

For Immediate Release

Thursday, 8 October 2009

Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

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A CONNOISSEUR'S DREAM:

**THE MARCH FAMILY OFFER THE MAGNIFICENT *CUCCI CABINET*
ATTRIBUTED TO 17TH CENTURY ITALIAN FURNITURE MASTER
DOMENICO CUCCI AT CHRISTIE'S LONDON IN DECEMBER**



500 Years: Decorative Arts Europe

Thursday, 10 December 2009

London – A magnificent Louis XIV cabinet-on-stand attributed to Domenico Cucci (1635-1704) and the Gobelins workshop, *circa* 1665-1675, is expected to realise in the region of £4 million when it is offered by The March Family at Christie's sale of *500 Years: Decorative Arts Europe* on Thursday 10 December 2009. This exceptionally rare work provides the global market with an unexpected treasure and once in a lifetime opportunity. This masterpiece is one of only three of Cucci's magnificent cabinets known to survive, with the other two, dating from *circa* 1681-3, in the collection of the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle and recently exhibited as highlights of the Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition *Baroque 1620-1800: Style in the Age of Magnificence*. Boasting exquisite Florentine pietre dure plaques, striking hard-stone columns and opulent gilt bronze mounts against a sumptuous tortoiseshell ground, the Cucci Cabinet is a connoisseur's dream.

Cucci, of Italian origin, was the leading *ébéniste* under Louis XIV alongside André-Charles Boulle (1642-1732). Having settled in Paris around 1660 upon the invitation of Cardinal Mazarin he joined the Gobelins workshops around 1662. Cucci contributed significantly to the luxurious grandeur and regal magnificence of Versailles and other royal palaces of the age.

Marcus Rådecke, Director of European Furniture, Christie's London: *"We are thrilled to have been entrusted with the sale of this extraordinary work by the March family, who are renowned for collecting with the passion and knowledge of true connoisseurs. This cabinet is remarkable; it is one of the very rare remaining examples of the spectacular cabinets produced in Paris in the late 17th century. It is attributed to the great Italian cabinet-maker Domenico Cucci and the celebrated Gobelins workshops, which were set up in 1662 by King Louis XIV and his finance minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Most probably commissioned by Queen Hedwig Eleonore of Sweden, the cabinet's tantalising provenance furthermore comprises a link with the French court through Count Axel von Fersen, who is widely believed to have been Marie-Antoinette's lover. Von Fersen inherited Steninge Palace, most probably with the cabinet. It is very exciting to present this once in a lifetime opportunity on an international platform to collectors, institutions and dealers around the globe."*

The History and Context of this Cabinet's Creation:

Under the artistic direction of Charles le Brun, the King's *premier peintre*, Cucci, who had been appointed *menuisier d'ébène ordinaire du Roi*, delivered the first of two very grand pairs of cabinets for the King's apartments at Versailles in 1664. The dating of the present cabinet to the first decade of the Gobelins workshops' existence is enabled by its many similarities to this pair of Royal cabinets, which have been long since lost. Like this masterpiece, they too were decorated with an abundance of gilt bronze ornaments and figures as well as striking hardstone elements - a trademark of Cucci's cabinets - and supported on stands with bronze-coloured figures.

Beautifully conceived under le Brun's direction and exemplifying Cucci's refined craftsmanship, the Cucci Cabinet epitomises the masterful fusion of skills and ideas of some of Europe's greatest artists and craftsmen of the period, drawn together at the Gobelins workshops. It was this utilisation of leading expertise, unified into one visionary design, which was at the very core of the Gobelins' creations and which imbues this cabinet with considerable international appeal.



From Italy, the beautiful pietra dura panels, depicting Orpheus amid animals attracted by his singing, are the work of the *Opificio delle pietre dure*, the Granducal workshops in Florence, *detail illustrated left*.

This further indicates that the cabinet was conceived in the early years of the Gobelins workshops before sufficient pietre dure panels were available from their own specialists.

