

For Immediate Release

15 February 2006

Contact: Matthew Paton

020.7389.2664

mpaton@christies.com

TURNER'S '*BLUE RIGI*' TO BE OFFERED IN *BRITISH ART WEEK* AT CHRISTIE'S

British Art Week, 5 – 9 June 2006

**British Art on Paper
5 June 2006**

London – An exceptional work by J.M.W. Turner, R.A. (1775-1851), the most important watercolour to appear at auction for over 50 years and one of the most impressive ever painted by the artist, will lead Christie's sale of



British Art on Paper on 5 June 2006.

The Blue Rigi is a remarkable work of art by the universally acknowledged master of watercolour and the 'precursor of Impressionism' which could become the most expensive British watercolour ever sold at auction when it is offered during *British Art Week* at Christie's in June. It is expected to realise in excess of £2 million.

Noël Annesley, Honorary Chairman of Christie's, says, '*This exceptional watercolour marks the culmination of Turner's achievement in the medium that he made his own, and its appearance at auction offers a special opportunity for both museums and private collectors. In a technique of almost unimaginable subtlety Turner expresses his lifelong preoccupation with the effects of light, shade and atmosphere.*'

The Blue Rigi: Lake of Lucerne, Sunrise is an extraordinary study in light, colour and texture. The watercolour depicts the expansive calm of sunrise interrupted by sudden movement as a gunshot spurs a pair of dogs to leap from a small boat in the foreground towards a group of startled ducks. Through his masterful control of light and shade, the artist evokes a tranquil yet expectant atmosphere, with the morning mist lingering and seemingly draping the Rigi.

Between 1841 and 1844 Turner undertook annual tours to Switzerland where he was inspired by the dramatic scenery around Lake Lucerne and the Rigi Mountain rising from the eastern shore. In 1842, on his return from Switzerland, Turner produced four 'exemplary' and highly finished watercolours, including *The Blue Rigi*, and went with them to his agent, Thomas Griffith, in order to secure further commissions. John Ruskin, the foremost art critic of the 19th century, said of this series that '*Turner had never made any drawings like these before and never made any like them again.*' *The Blue Rigi* was the most impressive of the four, and was acquired by Elhanan Bicknell from whose collection it was sold at Christie's in 1863 for 296 guineas. The work returned to Christie's in 1912 as part of the landmark auction of J.E. Taylor's collection of works by Turner and sold for 2,700 guineas. In 1942 *The Blue*

Rigi returned to Christie's for a third time, when it was purchased by the family of the present owner. *The Blue Rigi* was illustrated as the frontispiece of the Royal Academy's exhibition *Turner: The Great Watercolours* in 2000.

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) is widely recognized as one of the greatest and most original landscape painters in history. Born in London in 1775, he became a student of the Royal Academy Schools in 1789 and first exhibited a watercolour there in 1790, when he was only fifteen years old. His talent and progress were made apparent when in 1802, at just 27, he became the youngest ever artist to be appointed a Royal Academician. His early style was dramatic and romantic, but he drew inspiration from his travels around Europe, developing a looser and often almost abstract style that anticipated Impressionism. He has come to be recognized as one of the painters who most influenced the Impressionist and Modern Art movements, and one of the true geniuses of Western Art.

In June 2006 Christie's will host *British Art Week* comprising auction sales, events and lectures dedicated to the history of British art and furniture. A selection of paintings, watercolours, furniture and sculpture representing over 500 years of British art will be offered over 5 sales held between 5 and 9 June. *British Art Week* will include works by many renowned artists, including Burne-Jones, Lowry, Henry Moore, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Stubbs, Tissot and Turner, as well as important English furniture.

#

Images available on request

Visit Christie's on the web at www.christies.com

'Light is therefore colour' – J.M.W. Turner

Notes to Editors:

- Christie's hold two sales a year dedicated to *British Art on Paper*, and established the world record for any British work of art on paper in June 2000 when *Pandora* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti sold for £2,643,750. Christie's have established records for works on paper by a number of renowned British artists including Thomas Gainsborough, Samuel Palmer, Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Sir Edwin Landseer and Augustus John.

- The record price for a work on paper by J.M.W. Turner was set in 2001 when *Heidelberg with a rainbow* sold for £2,038,500.

- J.M.W. Turner's oil painting *Ginevra, La Donna della Salute and San Giorgio* will be offered in the sale of *Important Old Master Paintings* in New York on 6 April 2006. This masterpiece is the finest oil painting by the artist to come to the market in recent memory, and has been consigned for sale by the St Francis of Assisi Foundation, a New York State-incorporated not-for-profit institution. It is expected to realise in excess of \$20 million.

- *The Blue Rigi* will be on public view at the following locations before it is offered at auction:

2 – 10 April 2006
20– 21 April 2006
15 – 17 May 2006
30 May – 5 June 2006

Christie's New York, Rockefeller Centre
The Merrion Hotel, Dublin
Hotel des Bergues, Geneva
Christie's London, King Street