

**For Immediate Release**

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Contacts:

New York:	Sara Fox	+ 1 212 636 2680	sfox@christies.com
Paris:	Carine Decroi	+ 33 1 40 76 85 88	cdecroi@christies.com
London:	Alexandra Kindermann	+ 44 20 7389 2289	akindermann@christies.com

**A RARE FRENCH CROWN JEWEL RETURNS  
TO THE MUSÉE DU LOUVRE**



**New York** — The life of a historic jewel can sometimes take an unusual twist. On May 12, 1887 the French Crown Jewels were sold at public auction by order of the Third Republic, in the *Salle des Etats* of the Louvre. Lot number five in the catalogue was a diamond bow brooch created by François Kramer for the wife of Napoléon III, Empress Eugénie (1826-1920). It was bought for 42,200 French Francs or €85,000 at the time, by jeweler Emile Schlesinger for Mrs. Caroline Astor (1830-1908), of the prominent New York family known in business, society and politics in the United States.

121 years later, when hearing of the appearance at auction of the brooch at Christie's New York, the Louvre and the Friends of the Louvre decided to do everything possible to acquire the jewel and return it to France. The auction planned for April 15<sup>th</sup> was cancelled at the last minute for judicial reasons, but a private sale to the Louvre was negotiated soon after by François Curiel, President of Christie's Europe, with the agreement of the owner.

“Among the great missions of the Louvre is the development of the museum’s collections, with a particular focus on works of art and precious objects belonging to members of the former French Royal family. The crown jewels are important among the nation’s treasures and we are thrilled to see the brooch of Empress Eugénie returning to France, thanks to the Friends of the Louvre, the generosity of Mr and Mrs Rouffet and the support of the French State,” said **Henri Loyrette, President of the Louvre.**

“As a French citizen responsible for Jewelry at Christie’s, nothing could have pleased me more than to negotiate this sale of national importance. Thanks to the coordinated efforts of the Louvre, the Friends of the Louvre and the heritage fund (*Fonds du Patrimoine*), a French crown jewel has reclaimed its position among the museum’s Royal collections. Christie’s is proud to have facilitated this historic return,” announced **François Curiel, President of Christie’s Europe.**

“The Friends of the Louvre mobilized themselves as soon as the upcoming sale of Empress Eugénie’s brooch was announced and we are honored to have been able to gather very quickly the necessary funds for this prestigious acquisition. For this purchase, we were able to make available to the Louvre a universal legacy (*legs universel*) from Mr and Mrs Rouffet, who were Friends of the Louvre and whose name we would like to associate with this superb jewel,” declared **Marc Fumaroli of the Académie Française, President of the Friends of the Louvre.**

### **Empress Eugénie’s Brooch**

The sensational antique diamond bow brooch was made in 1855 by the Parisian jeweler François Kramer for Empress Eugénie. A Spanish countess, Eugénie de Montijo — Doña María Eugénia de Guzmán Portocarrero, Countess of Tèba — was born in Granada, Spain in 1826, and married Louis Napoléon in 1853 at Notre Dame Cathedral. Eugénie was one of the most beautiful consorts of her time, and was also considered a tastemaker of fashion, commanding Europe’s attention.

In 1887, the French Government decided that the once exclusive property of French queens and kings would be made available to the highest bidder in a public auction. The Empress Eugénie bow brooch was bought by the jeweler Emile Schlesinger. The large and impressive diamond bow was originally intended as a buckle for a diamond belt. Later, Eugénie asked one of her jewelers to make it more elaborate, and thus five diamond *pampilles* and a pair of diamond tassels were added. The rich style of the jewel was in accordance with the taste of the Empress and it was transformed into a magnificent stomacher: a decoration pinned to the chest, extending down to the waist.

Schlesinger acquired the brooch for Mrs. William B. Astor, the undisputed queen of American society. Caroline Astor insisted upon being called "The Mrs. Astor" by family and friends and also devised the famous "400," a list of 213 families and individuals whose lineage could be traced back to at least three generations. The Empress Eugénie brooch, known as one of the most famous jewels of the Gilded Age, became commonly referred to as "Mrs. Astor's diamond stomacher" and remained in the Astor family for over 100 years.

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**Notes to Editors:**

**CHRISTIE'S - JEWELLERY MARKET LEADERS SINCE 1994**

Christie's has been the world market leader in jewellery for 14 years, with sales totalling a record US\$395 Million in 2007, an increase of 11% over 2006 (US\$355 million), which was already up by 27% over a then record 2005 (US\$279 million). These results, the highest ever achieved by any auction house, confirm Christie's position of world market leader for jewellery auctions. 2007 market share compared to its principal competitor: 57%, or 54% taking into consideration all major international auctioneers. For the 14th year in a row, Christie's maintains pole position in the category. Christie's jewellery auctions take place in Amsterdam, Dubai, Geneva, Hong Kong, London King Street, London South Kensington, New York, Paris, and Milan.

**About Christie's**

Christie's is the world's leading art business with global auction sales in 2007 that totaled £3.1 billion/\$6.3 billion. This 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 expertise, as well as 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, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, 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 and new 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

*Images available on request*

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