Reflecting a clear Flemish interest, the dramatic stage-like interior of the central cupboard, concealing a number of hidden drawers and compartments, features delicate marquetry in exquisite veneers and engraved pewter. The superb figures, representing the four seasons, which support the cabinet are closely related to designs by le Brun and are likely to be the work of Cucci's cousin Philippe Caffieri, who came to the Gobelins workshops from Italy with Cucci, *detail illustrated right*.



The full provenance of this spectacular cabinet is yet to be completely revealed, however, it is linked to the Swedish King Charles X and Queen Hedwig Eleonora by an inscription on a silver-backed lapis lazuli seal pendant. It is thought to have been acquired by the widowed Queen of Sweden and given to Count Carl Gyllenstierna as part of the furnishings of Steninge, a Baroque palace that the Queen had built to designs by Nicodemus Tessin, for her young chamberlain. The cabinet appears to have remained at Steninge Palace when the property was bought by the von Fersen family in

1735. Johann Christian Linning's dated signature to the underside of one drawer bears witness that the cabinet was restored in 1787 by the Stockholm court cabinet-maker, probably under instructions of its owner, the Swedish statesman and diplomat Count Axel von Fersen, better known today as the reputed lover of Queen Marie Antoinette.

The cabinet must have stayed at Steninge with von Fersen's niece, Countess Gyldenstolpe, and returned to Paris some time in the 19th or very early 20th century to be sold there from the collections of her daughter-in-law, countess Louise Gyldenstolpe, in May 1923 at Galerie Georges Petit, as lot 204. It was later acquired, over 40 years ago, by the discerning March Family from Jean-Marie Rossi, Galerie Aveline, Paris. The March family were arguably the most dynamic and powerful banking dynasty of 20th century Spain, and their extensive business interests allowed them to assemble outstanding collections of paintings, works of art and books and to create elegant palaces in Madrid and Palma.

Christie's and Furniture:

Christie's is proud to be founded on a history of presenting some of the greatest pieces of furniture in existence to the market over the past 243 years and hold the record for 8 of the top 10 European furniture lots sold at auction. In December 2004 The Badminton Cabinet, commissioned by Henry Somerset, 3rd Duke of Beaufort, from the Grand Ducal workshops, was sold for £19.1 million / \$36.6 million - setting the world auction record for any piece of traditional furniture.

Other examples of notable lots include the Commode from the Bibliotheque of King Louis XVI at Versailles by Jean-Henri Riesener which was sold from the Rothschild Collection in July 1999, realising £7,041,500 / \$10,984,740; it has returned to Versailles. In June 2008, The Kenure Cabinet by Thomas Chippendale, the finest example of his craft ever to appear at auction, realised £2,729,250 / \$5,324,767 and became the most expensive piece of British furniture ever sold at auction. In November 2000 a 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 fetched £3,948,966 / \$5,726,000, setting a world record price at auction for Boulle. Most recently The Wrotham Coffers, a pair of Louis XIV ormolu-mounted Boulle marquetry coffers en tombeau by André-Charles Boulle, were bought by the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam for £2,617,250 / \$4,211,155. *For full details on the top furniture lots sold at Christie's please contact the press office.*

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Notes to Editors:

Sale date and public viewing: 500 Years: Decorative Arts Europe

- Viewing: 5 – 10 December 2009: Christie's London, 8 King Street, St. James', London, SW1Y 6QT
- Sale: 10 December 2009: Christie's London, 8 King Street, St. James', London, SW1Y 6QT



October 2009 marks the release of **Star Pieces** *The Enduring Beauty of Spectacular Furniture* by **David Linley, Charles Cator and Helen Chislett**. This dazzling survey of iconic furniture through the ages is an indispensable guide to commissioning or buying star pieces, written by experts on the subject. David Linley, Chairman of Christie's UK, is also the Chairman of Linley, the bespoke furniture company. Charles Cator, Deputy Chairman of Christie's International, is also a respected furniture historian. Helen Chislett is a writer on interiors and decorative arts. *For more information please visit* www.thamesandhudson.com

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 53 offices in 30 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.

*Estimates do not include buyer's premium