

## 51 Fernando Botero

1932 – Colombian

### Toro

oil on canvas, signed and dated 2002 and on verso titled on the Musée Maillol exhibition label  
58 ½ x 48 ½ in, 148.6 x 123.2 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Galleria d'Arte Contini, Venice, 2005  
Property of an Important Estate, British Columbia

#### LITERATURE

Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 1960, page 91  
Ana María Escallón, "From the Inside Out: An Interview with Fernando Botero," *Botero: New Works on Canvas*, 1997, page 12  
Cristina Carrillo de Albornoz Fisac, "The Perils of Popularity," *The Art Newspaper*, no. 120, December 2001, page 45  
Dina Vierny et al., *Botero: oeuvres récentes*, Fondation Dina Vierny—Musée Maillol, 2003, reproduced page 77

#### EXHIBITED

Fondation Dina Vierny / Musée Maillol, Paris, *Fernando Botero: Exhibition*, November 7, 2003 – March 15, 2004

"MY FIRST PASSION was the bulls," Fernando Botero recalls. "One day, my uncle Joaquín enrolled me in a training school for bullfighters. Run by Aranguito, a *banderillero*, it operated in the Macarena bull ring in Medellín. I would go to the bull ring two or three times a week and hang out there. I got to be good at dodging imaginary horns and at *toreo de salón*, that is, cape and *muleta* work without a bull. I went to see the great matadors of the time—Manolete, Lorenzo Garza, Arruza, and the others. But the day they brought in a real, live bull for us to work with, my passion cooled." Botero declined the precarious profession of the *torero*, but he nevertheless found in bullfighting a profound and enduring subject, its ritualized spectacle of life and death memorialized in a now iconic series of paintings and sculptures.

Although Botero drew scenes from the *corrida* as a boy, he returned to the bullring in the 1980s in full cognizance of the art-historical canon into which he entered. "In 1983, after attending a bullfight in Medellín, I retraced my steps along the road on which I had started," he explained. "I thought to myself: 'This is a worthy subject with a long tradition—Goya, Manet, Picasso,' and so I did my version of the bullfight." Francisco Goya's dramatic *Tauromaquia* etchings (1816) chronicled the history of Spanish bullfighting from the Middle Ages to his own time. The prints inspired Édouard Manet's ominous paintings of the bullring, notably the poignant *Dead Toreador* (1864), as well as Pablo Picasso, for whom the bull served as a symbolic alter ego, mythologized and existential. Botero's revival of the bullfight is steeped in this iconographic tradition, from its basis in Spanish patrimony and pageantry to its sobering meditations on the human condition. He drew further parallels between the bullring and the canvas: "A great matador such as Juan Belmonte defined the classical in bullfighting as 'what cannot be done better' and I think that this definition can be applied also in art," Botero observed. "The classics are the Greeks, the artists of the Renaissance, Velázquez, Vermeer."

Traditionally, the *corrida* unfolds in three stages (*tercios*), announced by drums and trumpets, in which the matador and

bull progressively engage each other. In the opening *tercio de varas*, the matador tests the bull with his cape, often with flamboyant showmanship, before the entrance of the *picadores* on horseback, who attempt to pierce the thick shoulder muscle of the bull with their lances. During the *tercio de banderillas*, the *banderilleros* ("flagmen") sink pairs of colourful, barbed sticks into the bull's neck and shoulder, further weakening him. In the signature *tercio de muerte*, the matador returns with a small red cape—the *muleta*—and incites the bull to charge, orchestrating a series of passes that displays his swirling artistry and bravado before he arrives at the ultimate moment of truth. "Bullfighting is the only art in which the artist is in danger of death," wrote Ernest Hemingway, a noted aficionado, "and in which the degree of brilliance in the performance is left to the fighter's honor."

Botero's *corrida* works encompass every aspect of the subject: the three stages of the bullfight and their specialized personnel; the theatre of the arena and its maddening crowds; the cultural links to flamenco dance; and the classical mythology of the Minotaur. The intensity and solemnity of the bullring are manifest in his portraits of famed *toreros*—no less, in a self-portrait in which he dons the *traje de luces*, the traditional costume. Their expressions convey fear and confidence, pride and passion; they are accompanied by elegant *majas*, waving their fans, flamenco guitarists and gypsies, and by death itself, in the fateful form of skeletons peering over their shoulders. Botero holds the *toro* in special regard, portraying him with magisterial power and supreme dignity in the arena. In *The Rape of Europa* (1995), he stages the Greek legend—in which Zeus, disguised as a bull, seduces the maiden Europa—in a Spanish bullring; the mythological lovers later inspired a series of large-scale sculptures in bronze.

The present *Toro* stands wounded and yet defiant, his muscular body vexed by pain as he stands ready in place, nostrils flaring. Botero portrays him in the second act of the bullfight: two brightly striped *banderillas* puncture his thick neck (the *morriño*), leaving a stain of blood that glistens against his satiny black coat. Two *toreros*, distinguished by the black hats (*monteras*) they wear, stand behind the brick-red *barrera* that surrounds the sand arena. The crowd, blurry and muted, teems in the background, framed by the *barrera* and the sloping, traditionally tiled roof.

A sensitive colourist, Botero works here in a subdued palette of cadmium red and yellow ochre, doubtless in recognition of the Spanish flag and the *corrida*'s storied national past; the bull has long served as a symbol of Castilian culture. Strapping and statuesque, Botero's bull commands the ring with a stately *gravitas*, his body tense in anticipation of his next charge. Disproportionately oversized, in Botero's characteristic style, he embodies the virility and high-keyed passion of the *corrida*; a noble adversary, he cedes nothing as he approaches his fate. "My great source of pleasure, almost as intense as painting, is to watch a bullfight every day—on video if need be," Botero once reflected. "Bullfighting, in an increasingly grey world, is one of the few fields that still has colour."

We thank Abigail McEwen, Associate Professor, Latin American Art at the University of Maryland, for contributing the above essay.

This lot is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity signed by the artist as well as a copy of a certificate of authenticity from the Galleria d'Arte Contini dated December 20, 2005.

**ESTIMATE: \$450,000 – 650,000**

