



52 Fernando Botero

1932 – Colombian

Seated Man

oil on canvas, signed and dated 2004
and on verso titled and dated on a label
48 x 37 ½ in, 121.9 x 95.2 cm

PROVENANCE

Opera Gallery, Paris, 2006
Property of an Important Estate, British Columbia

LITERATURE

Fernando Botero, *Fernando Botero: Paintings and Drawings*,
1992, essay by Werner Spies, page 158
Ana María Escallón, *Botero: New Works on Canvas*, 1997,
pages 27, 33, 39 and 55
Cristina Carrillo de Albornoz Fisac, “The Perils of Popularity,”
The Art Newspaper, no. 120, December 2001, page 45
John Sillevs, *The Baroque World of Fernando Botero*, 2006,
page 29

“I’M THE MOST Colombian of Colombian artists,” Fernando Botero insists, radiating pride in his country. “I paint Colombia the way I want it to be. It’s an imaginary Colombia—like Colombia but, at the same time, not like it... It’s a kind of nostalgia.” Botero left his hometown of Medellín at the age of 19, setting off for Europe and immersing himself in the history of Western art, lingering over the Trecento and Quattrocento—Giotto, Masaccio, Piero della Francesca—and the languid sensuality of Peter Paul Rubens and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. Yet even as his exploration of tactile values and volume placed him within the lineage of the old masters he admired, his iconography remained indelibly Latin American, his subjects—clergymen and cartel runners, generals and circus masters—drawn from his adolescence. “In a sense, the more parochial you are, the more universal you can become,” Botero has said. “You must be true to your roots; only then can you reach people all over the world.”

As curator John Sillevs has observed, “Botero has given us a very accurate portrayal of the South American way of life in the twentieth century, a unique panorama of personalities in a given period of history. His artistic universe is constructed with memories of his childhood, and as a young man. The families in the provincial towns in Latin America lived their lives with strict rules: the men were well groomed, they wore a suit, a tie, and a hat when outdoors, and the women also were ladylike, with gloves, handbags, and flowery dresses. The children were well behaved and disciplined. The pleasures of daily life were—and are—predictable: an outing in the country with a picnic basket, a visit to a bullfight, a walk through the narrow streets with colorful houses in colonial style, or a romantic night of ballroom dancing... It means working hard to keep up appearances in a society where even vice has a certain conformity. The men in Botero’s paintings may be good fathers and kind husbands, but they are also *macho* individuals who are familiar with the girls in the local brothels.”

A stock character of this bucolic world, *Seated Man* embodies the comfortable placidity—and banality—of everyday life in the sleepy, candy-coloured Colombian villages that Botero holds dear. He leans back in a stiff wooden chair, one stout leg crossed

awkwardly over the other; his arms splay forward, puffy fingers dangling off the armrests. His expressionless gaze, framed by a five o’clock shadow, suggests an accustomed weariness at the close of the working day. Tightly cropped, the composition compresses the man in space and stillness. Its slightly downward perspective exaggerates the wide expanse of the floor, cutting off the barely opened door as well as the ground beneath the figure’s left foot. In his olive suit and smart fedora, the man seamlessly assimilates into the bare, hazel-coloured room; the emerald green of his tie, echoed in the doorway, and the peeping red sock—a familiar Boterian embellishment—relieve the tonal monochrome of the tableau.

An outstanding colourist, Botero approaches his work with a sense of “plastic adventure,” allowing colour—here, an enveloping environment of green—to “[evolve] in the course of the painting” through a process of improvisation and refinement. “Color is basic in my work because it illuminates the painting and, in the end, the picture finds its resolution the moment the color is resolved,” he explains. “One thinks it is the composition, but actually what defines the picture is the color. When each element of the painting finds its place, peace is felt... Peace because the color balance induces a special tranquility: nothing is moving nor should. The meaning of the painting resides in that desire to find the perfect place for each color, because it is an integral element that takes its place and fulfills its own necessity.”

This chromatic equilibrium is enriched by the commensurably static, and unapologetically voluminous, approach to form for which Botero is justly celebrated. “I am looking for calm in the forms and a sensation of volume,” he allows. “The artist’s function is to exalt life through sensuality, to be communicated even if it is sometimes dull and devoid of interest. One way—not the only one—of doing it is through the idea of volume.” Botero has long resisted the suggestion that he paints “fat people,” summoning instead the classical proportions of his Florentine masters and the vaunted plasticity and solidity of their forms. “I believe that I have taken the idea of volume to the point of paroxysm,” he continues. “And that exaggeration has become part of modern art because our time tries to carry things to their ultimate conclusion.” Latter-day descendants of Piero, his pneumatic figures revel in their parodic amplitude, their monumentality a throw-back to the sensuality and refined equanimity of yore.

A portrait of old-fashioned respectability and bourgeois mores, *Seated Man* is poised between age-old painterly traditions and Colombian modernity. In his respectable suit and recumbent posture, he exudes the genteel values that characterized Botero’s childhood, his bearing at once familiar and quaintly droll in its profound rotundity. “A painter has no *raison d’être* if he does not create his own world,” Botero once declared, and in the muted mien of *Seated Man* he presents a microcosm of his imaginary Colombia, richly and magically real.

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 certificate of authenticity from the Opera Gallery dated September 25, 2006.

ESTIMATE: \$400,000 – 600,000