

For Immediate Release
Tuesday, 12 May 2009

CHRISTIE'S

Contact: Hannah Schmidt

020 7389 2964

hschmidt@christies.com

**THE GREAT GENIUS OF INNOVATION –
THREE EXCEPTIONAL AND UNPUBLISHED WORKS BY ANDRÉ-CHARLES BOULLE
WILL BE OFFERED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 200 YEARS AT CHRISTIE'S IN JULY**



Important European Furniture, Sculpture and Clocks

Thursday, 9 July 2009 at 10.30am

London – Christie's announce the landmark sale of three previously unpublished masterpieces by André-Charles Boulle (1642-1732), royal cabinetmaker and sculptor to King Louis XIV France and one of the most celebrated craftsmen of 17th century Europe. Comprising a pair of Louis XIV *coffres en tombeaux* circa 1688 (estimate: £2,500,000-4,000,000) *illustrated top left* and a Louis XIV cabinet-on-stand circa 1680 (estimate: £700,000-1,000,000) *illustrated top right*, these extraordinary works are offered for sale for the first time in nearly 200 years. They come from Wrotham Park, Hertfordshire, and are being sold by The Trustees of the 6th Earl of Strafford Will Trust at Christie's auction of *Important European Furniture, Sculpture and Clocks* on Thursday, 9 July 2009. Wrotham Park has been the celebrated location for evocative celluloid classics including Ken Russell's *Gothic*, Kenneth Branagh's *Peter's Friends* and most recently Robert Altman's *Gosford Park*. The appearance of these works on the market coincides with the Victoria and Albert Museum's current exhibition *Baroque 1620-1800: Style in the Age of Magnificence*. Christie's set the world record price at auction for Boulle at Christie's New York, in November 2000, when a Louis XIV centre table from the *Riabi Collection* realised \$5,726,000/£3,948,966.

Charles Cator, Deputy Chairman, Christie's International: *"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to acquire three newly discovered treasures by the innovative genius André-Charles Boulle, who is the towering figure of French cabinet making. For those fascinated by the history of collecting, these works transport one back to Paris in the early 19th century, illustrating the important part played by Regency collectors such as George Byng. It is a remarkable testament to Byng's taste and connoisseurship that he acquired such supreme examples by Boulle, which increase our knowledge and understanding of his work in the 1680s. These works have a timeless majestic strength, enabling them to become sculptures in their own right, which I believe would be powerful additions to even the most contemporary setting."*

George Byng (1764 – 1847) – The Regency Collector with the eye of a Connoisseur:

The man behind these acquisitions was George Byng, a lifelong supporter of the Whig party, who served as MP for Middlesex for fifty-six years. Powerful and rich, with a significant income as Whig commissioner, Byng was exceptionally well placed to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the art market following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Detailed records of his acquisitions between 1816 and 1843 show that he collected actively and enthusiastically until he was at least 79 years of age. Byng's long and distinguished life reflected the aspirations of the age in which he lived and, like so many of his contemporaries, he was fired with ambition to improve and embellish his inheritance; having, on the death of his father in 1789, inherited Wrotham Park, Hertfordshire, a Palladian house that had been built *circa* 1754 by Isaac Ware. This passion, shared by Regency collectors, led to the great enhancement of many existing collections as well as the formation of spectacular new collections, particularly of the French decorative arts. Byng was drawn to works of illustrious provenance, including the semi-anonymous sale of Queen Charlotte's collection at Christie's in 1819 and the Duke of Sussex in 1843.

The Wrotham Coffers - A pair of Louis XIV *coffres en tombeaux circa* 1688:

Unpublished and unknown, the pair of Boulle coffers *circa* 1688 are great masterpieces of Louis XIV cabinet-making (estimate: £2,500,000- 4,000,000), which epitomise the quality and execution behind the genius of Boulle's designs. These ormolu-mounted brass, pewter (tin) and tortoiseshell-inlaid boulle marquetry coffers are the only pair of this sumptuous scale and are the only ones to have stands of this exceptional form with scrolled supports and female heads. The firm attribution of these two coffers to André-Charles Boulle rests not only on all the stylistic analogies to his documented work, but by comparison with three other sarcophagus-shaped coffers, the only others known of this size, whose secure attribution to Boulle has a long and established history: one at Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire and two celebrated examples from the Demidoff collection at the Palace of San Donato near Florence, which were acquired by the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles in 1982.

An indication of the likely royal origin of the superb *Wrotham coffers* to be offered at Christie's is exhibited in the band of *fleur de lys*, which ornament their concave friezes. There is a record of the payment to Boulle for two coffers in the Comptes de la Maison de Condé, which were ordered by Henry-Jules de Bourbon, prince de Condé (d. 1732) on the marriage of his daughter, Marie-Thérèse de Bourbon-Condé, to her cousin, François-Louis de Bourbon, prince de Conti (1664-1709).

The *Wrotham coffers* can be specifically traced to an anonymous sale in Paris on 12 March 1772 when they were sold for 1501 *livres*; they reappeared thirteen years later in the sale of the *marchand-bijoutier* Antoine-Alexandre Dubois and were sold for the considerable sum of 7,409 *livres*. Any record of them during the Napoleonic wars is lost, but is resumed with the return of English visitors and collectors to Paris and George Byng's purchase of '2 Bule Coffers 8000 – or 329 £ s' in 1816/1817 from 'Madame Daval Quai Malaquai.' Daval, *marchand de curiosité et antiquité*, on the quai Malaquais at the corner of rue Bonaparte was one of the major dealers to whom the English flocked with such enthusiasm when in Paris.

