



## 50 Fernando Botero

1932 – Colombian

### Femme debout

oil on canvas, signed and dated 1982 and on verso titled on a label and inscribed 7162 – 63 / 18489/4 and with various numbers  
60 ¼ x 35 ¼ in, 153 x 89.5 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Galerie Beyeler, Basel  
R.L. Feighn, New York  
James Goodman Gallery, New York  
Rachel Adler Gallery, New York  
Mary-Anne Martin Fine Art, New York  
Hokin Gallery, Palm Beach  
Opera Gallery, Paris, 2005  
Property of an Important Estate, British Columbia

#### LITERATURE

Marie-Pierre Colle, *Latin American Artists in Their Studios*, 1994, page 44  
Ana María Escallón, *Botero: New Works on Canvas*, 1997, pages 12, 13 and 23  
Edward Sullivan, *Botero: Monograph & Catalogue Raisonné Paintings 1975–1990*, 2000, reproduced page 326, plate 505  
David Elliott, *Fernando Botero*, Moderna Museet, 2001, essay by Mario Vargas Llosa, pages 18 and 19  
Carlos Fuentes, *Botero Women*, 2003, pages 57 and 218

“AT THAT EARLY PERIOD,” Fernando Botero recounts of his artistic beginnings, “I discovered the ‘Vargas girls.’ I worked on his stilted, erotic figures. It was an interesting experience at that moment of puberty.” A precocious teenager, he would soon tire of Vargas’s glamorous pin-ups, made famous in *Esquire* magazine, as he discovered “that the beauty of a deteriorated body, too, can offer possibilities of another kind. It was a lesson that changed my aesthetic sensibility.”

Botero has long acknowledged the formative years of his adolescence in Medellín, and his paintings of familiar female subjects—matriarchal mothers, devout nuns, come-hither ladies of the evening—commingle nostalgia and good-natured satire. “My painting has two main sources,” he has said. “On the one hand, there are my views on aesthetics, and on the other hand, the Latin American world where I grew up... I have tried to see the pictures of my childhood, the villages of Colombia, its people, its generals and bishops, etc., through the prism of my tenets about art.”

“When Fernando Botero was a boy, the tradition that equated beauty with abundance was very much alive in Latin America,” the Peruvian laureate Mario Vargas Llosa remarked. “It was fuelled by a whole erotic mythology found in magazine drawings, in obscene bar jokes, in fashion, songs, popular literature and, above all, in the films that Mexican cinema sent to all parts of the continent. The exuberant forms of those artists with their bouffant hairstyles, who sang *boleros*, danced *huarachas* and wore tight clothes which emphasized their breasts and buttocks with knowing vulgarity—these were the delights of our generation and stimulated our first desires—must have remained embedded in the subconscious of the boy from Medellín.” This lush femininity permeates Botero’s women, whose pleasing amplitude conveys myriad pleasures of form and volume.

In defiance of prevailing standards of female beauty, Botero has for more than 60 years modeled figures ostentatiously oversized, their bodies—plump and pillowy—a throwback to

classical forms. “Every artist distorts or deforms nature,” he once declared. “Nobody truly copies reality as we see it... Realism is not the same thing as reality. The purpose of my style is to exalt volumes... because it conveys the sensuality, the exuberance, the profusions of the form that I am searching for.” As he traveled through Europe in the early 1950s, Botero found natural affinities with the old masters—Titian and Diego Velázquez; Peter Paul Rubens and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres—and their exemplary modeling of paint made flesh. But it was in Mexico City, in the shadow of the monumental Mural movement, that he had his own revelation of form. “Toward the end of 1956 I was in Mexico painting without letup,” he recalled. “But one day while drawing a generously proportioned mandolin, just as I was doing the sound hole, I made it very tiny, and the mandolin took on fantastic proportions... After that *Mandolin*, my world began to expand. I went on to figures and soon was creating a formal universe that found its supreme expression in small detail.”

Botero has painted innumerable women in his eponymous style ever since, from the early *Mona Lisa* series to the matronly ladies and pretty coquettes who moved through a bygone Colombian world. With lace-gloved hand on hip, the present *Femme debout* stands in coy contrapposto, her shapely figure balanced on dainty, high-heeled slippers. She flaunts her curves in a sheer, polka-dotted black gown trimmed in warm tones of salmon pink and golden yellow—companionable colours that harmonize as well in her long blonde hair, decorated with a girlish bow, her painted nails and beaded jewellery, and her rosy *maquillage*. Almost life-sized, she commands nearly all of the painting’s space, her body tightly framed by a tilting mirror and a simple still life arrangement: a glass bottle and Botero’s signature oranges, one on the tabletop and the others, less conventionally, on the ground.

Botero has likened his oranges to Rufino Tamayo’s iconic water-melons, explaining, “The orange is a sphere. It is the most simple and perfect form. I am also fascinated by its color. The important thing is to give it a personal seal. Do the same thing, but differently. This is what I call the fire test of painting, ‘the orange test.’” Here, the oranges add a pleasing element of serendipity, their shape and colour a gentle foil to the rounded figure and roseate complexion of the winsome *Femme debout*.

“In this essentially matriarchal world, the men look to the women for company and protection rather than pleasure,” Vargas Llosa concluded. “Botero’s women, with their perms, their scarlet nails and their boneless, luxuriant forms, are not only a stylised fantasy of the ‘ideal woman’ in the Latin American world of the 1940s and 1950s. Their thick figures embody, above all, the mother/woman, the supreme taboo, which gives life, suckles the species and is the backbone of the home. Rather than a whore, a nun, or a saint, Botero’s fat woman is—has been, or will be—a mother... It is this function that prevails above all others and which, in an explicit or implicit way, determines the attitude, both chaste and timid, that men adopt towards her.” The womanly affectations of *Femme debout* belie her essential maternal *gravitas* and, no less, the esteem with which Botero regards her, the eternal Everywoman of an olden Colombian world.

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 November 15, 2005.

ESTIMATE: \$500,000 – 700,000