

# CHRISTIE'S

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## ***SAINT PRAXEDIS* BY JOHANNES VERMEER**

**- One of only two paintings by the artist in private hands -**

**LEADS THE SALE OF WORKS FROM**

***THE BARBARA PIASECKA JOHNSON COLLECTION***

**WITH *PROCEEDS TO BENEFIT***

***THE BARBARA PIASECKA JOHNSON FOUNDATION***

**AT CHRISTIE'S IN JULY**



**London** – Christie's is pleased to announce that works from *The Barbara Piasecka Johnson Collection* with *Proceeds to Benefit the Barbara Piasecka Johnson Foundation* will be offered at Christie's London from 8 to 17 July. The star lot is the famous painting of *Saint Praxedis* by Johannes Vermeer of Delft (1632-1675), from 1655, which is the earliest dated picture by the artist and one of only two from his rare oeuvre to remain in private hands (estimate: £6-8 million, *illustrated above*). The results of recent material technical analysis conducted by the Rijksmuseum in association with the Free University, Amsterdam endorses Vermeer's authorship of the picture. They establish not only that the lead white used in the paint is consistent with Dutch painting and is incontrovertibly not Italian; they also reveal a precise match with another established early painting by Vermeer - *Diana and her Companions*, in The Mauritshuis, The Hague. The match even suggests that the exact same batch of paint was used for both paintings. This magnificent painting offers one of the rarest and most alluring opportunities for collectors and institutions this season. *Please click [here](#) for the full catalogue note on this work.*

An art connoisseur whose dedicated collecting was underpinned by art historical training in Poland, where she was born, Barbara Piasecka Johnson (1937- 2013) was also a humanitarian and philanthropist. Having married

J. Seward Johnson (1895 -1983), son of one of the co-founders of the Johnson and Johnson medical and pharmaceutical firm, in 1971, Mrs Johnson and her husband acquired many masterpieces together, and she also established the Foundation that bears her name today. Throughout her life she was sustained by a strong religious faith; her veneration of Saint Francis was reflected in many of her finest acquisitions and also fuelled her extensive charitable work which was recognised with many prestigious awards. She was passionate about Italian art and Italy, and her collection reflected this, highlighting the illustrious history and quality of the works and the vision Mrs Johnson showed in her choices.

Christie's will offer works from the collection across three sales this season: the *Old Master & British Paintings Evening Sale* (10 lots) and *Day Sale* (15 lots), on Tuesday 8 and Wednesday 9 July respectively; and a sale of furniture, sculpture, tapestries, silver, pictures and works of art on 17 July (70 lots). A further array of fine art, furniture and decorative objects will be sold across a number of sales in New York and London in the autumn. The Collection as a whole is expected to realise in excess of £14 million with proceeds being used to continue Mrs Johnson's charitable work by further supporting a long term programme to increase awareness and understanding of autism and to maintain financial assistance to a centre of excellence in early autism intervention in Poland, that was established by the Foundation (the Institute for Child Development in Gdańsk), which is very active worldwide.

### Old Master & British Paintings Evening Sale, 8 July

The spectacular recent scientific evidence that endorses the Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) attribution of *Saint Praxedis* is a significant art historical development and makes this work one of the stars of the summer sales (estimate: £6-8 million, *illustrated right*). One of only two works by the artist to remain in private hands, this striking picture is one of the earliest known works by Vermeer; signed and dated 1655 it was painted when the artist was 22 or 23. Two other major history paintings by the artist are datable to the same period: *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh) and *Diana and her Companions* (The Mauritshuis, The Hague). These three pictures together represent the early phase of the artist's career before he evolved the modern style for which he is best known. *Saint Praxedis* was attributed to Vermeer for the first time in 1969 and was fully included in Vermeer's oeuvre in 1986. Mrs Johnson, characteristically, moved quickly to seize the opportunity to acquire it less than a year later. *Saint Praxedis* appeared in the seminal monographic exhibition of Vermeer's work held at both The National Gallery of Art, Washington and The Mauritshuis, The Hague, in 1995-96, and most recently in the Vermeer exhibition held at the Scuderie del Quirinale in Rome in 2012/13.



Mrs Johnson had followed with keen interest the scientific research carried out on her other great Dutch picture, the Rembrandt portrait *Portrait of a man, half-length, with his arms akimbo* from 1658, sold at Christie's London in 2009 for £20,201,250, and would have been gratified though not at all surprised, at the findings that Christie's are now able to unveil.

An addition to a small group of works showing the young artist's response to contemporary Italian painting, the picture shows Vermeer copying a composition by the Florentine Felice Ficherelli (1605-c.1669). Vermeer has, however, subtly recreated in his own style the Saint's head into an image of sweet piety, and shows her grasping a crucifix on which she meditates while squeezing a sponge soaked in martyr's blood into a ewer. Praxedis was a Roman Christian from the second century A.D. who made it her mission to care for the bodies of those who had been martyred for their faith. The emotional subject of the picture and its Italian links held a special appeal for Mrs Johnson. *Please click [here](#) for the separate press release on this work*

Further top lots from the collection include *The Annunciation to the Shepherds* by The Master of the Annunciation to the Shepherds (active in Naples, first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century), a masterpiece of 17<sup>th</sup> century Neapolitan painting (estimate: £1-1.5 million, *illustrated right*). Measuring 50¼ x 70¼ in. (128 x 181 cm.), this work is grand in scale and rich in drama. It bears close comparison to the eponymous work by the artist in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, which is dated to *circa* 1630. While the artist's identity has still not been conclusively established, he has a close affinity with Ribera, and the exceptional quality of his *oeuvre* places him amongst the most significant artists of the Baroque period. The market has responded strongly to works by the artist in recent years.