The Wrotham Cabinet - A Louis XIV cabinet-on-stand, circa 1680:

In 1828 Byng, with his sure eye, also acquired the Louis XIV cabinet-on-stand to be offered in this sale (estimate: £700,000-1,000,000). Also undoubtedly by André-Charles Boulle, Byng purchased this stunning ormolu-mounted brass, pewter (tin) and brown tortoiseshell boulle marquetry cabinet-on-stand at Oxenhams for 275 guineas £288 15s 0d. It was recorded as a large 'Upright German Cabinet

inlaid with Brass and Mother of Pearl very richly ornamented with Ormolu.' It is very likely that the cabinet had already been in England for some time before the Oxenham's sale in 1828, as the closely related cabinet in the collection of the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry at Drumlanrig Castle was recorded at Dalkeith Palace in 1812.

Between 1675 and 1700 Boulle developed and refined his designs for cabinets-on-stands; utilising the potential of their powerful associations and connotations as the vehicle for displaying his most inventive skills. Almost always conceived in pairs with *première* and *contre-partie* versions, Boulle began the series in the 1670s with cabinets in wood marquetry, such as the example in the Wallace Collection; developing the design further, *circa* 1675-1680, to incorporate a small amount of metal in the marquetry, principally in their *fleur de lys* friezes, lambrequins on the side panels and borders framing the central doors, such as the two celebrated examples in the J. Paul Getty Museum and at Drumlanrig Castle.

The closest parallel to the *Wrotham cabinet* to be offered at Christie's sale is the second smaller cabinet at Drumlanrig and both, datable to *circa* 1680, are entirely in marquetry of brass, pewter (tin) and tortoiseshell, but the central doors and roundels on the side are inlaid with wood marquetry on a tortoiseshell ground – Boulle's most sumptuous technique.

Both the *Wrotham coffers* and *Wrotham cabinet* date from the early phase of Boulle's mature career in the 1680s, from which surviving examples are very rare; they establish some of the important characteristics that reappear throughout his *oeuvre*.

André-Charles Boulle:

The celebrated ébéniste André-Charles Boulle's unparalleled fame rests upon his extraordinary technical virtuosity, his innovation in both technique and design, his brilliance as a sculptor and his love and inventive use of rare and exotic materials. Christened by his contemporaries as "the most skilful artisan in Paris," André-Charles Boulle's name is synonymous with the practice of veneering furniture with marquetry of tortoiseshell, pewter, and brass. Although he did not invent the technique, Boulle was its greatest practitioner and also lent his name to its common name: *boulle* work. Boulle also specialized in floral marquetry in both stained and naturally coloured wood. Many of his designs are illustrated in the famous book of engravings published in Paris around 1720. Boulle became a master before 1666, and in 1672 the King granted him the royal privilege of lodgings in the Palais du Louvre. In the same year, he achieved the title of cabinetmaker and sculptor to Louis XIV, King of France. This new title allowed him to produce furniture as well as works in gilt bronze such as chandeliers, wall-lights, and mounts. Although strict guild rules usually prevented craftsmen from practicing two professions simultaneously, Boulle's favoured position allowed him protected status and exempted him from these statutes.

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Images available on request
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NOTES TO EDITORS:

George Byng and his Taste for Boulle will be the subject of in-depth academic examination in an article by Charles Cator and Alexandre Pradère, in the June issue of Apollo Magazine. www.apollo-magazine.com

Top 5 prices for André-Charles Boulle:

- Louis XIV ormolu-mounted ebony, blue-stained horn, brass, pewter, tortoiseshell, boule and wood marquetry centre table by André-Charles Boulle from The Riahi Collection: Christie's New York, 2 November 2000. Price realised: £3,948,966/\$5,726,000 **WORLD RECORD PRICE AT AUCTION FOR BOULLE**
- A Louis XIV ormolu-mounted and Boulle brass-inlaid brown tortoiseshell bureau plat circa 1710, attributed to André-Charles Boulle from The Wildenstein Collection: Christie's London, 14/15 December 2005. Price realised: £2,920,000/\$5,180,080
- A Louis XIV ormolu-mounted ebony, cut-brass, tortoiseshell, blue-stained horn and pewter marquetry armoire 'de l'Histoire d'Apollon': Christie's New York, 22/23 October 2003. Price realised: £2,713,705/ \$4,599,500
- A Louis XIV bureau plat by André-Charles Boulle from The Givenchy Collection: Christie's Monaco, 4 December 1993. Price Realised: £2,144,318/ \$3,198,305
- A Louis XIV ormolu-mounted and brass-inlaid brown tortoiseshell, ebony and ebonised boule table en bureau, circa 1700, by André-Charles Boulle from The Riahi Collection: Christie's New York, 2 November. Price Realised: £1,748,966/\$2,536,000. This item also belonged to George Byng.

Sale date: Important European Furniture, Sculpture and Clocks:

Thursday, 9 July 2009 at 10.30am at Christie's King Street, 8 King Street, St. James', London, SW1Y 6QT

Public Viewing dates: Christie's King Street, 8 King Street, St. James', London, SW1Y 6QT from Saturday 6 July – Wednesday 8 July 2009.

About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business had global auction and private sales in 2008 that totaled £2.8 billion/\$5.1 billion. 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 57 offices in 32 countries and 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai and Hong Kong. More 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.