

For Immediate Release

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TISSOT MARVELS AT CHRISTIE'S *BRITISH ART WEEK* IN JUNE

British Art Week, 5 – 9 June 2006

Victorian and Traditionalist Art

8 June 2006



London – Christie's announce that they will offer at auction one of the most ingenious figurative compositions by James Jacques Joseph Tissot (1836-1902), the most glamorous painter of Victorian society. *Preparing for the Gala* is an outstanding showcase of Tissot's ability that will be offered during *British Art Week* in June. It is expected to realise £1,800,000 – 2,400,000.

Preparing for the Gala is set in the garden of Tissot's house at 17 (now 44) Grove End Road in St. John's Wood, London, and depicts a figurative group hoisting flags in anticipation of a celebratory event. Tissot contracted the space in order to include his newly built colonnade and enlarged pool in the background of the picture, and the work is highlighted by his mastery in portrayal of the fabrics as demonstrated in the flags and the dresses.

Tissot's house was renowned among Victorian society, as noted by 19th century writer Edmond de Goncourt: 'He has a studio with a waiting room where, at all times, there is iced champagne at the disposal of visitors, and around the studio, a garden where, all day long, one can see a footman in silk stockings brushing and shining the shrubbery leaves.'

The present picture is the later of two versions. *Still on Top* (Auckland City Art Gallery) can be dated to *circa* 1874, and is without the colonnade and pool that distinguish the present version. The picture to be offered at Christie's can be dated to *circa* 1874-76, and is one of the first pictures painted at the artist's house after the garden was developed and improved late in 1874.

James Jacques Joseph Tissot (1836-1902) was born in the French port city of Nantes in 1836. He moved to Paris *circa* 1856 and studied at the School of Fine Arts in Paris, exhibiting at the Paris Salon from 1859. While his early works were largely period costume pieces, he soon began to paint subjects from modern life and showed influence from the impressionists, in particular Monet and Manet. Tissot became involved with the Paris Commune and after its fall in 1871 he moved to London. He exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy between 1864 and 1881 and became the most glamorous artist of Victorian Britain. In 1876 he met Mrs. Kathleen Newton, a divorcée, but the openness of their relationship led him to a more introvert life and when she died in 1882 after a protracted battle with tuberculosis, Tissot returned to Paris

a broken man. Having produced *La Femme A Paris*, his last series of paintings based on modern life, he devoted himself to religious painting and died a recluse in 1902.

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, Gainsborough, Lowry, Henry Moore, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Stubbs, Tissot and Turner, as well as important English furniture. The week will be highlighted by 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. *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. It is expected to realise in excess of £2 million.

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Images available on request
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Notes to editors:

- Works of art to be sold during *British Art Week* will be on public view at Christie's, King Street, between 30 May and 8 June 2006
- Christie's has dominated the market for Victorian pictures for over a decade and established the world record price for any Victorian picture at auction when *St. Cecilia* by John William Waterhouse was sold for £6.6 million at King Street in June 2000.
- The world auction record for a painting by James Jacques Joseph Tissot was set when *Le Banc de Jardin* sold for \$5,282,500 at auction in New York on 12 October 1994
- The annual auction of *Irish Art* will take place at King Street on 12 May. This sale will offer a strong selection of works from the 18th to the 20th centuries and is led by *The Honeymoon* by Sir John Lavery RA (1856-1941) which carries an estimate of £500,000-800,000. The sale will also include works by Gerard Dillon, Paul Henry, Jack Butler Yeats and Louis le Brocquy.
- The annual London sale of *Sporting Art* will take place at King Street on 19 May, and is led by the exceptional *Tom and Luke Parsons on their ponies, Champagne and Squirrel, Exmoor* by Sir Alfred James Munnings, P.R.A. (estimate: £1,000,000-1,500,000). Also included in the sale are approximately 80 works by artists including John Ferneley Snr., J.F. Herring Senior and Archibald Thorburn.