

Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

For Immediate Release

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**CHRISTIE'S TO OFFER SUPERB 16th CENTURY
MASTERPIECE BY GIROLAMO ROMANINO**

**“Christ Carrying the Cross,” Restituted to the Heirs of Federico Gentili di Giuseppe,
Will Lead Christie’s Old Master Paintings Auction in New York on June 6**



GIROLAMO ROMANINO (Brescia 1484/87-1560)

Christ Carrying the Cross

Estimate: \$2,500,000-3,500,000

New York – A magnificent picture of *Christ Carrying the Cross* is a masterpiece of Girolamo Romanino’s fully mature style and among the most potent and moving depictions of the theme in 16th century Italian art. The painting will highlight Christie’s Old Master Paintings sale on June 6 in New York, and is estimated at \$2,500,000-3,500,000.

Nicholas Hall, Co-Chairman, Old Masters & 19th Century Art, comments: *“Christie’s is honored to be chosen to auction this rare work on behalf of the heirs of Federico Gentili di Giuseppe. Romanino’s “Christ Carrying the Cross” is a masterpiece of the Italian High Renaissance, which could hang in any major museum: a picture of this importance by the artist has not been available on the market for more than a decade.”*

A leading painter of the north Italian school, Girolamo di Romano, who during his lifetime came to be called Romanino, was born between 1484 and 1487 in Brescia, then under Venetian rule. Active as a painter of frescoes, altarpieces, portraits and private devotional pictures, Romanino worked in numerous cities across northern Italy, including Padua, Cremona, Trento and Brescia, which remained his chief residence over the course of his career.

The theme of *Christ Carrying the Cross*, in which Jesus is presented half-length and at close range against a neutral dark background while tormented by his executioners, was enormously popular in north Italian painting in the first half of the sixteenth century. Such representations were intended to serve a devotional function, as a stimulus to prayer and pious contemplation. Most often relatively small in scale, they were typically commissioned by a private patron for display in a study, bedroom or small chapel in the home, as is likely to have been the case with the present picture.

Christ Carrying the Cross is based on the dramatically charged episode from the Passion in which Jesus is forced to carry the cross on which he will be crucified from Pilate’s palace in Jerusalem. Romanino shows Christ half-length, dressed in a splendid copper-colored satin robe and wearing a crown of intricately twisted thorns. He is bowed under the weight of an enormous wooden cross, which he grasps with both hands while turning his head to the right, gazing out past the viewer as if deep in thought. At upper left, the head of a brutish torturer emerges from the shadows, his mouth open and teeth bared as if taunting Christ as his clenched fist pulls on the knotted rope around the Savior’s neck.

The juxtaposition of the crude vehemence of the torturer’s expression and the quiet restraint of Christ gives visual expression to the age-old struggle between good and evil, here also symbolized by the tormentor’s placement to the left, that is, on the sinister side. Christ’s robe seems to have slipped to expose his bare shoulder, alluding to the humiliation he will endure when he is stripped before being crucified, a poignant detail which heightens the pathos of the scene. The torturer’s bushy moustache and red velvet beret with a full white plume, suggest those worn by the German mercenary soldiers who sowed terror across north Italy in the 16th century, perhaps known to Romanino first-hand, but which he also would have seen in German prints by Daniel Hopfer and others, then widely disseminated. Notwithstanding the subject, the violence is subdued. The picture conveys a sense of peace, due not only to Christ’s tranquil expression, but also to its balanced and harmonious design.

Provenance and Restitution

A *Christ Carrying the Cross* by Romanino was documented in the Brognoli collection in Brescia in 1820, but cannot be identified with certainty as the present picture. The first secure record of its whereabouts dates from 1853, when it was seen by Odorici in the distinguished collection of Cesare and Antonio Averoldi in

Brescia. This points to the possibility that the picture may have originally been painted for a member of the Averoldi family, who in the 16th century were among the most prominent art patrons in the city, having commissioned works from Titian, Savoldo, Moretto da Brescia as well as from Romanino. By 1900, the picture had passed into the Crespi collection, Milan, following the 1914 sale of which it was acquired in Paris by Federico Gentili di Giuseppe. After his death in 1940, the picture was sold in a forced sale of his estate in Paris in 1941. By 1996, it had entered the Polli collection, Milan, from which it was acquired, in 1998, by the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. On 2 June 1999, the Court of Appeals of Paris nullified the 1941 sale, determining that Mr. Gentili di Giuseppe's family had been prevented from attending to the administration of the estate. Thereafter, the heirs pursued the restitution of the collection. Restituted by order of the United States District Court, Northern District of Florida, on 6 February 2012, the picture was returned to the heirs of Federico Gentili di Giuseppe on 18 April 2012.

Gentili di Giuseppe

Federico Gentili di Giuseppe was a Jewish Italian businessman and art collector living in Paris, with a considerable art collection. He had built a large collection of Old Master paintings and drawings, books and manuscripts, as well as 18th century French furniture. Known by his contemporaries as a “connoisseur” in early Italian painting, he was not only a collector, but also an art historian and a generous donor to museums (he gave some modern Italian paintings and sculptures to the Musée du Luxembourg). He died of natural causes in April of 1940, leaving his estate to his children. With the fall of France to Hitler in June of that year, his family fled the country. German law forbade the return of those who had left occupied territory, so his family was unable to assert its claim to the works of art. A surrogate administrator was appointed to manage the family's affairs and the art collection was auctioned in Paris in 1941, and the family lost possession of the paintings.

Over the years, a dozen objects have been restituted to the heirs of Gentili di Giuseppe, from the Musée du Louvre, the Musée des Beaux Arts de Lyon and the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Princeton University Art Museum have also settled with the heirs. In January 2000, Christie's New York sold six works that were restituted to the heirs of Gentili di Giuseppe, including Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's *Alexander and Campaspe in the studio of Apelles* (circa late 1730s), which had been in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, and was bought by the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, and Tiepolo's *Rinaldo Abandoning Armida* (circa 1752-53), which was at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, and bought back by that same institution.

Auction: **Old Master Paintings**, Christie's New York, 6 June 2012 at 5pm

Viewing: 2-5 June 2012

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 growth 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.*

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