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REDISCOVERED MASTERPIECE

- Considered Lost for Over 60 Years
- Masterpiece by Egon Schiele
- Rediscovered, Restituted & To Be Offered at Christie's London



Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale

Christie's London

20 June 2006

London – Christie's announces Egon Schiele's lost masterpiece, *Sonnenblumen* or *Wilted Sunflowers (Autumn Sun II)* has been rediscovered and restituted to the heirs of Karl Grünwald. The painting will be offered for sale in London on 20th June 2006 (estimate: £4-6 million) and will lead the Impressionist and Modern Art evening sale. This magnificent work has been missing, feared destroyed, for over sixty years and was last seen publicly at the Jeu de Paume in Paris in the summer of 1937.

"It had become increasingly unlikely to imagine that Egon Schiele's Wilted Sunflowers (Autumn Sun II) would publicly resurface," says Jussi Pylkkanen, President of Christie's Europe. *"This painting is of great art historical importance and Christie's is proud to have rediscovered and identified Wilted Sunflowers (Autumn Sun II) as well as contributed to its restitution. We are extremely grateful to the Grünwald family for having entrusted us with the sale of this masterpiece of the twentieth century"*, he continued.

The incredible journey of this painting began in 1914, the year it was painted and first exhibited at the *Salon Triennial* in Brussels. Purchased from the exhibition by Mrs. Xaver Gmür on the advice of Hugo Jung, it seems that the outbreak of World War I delayed the payment of 3,000 francs due to its creator,

Egon Schiele. When the picture was finally returned to Vienna in 1917, the artist, assuming the sale had fallen through, inadvertently sold the picture to another collector, Richard Lanyi. Shortly after the war, however, the Gmürs were able to reassert their claim and obtain the painting at last.

The *Wilted Sunflowers (Autumn Sun II)* was subsequently acquired by the Austrian collector Karl Grünwald, an art, textiles and antique dealer based in Vienna, who had provided textiles to the Wiener Werkstätte. Recognising Schiele's talent, Grünwald was instrumental in stopping the artist from going to the front line, and had him appointed as a war artist. Much of the artist's subsequent war images stem from this period. In 1938, the year Hitler annexed Austria, Grünwald, who by this time had amassed a first rate collection of Austrian art, fled Vienna for France. Settling in Paris, the collector moved fifty paintings out of Austria, including the present work. Unfortunately, the Grünwald collection, including *Wilted Sunflowers (Autumn Sun II)*, was confiscated in Strasbourg, where it had been placed in storage by Grünwald and sold at auction in 1942. Karl Grünwald escaped the war, but spent most of his life searching relentlessly for his collection. He only had limited success until he passed away in November 1964, when his family continued this pursuit.

Karl Grünwald had four children, Hannah, Frederic, Lena and François Grünwald. Tragically Karl's wife Steffany and their daughter Lena died in a concentration camp. After his father's death in 1964 Frederic, a successful and energetic businessman, worked hard to locate and recover the paintings looted from his father. He had some success: first he located and obtained the restitution of a portrait by Schiele of Karl Grünwald; subsequently he brought a successful Court action against a museum in Strasbourg to obtain the restitution in 1999 of a painting by Klimt entitled *Die Erfüllung*. However, despite his efforts, the painting which he and his father most wanted to recover - the *Wilted Sunflowers* by Schiele - remained lost. As a result of his efforts the lost painting *Wilted Sunflowers* acquired an iconic reputation amongst those involved in restitution claims as well as among art history scholars. Frederic Grünwald died in September 2004, aged 85, and his final preoccupation was that the family was not to forget about the *Wilted Sunflowers*.

Then after nearly seventy years, the *Wilted Sunflowers (Autumn Sun II)* was discovered in France. At the end of 2005 Christie's were contacted by the then owner of the painting, who has no particular knowledge of the arts, to provide a routine valuation of the painting which he had acquired a few years earlier. On looking at the supplied photograph, Christie's specialists initially believed it to be a copy of Schiele's *Sonnenblumen*, a work which the company knew had been missing since 1942. Andreas Rumbler and Thomas Seydoux, leading Christie's experts, nevertheless went to see the painting which was hanging in the most modest surroundings in a small apartment.

To their astonishment, and that of the owner who wishes to remain anonymous, it became clear that this was no copy - but the original missing painting. Thomas Seydoux relates: "*On our way to the appointment, Andreas and I were not sure what to expect and tried hard not to speculate, it seemed so unlikely that this would be the missing treasure. A few minutes later we entered the apartment, took one look at the picture and immediately turned to each other incredulous! There was no doubt we were standing in front of the Schiele masterpiece. It was an intense experience, a rare moment of magic*".

The Christie's specialists explained however that while they were in possession of a lost masterpiece, the painting also had long been sought by the heirs of the Grünwald family. Christie's advised that there were important moral considerations which had to be addressed. As a result the owner decided that the painting should be returned to the heirs of Karl Grünwald and it was officially restituted in February this year.

Commenting on the Schiele painting, a spokesperson for the Grünwald family said: *"The family worked relentlessly for many years to locate and reclaim family possessions wrongfully taken under the Nazi regime. This rediscovery and restitution has been a very emotional experience for all the Grünwald family and we wish that our grandfather, Karl and his children were here to share in this discovery, as it would have meant so much to them. The struggle to reclaim our families' stolen art has become a part of our family legacy. As such, we will continue to pursue the reclamation of our possessions as a duty to our family and to all who have similarly suffered."*

Artistically in this painting, Egon Schiele pays homage to the famous images of sunflowers created by Vincent van Gogh. Although Schiele painted several smaller compositions of sunflowers in both gouache and oil, it was not until 1914 that he fully celebrated the subject as seen in the present painting.

Sunflowers were originally depicted by Vincent van Gogh as a symbol of hope, celebrating the long awaited arrival of Paul Gauguin in Arles. Yet Schiele's *Wilted Sunflowers (Autumn Sun II)* adopts a more somber mood relating to the eve of the Great War. The flowers become a symbol of the unavoidable suffering soon to follow with the dynamic brushwork capturing the angularity and harshness of the subject. While technically not considered an Expressionist work, the beginning of the artist's highly personalized interpretation of life, that uses distortion for emphasis, is clearly seen in this painting.

Schiele painted his sunflowers in a natural setting, but instead of being lavishly surrounded by the blooming flowers of a rich garden, they now dominate the composition, standing tall above the rest of the vegetation, yet denied the vital rays of sunlight which just fail to pierce through the thickness of a cold misty sky. Painted almost life size (the canvas exceeds a square meter), and placed in the extreme foreground the composition, the sunflowers are projected into the spectators' space, forcing the viewer to address and endure their presence and consider their fate.

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