



**FERNANDO BOTERO (B. 1932)**

*Woman in Front of a Mirror (Mujer en Frente de un Espejo)*, 1986

Oil on canvas

63 3/4 × 49 1/4 in. (162 × 125 cm.)

Signed and dated 'Botero 86' lower right

This work is available for private viewing at Artnet's headquarters in New York.

**Estimate: 1,200,000 – 1,800,000 USD**

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### Provenance

Marlborough Fine Art Ltd. Tokyo  
 Private Collection (acquired from the above)  
 Christie's, New York, May 26, 2011, lot 48  
 Acquired at the above sale

### Exhibition History

*Fernando Botero*, Tokyu Department Store Art Gallery, Tokyo, August 23-September 3, 1986; then traveled to Hokkaido Museum of Art, Sapporo, September 7-October 5, 1986; Daimaru Museum, Osaka, October 15-October 27, 1986; and City Art Museum, Niigata, November 1-November 30, 1986, no. 43, p. 66, illustrated

*Fernando Botero*, Marlborough Fine Art Ltd. Tokyo, January 19-March 20, 1987, p. 19, illustrated

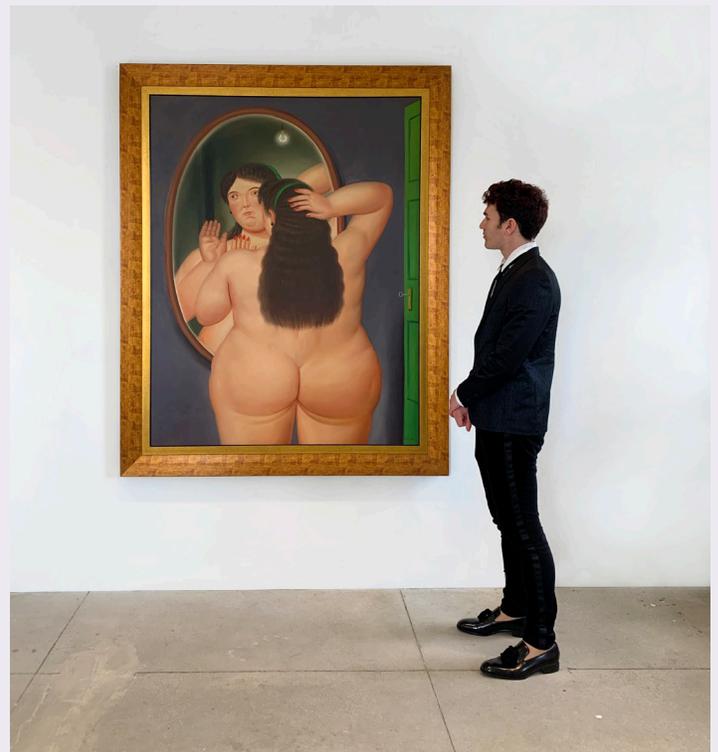
### Literature

Gilbert Lascault, ed., *Botero- La pintura*, Lerner & Lerner Editores, Madrid and Editions Cercle d'Art, Paris, 1992, p. 246, illustrated

Xiaosheng Xing, ed., *Fernando Botero*, Jiangxi Art Edition, Beijing, 1995, p. 51, illustrated

Edward J. Sullivan and Jean-Marie Tasset, eds., *Fernando Botero: Monograph & Catalogue Raisonné*, Paintings 1975-1990, Acatos, Lausanne, 2000, no. 1986/36, p. 383, 400, illustrated

Paulo Gribaudo and Benjamin Villegas, eds., *Botero: Mujeres*, Villegas Asociados, Bogotá, 2003, p. 96, illustrated



## ¡Botero! Portal al Amor Inmortal

She's a goddess; she's a saint; she's a queen; she is a dream. The global celebration of Fernando Botero's 90th birthday has given us an opportunity to reexamine her story, unveiled in 1986 across museums in Japan. Lushly, rationally rendered, her figure stands in a deepened lavender room, green door swung open, key turned inside its lock to let in the unknown. Her hand raised up, as if in spiritual exclamation, resembles Mary's during a heavenly Assumption. But encircled by light like a halo, the oval mirror-altar she faces produces clear mythologies: a true Venus Effect. Titian, Veronese, Velázquez, Rubens, and many, many more have imbued optical mystery and impossibility into Claudian's phrase about "the mirror's verdict" for the female spirit of Eros, "her image is reflected over all the palace and she is charmed" (*Epithalamium*).

Astoundingly colored and scaled, Maestro Botero's own Venus Effect is one like Ovid's, "gleaming" at this market moment "as a star"—a more at once historically and visually sensational piece by Botero has not come to auction in over 10 years. Its emerald green door ajar mirrors the mujer's headband; her ruby nail polish reflects a feathered twinkle from the bulb alight above. For Mario Vargas Llosa, Maestro Botero's pleasure "is to be found in the luminous, sensual and enjoyable way" (1), the triumph of a century, which has made him an icon of Colombian and World History.

"If I paint a picture that has the same theme as that used by a famous painter,  
I'm part of the same tradition."

She's divina; she is grace; she is 1555 AD but also 399 BC. Because painters of Vasari's generation drew from Neoplatonic writings on the divine soul of beauty and love, so does Maestro Botero classically reference. Plato's *Phaedo* sees Socrates recount his sense of the soul "released from the body" going to "the divine and immortal and wise, where on arrival it has the opportunity to be happy." And Ovid bridged that vision to Venus in *Metamorphoses* Book Fifteen: "She felt it burn, released it from her bosom, and saw it rise, beyond the moon."

Looking at the span of Maestro Botero's oeuvre, it is telling that he returned to this canonical tradition following a long sojourn in the realms of reflection dominated by psychology. Around 1949 at La Sorbonne, Jacques Lacan and Maurice Merleau-Ponty were reworking Sigmund Freud's mirror-stage; they argued self-recognition and development could only occur in the presence of real-world relationships. Yet Gabriel García Márquez, who would win the Nobel Prize in 1982, was concurrently writing about a departure from these claims in his short story *Dialogue with the Mirror*: "Or could it have been possible (...) that the image had taken on its own life."

Congruent with García Márquez's magical reality, Maestro Botero's practice achieved prime impact by the 1980s. In 1983, the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired one of his works, and throughout the subsequent years he constructed a universe for sculpture fabrication in Pietrasanta, near the Carrera marble quarries. *Woman in Front of a Mirror*, executed in 1986, marks a pivotal moment in the artist's career and represents how he thus won Vasari's so-called battle between Italian *disegno* and *colore*. If Vasari felt that only Renaissance sculptors, with their specific anatomical skills, could successfully marry drawing with color, Maestro Botero would have pleased him. The mujer's delicately modeled flesh viewed from the back gradates chromatically with a certain nonchalant bravura, à la Tiziano, or Castiglionean sprezzatura. Yet ratios of highly intentional, seductive proportion contain its ampleness on the brink of flight; from this mujer he reflects, supremely, that certain immortally enchanting Amor, as if she were Venus taking the souls of his beholders up to Boterismo's Olympic infinity.

(1) "La Suntuosa Abundancia," p. 40

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