An extensively published and exhibited painting, *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* was previously attributed to Jusepe de Ribera and has, more recently, been re-assigned to Luca Giordano, called Fa Presto (1634-1705), who trained in the former's studio and went on to establish his reputation in Italy and Spain (estimate: £800,000-1,200,000, *illustrated left*). Dating to around 1656-7, it is a prime example of Giordano's early career, and is highly comparable in technique and style to other fine works from this point in his oeuvre, such as the *Apollo and Marsyas* in the Museo di Capodimonte, Naples. This work was formerly in the collection of Carlo del Chiaro, Florence, until 1839; going on to be owned by Prince Anatole Demidoff of San Donato, Florence until 1870 and later André Marie, Président du Conseil des Ministres, Paris, until 1975. It has been in The Barbara Piasecka Johnson Collection since 1984.

Other highlights offered in this sale include Domenico Zampieri, Il Domenichino (Bologna 1581-1641 Naples) *Christ at the Column*, dated 'M.DCIII' (estimate: £500,000-700,000); a monumental depiction of *The Siege of Asola* by Jacopo Robusti, called Jacopo Tintoretto (Venice 1519-1594) (estimate: £500,000-800,000); *Saint Peter and Saint Paul* (a pair of canvases) from the Studio of Sir Peter Paul Rubens (Siegen, Westphalia 1577-1640 Antwerp) (estimate: £300,000-500,000) and *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* by Francisco de Zurbarán (Fuente de Cantos, Badajoz 1598-1664 Madrid) (estimate: £200,000-300,000).

## Old Master & British Paintings Day Sale, 9 July



Among the 15 lots from the collection which are offered in the *Old Master & British Paintings Day Sale*, highlights include *The Lamentation*, North Italian School, 16<sup>th</sup> Century (estimate £60,000-80,000, *illustrated left*). A striking composition, it is executed on a large North Italian panel, by an artist probably of Lombard origin, and dating to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.

Further notable works include *Portrait of an architect, half-length, in black robes, holding a pair of dividers*, attributed to Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) (estimate: £30,000-50,000, *illustrated right*). This intriguing portrait, which dates from the early to mid-17<sup>th</sup> century Rome, relates closely to a number of unfinished works by Bernini, including the self-portrait in the Prado.



## The Barbara Piasecka Johnson Collection - 17 July



Christie's will be offering a rich and varied array of furniture, sculpture, tapestries, silver, pictures, and works of art from the collection, which together formed part of the private world of Barbara Piasecka Johnson, in a sale on 17 July. Featuring 70 lots, the sale provides an evocative insight in to the passionate collecting, taste, and life of Mrs Johnson.

Highlights include a Florentine terracotta relief of the Virgin and Child, *circa* 1420 (estimate: £200,000-300,000, *illustrated left*), previously in the Oskar Huldshinky Collection, which was exhibited, along with a number of other works in the sale, in Mrs Johnson's highly acclaimed exhibition at the Royal Castle in Warsaw in 1990, *Opus Sacrum*. Providing a handsome and detailed record of a significant portion of the great collection that she, with the enthusiastic support of her husband J. Seward Johnson, had already formed in an astonishingly brief period of eighteen years, the exhibition concentrated on religious subjects expressed through pictures, sculpture and other works of art. Mrs Johnson conceived it as a tribute to the courage and resilience of her fellow Poles who were beginning to emerge from many years of Soviet oppression after the end of World War II.



Leading the **furniture** from the collection are the Marquis Patrizi cabinets inlaid with pewter-mounted *pietra dura*, dating to the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (estimate: £150,000-250,000, *one of two illustrated left*). These impressive cabinets are inlaid with hardstones including agate, jasper and amethyst, and each feature a central drawer in the form of an architectural niche above a door flanked by Corinthian columns and pilasters.

Among a fine group of **tapestries** is a pair of Flemish Biblical tapestries (estimate: £50,000 – 80,000) and a further Flemish work depicting *The Eucharist overcoming pagan sacrifices*, after the sketch by Peter Paul Rubens (estimate: £25,000-40,000, *illustrated right*). Other highlights include a superb early **engraving** from the workshop of Andrea Mantegna, *Descent into Limbo*, circa 1475-80, which is in excellent condition and is a reminder that Mrs Johnson at one time also owned the painting of this subject (estimate: £100,000-150,000, *illustrated left*).



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### About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction and private sales in 2013 that totaled £4.5 billion/ \$7.1 billion, making it the highest annual total in Christie's history. 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 around 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 & Contemporary, Impressionist & Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. Private sales totaled £760.5 million (\$1.19 billion) in 2013, an increase of 20% on the previous year.

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*\*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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