

For Immediate Release

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THE RICE PORTRAIT OF JANE AUSTEN TO BE OFFERED FOR SALE AT CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK THIS APRIL

Important Old Master Paintings April 19, 2007

New York – On April 19 during the *Important Old Master Paintings* auction at Christie's in New York, one of the world's most intriguing literary portraits will be offered for sale, *The Rice Portrait of Jane Austen*, by British society painter Ozias Humphry (1742-1810). Estimated to fetch between \$400,000 and \$800,000, the picture is one of the most important portraits in the history of English Literature.

The only known oil painting of arguably England's most famous female writer, the work is being sold by direct descendants of Jane Austen, and the painting has been in the family since its creation.

Provenance and Controversy

The picture came to prominence in 1884 when it featured as the frontispiece of the first published collection of Jane Austen's letters. The editor of these letters was Edward, Lord Brabourne, the great-nephew of Jane – and for the following sixty years it was accepted as the most important image of the novelist.

Fanny Caroline Lefroy, the granddaughter of Jane's brother James, and acknowledged authority on the Austen family, thought the picture dated to 1788 or 1789, making Austen 14, and a newly-discovered letter to Lord Brabourne from Jane's great nephew Cholmeley Austen-Leigh, confirms that the only portrait known of Jane was painted at 'the beginning of her life'.

Letters in the National Portrait Gallery reveal that in the 1930s Sir Henry Hake, the Director, attempted to purchase the work, but the then owner, Henry Rice, was unwilling to part with the painting of his great-great aunt.

In 1948, a leading Austen scholar Dr R.W. Chapman, dismissed the authenticity of the portrait, despite its exceptional provenance, on the grounds that the costume dated to about 1805, making Austen 30. This skepticism was fuelled by other costume historians who asserted that the combination of features in the painting was not in existence until the beginning of the 19th century. As a result, the *Rice Portrait* divided international scholars.

In recent times the opinions based on fashion evidence have come under critical attack. A number of academics, including respected Austen scholar Professor Claudia Johnson of Princeton and Brian Southam, Chairman of the Jane Austen Society, have dismissed the evidence used as unsubstantial and casual and support the original attribution and subject matter.

Christie's supports the Rice portrait as a true depiction of Jane Austen and is honored to have been chosen by the family to organize a public auction – and to publicly exhibit the painting in New York City.

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Christie's *International Old Master Department* announced an annual sales total of £146 million / \$264.3 million / €213.2 million in 2006. This built on the success of 2005 and reaffirms Christie's position as market leaders in both the Old Master Picture and Old Master Drawing categories, increasing market share against the nearest competitors to 54.5% for the Old Master Category as a whole.

About Christie's

Christie's is the world's leading art business with global auction sales in 2006 that totaled £2.51 billion / \$4.67 billion. This 36% increase over 2005 marks the highest total in company and in art auction history. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service, and international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's conducted the greatest auctions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and today remains a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 600 sales annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewelry, photographs, collectibles, wine, cars and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$80 million. Christie's has 85 offices in 43 countries and 14 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv, Dubai and Hong Kong. Most recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging markets such as China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Dubai, Mumbai and Russia. Christie's also offers its clients worldwide access to its sales through Christie's LIVE, its unique, real-time online bidding service.