisneros, July 2004 - June 2005, p. 129 (text)
Ciudad de México, Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, Cruce de Miradas: Visiones de América Latina en la Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, August - October 2006, p. 124, illustrated in color, and pp. 125-126 (text)
Kassel, Documenta Kassel, Documenta 12, June - September 2007, pp. 74-75, illustrated in color
New York, The Museum of Modern Art, Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel, April - June 2009, p. 113, illustrated in color
Porto Alegre, Brazil, Fundação Iberê Camargo, Desenhar no Espaço: Artistas abstratos do Brasil e da Venezuela na Coleção Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, November 2010 - February 2011, p. 111, illustrated in color
Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Concrete Invention: Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Reflections on Geometric Abstraction from Latin America and its Legacy, January - September 2013, p. 163, illustrated in color
London, Tate Modern, Mira Schendel, September 2013 - January 2014, p. 121, no. 89, illustrated in color

LITERATURE

CATALOGUE NOTE
One of the most significant Latin American artists of the Twentieth Century, Mira Schendel is celebrated for her breathtakingly poetic expressions of material transience, which serve as a metaphor for the human condition. Exuding diaphanous fragility through an intricately entangled network of knotted Japanese rice paper, the present work is a preeminent example of Schendel's most renowned body of work, known as the Droguinhas (Little Nothings). Named after the Brazilian slang expression for “nothing,” indicating something utterly worthless, the incredibly rare Droguinhas
works were conceived as exercises in ephemerality and meaningless repetition. Extraordinarily rare, Schendel produced less than 10 examples of the Droguinhas during her lifetime, many of which are in the world's most renowned private and public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Of the series, the present work is distinguished as being among the largest and most complex configurations. Boasting an extraordinary provenance, the present work has remained for the past twenty years in the inimitable collection of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, whose taste and connoisseurship in the field of Latin American Art has consistently identified the most exceptional artists of our time. Further distinguished by its inclusion in a number of the seminal surveys of Latin American art of the past decade, the present work is an exceptional embodiment of the celebrated Droguinhas, and a beautiful example of Schendel's intricately lyrical creations.

Having spent her early years in Europe, Schendel fled fascist Italy for Brazil in 1949, eventually settling in Sao Paulo. There, she surrounded herself with a circle of fellow emigrants who shared her passion for philosophy, aesthetics, and existential theory. Through the influence of friends, including the Czech-born philosopher Vilem Flusser, the physicist Mário Schenberg and the psychoanalyst Theon Spanudis, Schendel began to pursue the realm of phenomenology, a theme that became increasingly prominent in her artistic output of the fifties and sixties. Her practice was radically galvanized when, in the early 1960s, Schendel was given a large quantity of rice paper by Mário Schenberg—a gift that would determine her medium, designate the nature of her art, and indelibly change the trajectory of her career. Reflecting on this revelatory transformation, Schendel commented: "I'm just going to give an idea of how the objects I made came about—in a way, out of chance and curiosity. I was once given a large amount of delicate Japanese paper. I stored it, not knowing what to do with it. I had no plans. It was given to me. "Do you want it?" "Yes." Sometime later, about a year later, I started to work with that paper." (the artist cited in Exh. Cat., New York, Museum of Modern Art, León Ferrari and Mira Schendel: Tangled Alphabets, 2009, p. 62)

It was through sheer contingency—arriving in the form of an arbitrarily bestowed surplus of paper—that Schendel discovered the most defining works of her career. Having initially used the rice paper to create a series of transparent monotype drawings, Schendel was keenly aware of the paper's gossamer sensitivity. While the monotypes explicitly exposed the frailty of the paper, the ensuing Droguinhas sought to disguise and subvert the paper's weakness by tying it into a seemingly infinite mass of knots. As Adele Nelson observed in the present work, "The artist converted a seemingly fragile, two dimensional material (thin rice paper) into a bulky form. Although Droguinhas appears to almost float in space, the object's materiality remains enigmatic, since the viewer is haunted by the first impression of the work as a hefty mass pulled down by gravity." (Adele Nelson, "Mira Schendel: Droguinha [Little Nothing], in Exh. Cat., Austin, Blanton Museum, The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection, 2009, p. 230) Embodying a visual record of physical activity, the present work elevates the status of handiwork to a point where gesture is the sole subject matter.

Such insistence on the body's visceral gesture provides an inextricable link to the work of Eva Hesse, as both artists simultaneously evoke and negate bodily language, ultimately underscoring the inherent concept of "nothingness" in their work. As demonstrated in Hesse's hanging rope pieces and Schendel's Droguinhas, there is a paradoxical emphasis on process: "laborious effort has gone into the making of a nothing: Schendel through her repeated gestures of twisting and knotting the rice paper, and Hesse in the dipping of her ropes in latex and their subsequent intertwining, knotting, and suspending" (Denise Birkhofer, "Eva Hesse and Mira Schendel: Voiding the Body—Embodying the Void," Woman's Art Journal, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2010, p. 10) The fascinating linkage between two of the most profound female artists of the modern age is aptly reflected in Birkhofer's conclusion that "it is this state of paradox that unites [their] work: they are simultaneously somethings and nothings, corporeal and evanescent, like the body and unlike the body." (Ibid, p. 10)

In addition to the notion of transience, Schendel's Droguinhas are often interpreted as analogies for language and writing. In 2009, the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition Tangled Alphabets (a dual show on the work of León Ferrari and Mira Schendel) especially stressed the linguistic underpinnings of the Droguinhas, arguing for a new text-based understanding of these works. The exhibition introduced a new way of viewing the Droguinhas, where "each knot and twist is like a word that, when connected to others, builds up to form a string of words or a coherent phrase." (Ibid...
In the Drouguinhas, however, such coherency is negated by the work’s indecipherable and convoluted form—thus, the language is rendered mute. Indeed, the holes and empty spaces in present work are hauntingly enchanting emblems of negation and absence. Suspended in the air, the “Little Nothing” bespeaks silence through its simple and overt redundancy: a colorless, formless body of matter frozen in its progression toward entropy. Indeed, this theme of gradual entropy is integral to Schendel’s conception of the work, as dictated by their candid title. Reiterating her fundamental concern for ephemerality, she commented: “This was a transitory object; it could be made by anyone, twisting the paper into knots like that...Droguinha...an ephemeral object, something exposed to the world, to the elements, to dust, like our own lives.” (The artist in Exh. Cat., New York, Museum of Modern Art, León Ferrari and Mira Schendel: Tangled Alphabets, 2009, p. 62) The work’s guiding spirit, then, is its nuanced yet negated complexity preserved through an infinitesimal labyrinth of knots. An exquisite reflection of the phenomenological force behind Schendel’s work, the present work juxtaposes ideas of fragility and strength through various incarnations of line and shape, ultimately functioning as a poetic reminder of the forms of our own internal complexity and the forms of entanglement in which we live.

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**Fig. 1**

Mira Schendel, Untitled from the series Drouguinhas (Little Nothings), c. 1964-66
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY
Art © 2017 Estate of Mira Schendel

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**Fig. 2**

Eva Hesse
No Title, 1969-70
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
© The Estate of Eva Hesse, courtesy Hauser & Wirth

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**Fig. 3**

Marisa Merz
Untitled (Living Sculpture), 1966
Tate, London / Art Resource, NY
© Marisa Merz
Fig. 4

The artist with Little Nothing, 1966, c. 1966
Photo © Clay Perry, courtesy of England & Co. Gallery
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