

Bonhams presents a rare and exquisite painting by modernist painter Jewad Selim

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Bonhams is delighted to present a rare and exquisite painting by Iraq's foremost modernist painter Jewad Selim, depicting Mrinalini Sarabhai, one of the most celebrated figures of classical Indian dance, for sale on April 8th in New Bond Street. It is estimated to sell for £50,000-70,000.

Mrinalini Sarabhai, one of the most renowned and prolific practitioners of classical Indian dance, was born in Chennai 1918, she was educated in Switzerland, her native India and the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Mrinalini went on to gain international acclaim both for her performance and choreography, as well as founding one of the most influential dance academies in India. By her early twenties, Mrinalini had already performed in India, Europe and America with her company.

The present portrait was painted during her first London appearance in 1949 at St Martin's Theatre in London's West End with the "Ballets Hindous" which also performed in Geneva, Lucerne and Brussels in the same year. At the time the portrait was painted Selim was studying in London on a government scholarship and mixing in artistic and musical circles where he encountered Mrinalini. He started at the Chelsea School of Art in January 1946, but moved to the Slade School of Fine Art in September of that same year, where he met his future wife and fellow art student, Lorna, whom he married in 1950.

One of the founding fathers of Iraqi modernism, Jewad Selim was sent to Europe on government scholarships to further his art education, first to the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris (1938-39) and then to the Academia di Belli Arte in Rome (1939-40). The hostilities of World War II resulted in Jewad cutting short his studies and returning to Baghdad, where he began part-time work restoring Sumerian and Assyrian reliefs in the Department of Archaeology at the Baghdad Museum of Antiquities. He also taught at the Institute of Fine Arts, where he founded the sculpture department.

Offered at £50,000-70,000, "Nalini" is one of only three oil paintings by the artist ever to be offered at auction. Coming from the artist's family, it carries an impeccable provenance, having been exhibited in the Baghdad Fine Arts Institute in 1952, as well as partaking in a travelling exhibition throughout India organized by the Iraqi Government in 1955 where it was also published.

In composition and technique, Nalini is demonstrative of the influence of 20th century European art on Selim's work, and in particular the palette and textural quality of post-impressionists like Cezanne and Toulouse Lautrec. Demure yet empathetic. Nalini recalls the sombre portraiture of Lautrec, with its linear, painterly strokes giving emphasis to contour over detail, and the distinct gaps between brush-strokes evoking the freedom and spontaneity of drawing.