

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Tuesday 29 May 2012

CHRISTIE'S

Contact: Matthew Paton

mpaton@christies.com

+44 207 389 2664

**JOHN CONSTABLE'S '*THE LOCK*'
TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S LONDON
ON 3 JULY 2012**

Celebrated British landscape expected to realise in excess of £20 million



John Constable (1776-1837), *The Lock*
Oil on canvas, 56 x 47 in. | 142.2 x 120.7 cm
Estimate: £20 million to £25 million

London – Christie’s will offer *The Lock* by John Constable (1776-1837) at the *Old Master & British Paintings Evening Auction* on Tuesday 3 July. The sale of this masterpiece represents a major moment for the international art market as collectors from all over the world convene in London for the summer sales. One of six paintings that make up the artist’s most celebrated series of large scale works which also includes *The Hay Wain*, now in The National Gallery, London, *The Lock* is the last to remain in private hands. From the Private Collection of Baroness Carmen Thyssen Bornemisza, it has been sold only once since it was acquired from the artist. When bought at auction in 1990 for £10.8 million, it became the most valuable British painting ever sold at the time – a record it held for 16 years. It is expected to realise £20 million to £25 million on 3 July.

Jussi Pykkänen, President of Christie’s Europe, Middle East, Russia and India: *“Christie’s is honoured to have been chosen to sell ‘The Lock’, one of John Constable’s greatest paintings and an outstanding masterpiece of European art. This superb landscape, coming from the same series as ‘The Hay Wain’, represents British landscape painting at its very best and is sure to attract bidding from museums and collectors from all over the world. It has been sold only once before since it was acquired from the artist, whereupon it held the world record for any British work of art for some 16 years. We look forward to exhibiting ‘The Lock’ at our King Street headquarters during the summer period when it is sure to be the leading highlight as art collectors from all over the world congregate in London for a busy annual season of exhibitions and sales.”*

Richard Knight, co-Chairman of Old Master and British Paintings Department; and John Stainton, International Director, British Paintings: *“The sale of this painting will be a moment of huge significance for the art market, and for that of Old Master paintings in particular. In 2006 we combined the forces of our Old Master and Early British paintings departments due to the broadening international appeal for works dependent on their quality, as opposed to the nationality of the artist. Since then we have seen British art reach new heights and have broken records for a number of the greatest British artists including Stubbs, Gainsborough and Lawrence. We look forward very much to presenting this hugely significant work of art to the world’s leading collectors and museums.”*

John Constable: *My Lock is now on my easel ... It looks most beautifully silvery, windy & delicious - it is all health - & the absence of everything stagnant, and is wonderfully got together after only this one year’.* (Beckett, op. cit., VI, 1968, p. 200).

Art critic, Morning Post, 13 April 1824 – in response to its exhibition at the Royal Academy: *‘Mr. Constable contributes a landscape composition which for depth, sparkling light, freshness and vigorous effect, exceeds any of his works’.*

John Constable (1776-1837) was one of the most original artistic forces to emerge in the early nineteenth century. Like that of his near contemporary J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851), the impact of his work would continue to reverberate in Britain, and internationally, long after his death. Yet, in his own lifetime, Constable’s attainment of professional, critical and commercial success, and what he no doubt considered his rightful place in the artistic firmament, often seemed less assured than it does with hindsight. Constable was committed to the purity of undiluted nature as the principal theme of his work, at a time when history painting was ‘in vogue’.

The Lock was finished in 1824, one of the most significant years in Constable's career, which saw *The Hay Wain* exhibited at the Paris Salon and King Charles X of France award him a gold medal. Constable's success in France has been seen by many art historians as having significantly influenced the course of the history of art; Constable's intense observation of nature inspired French artists in a movement of landscape painting that would find its fullest expression half-a-century later in the work of the Impressionists.

The Lock, which Constable exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1824, his sole exhibit there of that year, is one of the artist's finest landscapes, and is one of six paintings that make up *The Stour Series* - one of the most important and influential bodies of work in the history of art. Exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1819 and 1825, the works from this series were the first of the 'six foot' canvases that define his artistic maturity. *The Lock* is a distillation of Constable's profound emotional and artistic response to the scenery of his native Suffolk that was central to his art. Among the series are several of Constable's most renowned works, including *The Hay Wain* and *The Leaping Horse*, exhibited respectively in 1822 and 1825 (now London, National Gallery; and London, Royal Academy of Arts). *The Lock*, which is remarkable for its excellent state of preservation, is the only one of this series to remain in private hands.

The Lock was originally owned by the celebrated collector James Morrison (1789-1857), who acquired the picture at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1824. It was inherited by his grandson Colonel James Morrison of Basildon Park, in whose family's possession it remained until it was sold at auction in 1990 when it was acquired by Baron and Baroness Hans Thyssen-Bornemisza for £10.8 million - a world record price at auction for any British work of art at the time. It has since been in the private collection of Baroness Carmen Thyssen Bornemisza, from which it is offered at Christie's on 3 July.

Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza, was one of the richest men in Europe in the latter half of the twentieth century. He followed in the footsteps of his father, Baron Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza, and became one of the world's greatest art collectors. Using the enormous wealth generated from the large industrial conglomerate that he had inherited from his father, and which he had worked so successfully to rebuild and diversify after the Second World War, he not only preserved and augmented the outstanding collection of Old Master pictures that his father had formed in the 1920s and 1930s, but also significantly expanded the range of the collection through his own remarkable acquisitions, most particularly of the work of European and American artists from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

His father's collection was formed with the intention of creating a panorama of European painting from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, and was outstanding not only for its scale but also for its quality. It included masterpieces by a grand roll call of European masters including Hans Holbein the Younger, Albrecht Durer, Jan van Eyck, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Fra Angelico and Caravaggio. His collection was largely displayed at the Villa Favorita, a seventeenth-century mansion

on Lake Lugano which he had acquired from Prince Friedrich Leopold of Prussia in 1932, and to which he had added a picture gallery in 1937 which was arranged with the discipline of a museum.

Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza added over two hundred paintings to the existing Old Master collection, as well acquiring over nine hundred more modern works which were completely outside his father's range of interest, forming a remarkable collection of 19th and 20th Century Art. Baron Thyssen was twice painted by Lucian Freud.

As his collection increased in scale, Baron Thyssen began to focus on the possibility of finding it a suitable, permanent home. In the mid-1980s, the main body of the collection was placed into a trust and in 1992 the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum was opened in the newly refurbished nineteenth-century Villahermosa Palace in Madrid.

Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza shared her husband's passion for collecting and they spent much of their marriage visiting museums, art galleries, auction houses and artist's studios. The Baron and Baroness continued to acquire works of art after the creation of the trust which, together with a core group that had been inherited from his father, formed a separate, private collection of approximately 800 works. Of these, approximately 400 have since been on free loan to the Museum, including *The Lock*. The sale of this painting will safeguard the future of the private collection and will allow the loan of other paintings to the Museum to be secured for the foreseeable future.

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About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction and private sales in 2011 that totaled £3.6 billion/\$5.7 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 450 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War and Contemporary, Impressionist and Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. Private sales totaled £502 million / \$808.6m in 2011, an increase of 44% on the previous year.

Christie's has a global presence with 53 offices in 32 countries and 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, and Hong Kong. More recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging and new markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.

**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.*