

For Immediate Release
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Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

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MEISSEN SNUFF-BOX LAST SOLD IN 1855 FOR 16 POUNDS, 10 SHILLINGS; NOW ESTIMATED TO FETCH OVER £25,000 AT CHRISTIE'S IN JUNE



Centuries of Style: Silver, European Ceramics, Portrait Miniatures and Gold Boxes
2 June 2009
Christie's King Street

London – Christie's upcoming sale *Centuries of Style: Silver, European Ceramics, Portrait Miniatures and Gold Boxes* offers collectors an incredible opportunity to purchase a unique treasure with exceptional provenance, on sale for the first time in nearly two centuries: a Meissen gold-mounted circular snuff-box and cover, *circa* 1738 (estimate: £25,000-40,000) *illustrated above*. This enchanting object last changed hands at the historical Christie's sale of *The Ralph Bernal Collection* in 1855, and was bought for 16 pounds, 10 shillings.

Rodney Woolley, Director, Porcelain Department, Christie's:

"Exceptional quality, popular subject matter and superb provenance combine to render this one of the most important snuff-boxes to come to the market in recent years."

Snuff-taking began as an elite pastime during the early 18th century, and snuff-boxes were considered prized and distinctively personal items made of gold, porcelain and enamel, and were frequently embellished with precious objects; snuff-boxes did not only serve a functional purpose as a vessel for

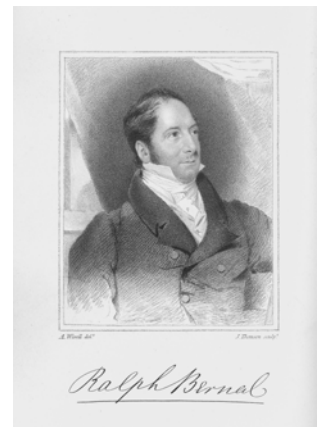
holding snuff, but were also often exchanged as love tokens or ambassadorial gifts in aristocratic and diplomatic circles.



Traditionally, the image on the inside of the lid of a decorated snuff-box would be the most intricate, with a particularly specialist miniaturist taking on the challenge, whereas another skilled artist might decorate the exterior of the box. The example included in the June sale is no exception, with the interior image taken from a detail of a print by B.Audrian *illustrated left*, after Watteau. The original painting by Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), *L'Aventurier*, circa 1717, is currently in the collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Troyes, France.

The Ralph Bernal Collection, from which the snuff-box originated, was a monumental sale in the history of Christie's, lasting thirty-two days and including over 4,300 lots of furniture, objects and works of art; it was also one of the first Christie's catalogues ever to be illustrated, with woodcuts executed by A.J. Mason. The sale itself took place at the home of the late Ralph Bernal at 93 Eaton Square, London.

Ralph Bernal was a politician, but he was even more widely known for his knowledge and appreciation of art and antiques; he had such a reputation that "whenever he was observed to admire anything it was quite enough to enhance its value in the eyes of the dealers". George Redford, F.R.C.S, of *The Times*, writing in 1888 named him as "*the most accomplished collector of his time*", and in reference to the Christie's sale applauded him for "*having rendered very considerable public service to art by thus affording the opportunity of acquiring some of the most important representative examples for the British Museum, the South Kensington Museum, and various private collections*".



Portrait of Ralph Bernal
© Kohler Art Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison

The Meissen snuff-box is to be sold alongside an incredible array of silver, European ceramics, portrait miniatures and gold boxes, including: an important George IV silver-gilt tray, made as part of a large service of plate that was made for Hugh, 3rd Duke of Northumberland in 1823 (estimate: £70,000-100,000); a Chelsea porcelain gilt-metal mounted striking musical table clock, *circa* 1756-58 (estimate: £20,000-30,000); and a beautifully detailed miniature portrait by John Smart of *Lieutenant General Daniel Burr (1749-1828)* (estimate: £20,000-30,000). The sale presents collectors and connoisseurs the ultimate opportunity to add to their collections with a wide range of beautiful and rare objects on offer.

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Further information, images and interviews are available upon request

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Notes to Editors:

Christie's, 8 King Street, St. James's, London, SW1Y 6QT

Auction: Tuesday, 2 June 2009

Viewing: 29 May 9.00-4.30pm
31 May 2.00-5.00pm

1 June 9.00-4.30pm

Specialists:

Harry Williams-Bulkeley, Silver

Rodney Woolley, Ceramics, Porcelain and Glass

Jo Brooks, Gold Boxes & Portrait Miniatures

E-catalogue:

http://www.christies.com/eCatalogues/index.aspx?Sale_ID=22213&eCatParameter=eCat/2213/03/01

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.