

For Immediate Release

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OLD MASTERS AT CHRISTIE'S IN JULY

**Previously Unknown Panel by Antonello da Messina, Works by Goya and Tiepolo
& A Rediscovered Rembrandt Drawing**



Important Old Master Pictures

Wednesday, 9 July 2003

Old Master and 19th Century Drawings

Tuesday, 8 July 2003

London – A previously unknown and recently attributed devotional panel by Antonello da Messina will be offered at Christie's sale of *Important Old Master Pictures* on 9 July 2003 (estimate: £200,000-300,000) (*Illustrated above*). Further highlights will include works by Goya and Tiepolo. Christie's sale of *Old Master Drawings* on 8 July will include sheets by Rembrandt, Rubens and Guercino.

“The emergence of a work by an artist of the first rank is always exciting, particularly when the painter’s oeuvre is relatively small. The panel fuses Italian and northern influences so brilliantly and is an early work, executed before the artist left Sicily for Venice. It is painted with the utmost subtlety and refinement,” said Francis Russell, Senior Director, Christie’s Old Master Picture Department.

A private devotional work, it shows the Madonna and Child with a praying Franciscan, the patron. The gold panel is painted on both sides. On the reverse is Christ crowned with thorns, in a *trompe l’oeil* quatrefoil surround. The work shows the early development of the artist and in details such as the chiselled profile of the donor, the work prepares us for the compelling portraits that were to be among Antonello’s most influential productions. The panel represents a crossroads of Mediterranean art, helping to explain the stylistic evolution of an artist who, both in his native Sicily and subsequently in Venice, may be seen as one of the protagonists of Renaissance painting.

A superb modello for the magnificent ceiling painting in Ca’Rezzonico by Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770), *Merit raised to Glory by Nobility and Virtue*, will also be offered (estimate: £300,000-500,000). One of the most beautiful palaces in Venice, in the early 16th century the site of the Ca’Rezzonico housed Titian’s studio. It was acquired in the mid-18th century by Giambattista Rezzonico, a Lombard merchant and banker, who engaged Giorgio Massari to reconstruct the palace. The family was enjoying a glory that reached its height at the time of the 1748 election of Giambattista’s son, Carlo, to Pope Clement XIII. The interiors of the palace, begun in 1752, were designed to reflect the family’s magnificence, and the finest artists and craftsmen in Venice were thus hired. Tiepolo had recently returned from Würzburg, where he had executed a commission at the Kaisersaal, and the ceiling of the Treppensaal, of the Residenz of the Princes-Bishop. On his return to Venice in 1753 he was at the summit of his career, as was recognised by his 1756 appointment as President of the Venetian Academy. In the winter of 1757, he began work on the frescoes at Ca’ Rezzonico. This modello is imbued with all the exuberance, vitality and virtuoso handling of the greatest master of the Venetian rococo.

Following on with the Venetian theme, an important pair of works by Gaspare Vanvitelli, *The Grand Canal, looking towards Santa Maria della Salute*, 1710, and *The Island of San Giorgio*, 1709, will also be offered (estimate: £500,000-700,000). These views are excellent examples of Vanvitelli’s work. Possessing all the qualities of light and spontaneity that characterise the finest *vedute*, the paintings are a vivid reminder of the abilities of the founder of this school of art, the forerunner of Canaletto himself.



Gaspard van Wittel, called Vanvitelli (1653-1736), *The Grand Canal, Venice, looking towards Santa Maria della Salute*, 1710 (to be sold as a pair with *The Island of San Giorgio*, 1709, oil on canvas, estimate: £500,000-700,000)

A remarkable sketch, *The Apparition of the Virgin of the Pillar to Saint James the Great*, by Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828) relates to an altarpiece, now destroyed, that the artist painted for the church at Urrea de Gaén, Teruel, in 1782-3 (estimate: £400,000-600,000). Saint James was praying with his disciples by the River Ebro when the Virgin appeared to him surrounded by angels. She presented him with an image of herself standing on a marble column, and on this site the apostle built a chapel that has remained a place of pilgrimage ever since.

Leading the Dutch section of the sale is *The Pelkuspoot on the River Vecht near Utrecht* by Salomon van Ruysdael (1600/3-1670) (estimate: £300,000-400,000). Dated 1663, this is a beautifully preserved panel and a fine example of the artist's later style. Simon de Vlieger's *A Dutch Squadron preparing to make way in a calm, with a man-o'-war firing a salute for a commander in his barge* (estimate: £100,000-150,000) is a further highlight.

Old Master and 19th Century Drawings

Tuesday, 8 July 2003

The drawing for a tapestry commissioned by Cosimo de Medici for his *palazzo* in Florence will lead the sale. *The siege and destruction of Fiesole by the Goths in 405* by Friedrich Sustris (1540-1599) is a design from the second in a series of three depicting the History of Florence delivered in 1564 and is a rare and important example of Cosimo I's patronage of the artist (estimate: £100,000-150,000). The set was designed to hang in the Sala di Gualdrada in the apartments of Cosimo's wife, Eleonora of Toledo, in the Palazzo Vecchio. They are now kept in the Pitti Palace. Sustris was one of the most prominent young artists working under Vasari. In 1568, he moved to Augsburg and five years later to Munich where he became court painter to Crown Prince William, late Duke of Bavaria.

The sale of Old Master Drawings will also include the recently discovered sketch by Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606-1669), *A seated man with long hair, his hands folded* (estimate: £15,000-20,000). Lost for years in the attic of house in France, the work was uncovered, brought to Christie's Paris and identified. Published for the first time in Christie's catalogue, the drawing is one of a group of small sketches in black chalk, representing single figures and small groups of men, women and children. This example has been connected with similar etchings from 1652 and 1654. The drawing typically shows the artist exploring with great delicacy the handling of light and shade.

An alluring ink sketch of *Bathsheba attended by her maid* by Guercino (1591-1666) relates to a lost painting commissioned by Conte Astorre Herculani in 1640 (estimate: £30,000-50,000). Bathsheba is shown seated in profile and evocatively, only partially covered by a billowing cloth. The drawing is one of only three preparatory sketches that give a glimpse of a lost work by the master.

An exquisite work by Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), *A nude youth in the pose of the Spinario* (estimate: £150,000-200,000) will also feature. This superb drawing, inspired by the celebrated sculpture in the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome, was identified and consigned to Christie's after a routine email valuation was submitted by the private vendor. A strong selection of drawings by French Old Masters includes *A seated violinist tuning his instrument, looking down to the left* by Antoine Watteau, generally supposed to be a portrait of the artist's friend, the painter Nicolas Vleughels (estimate: £100,000-150,000).

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Images available on request

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